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THE BLUE BOOK

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A FIGHTING MAN OF MARS

by Edgar Rice Burroughs
AUTHOR OF *TARZAN*

STOWAWAY GOLD

by Frederick Bechdoldt

THE RED STAR OF ISLAM

by Warren Hastings Miller

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He Who Crows Last

By ARTHUR
K. AKERS

The excitement all started over a rooster—an obstreperous fowl that could get a colored boy up at dawn with one vocal cord tied behind him. The subsequent proceedings make one of the most joyous stories even Mr. Akers ever wrote.

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THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

The McCall Company, Publisher, 230 Park Avenue, New York



They Told Him Salesmen Were "Born" But Now He Makes \$10,000 a Year ...Thanks to This Little Book

IT was just a little free book that made the difference between Ed Pinkham and the rest of the men in our shop. Nobody ever imagined that Ed would land, even in the \$5,000-a-year class, let alone be making \$10,000 before he was thirty. Ed didn't know himself the abilities he had in him as a money-maker.

But one day, a strange occurrence changed his whole life. During his lunch hour Ed started to read a little book he had brought to work with him.

"It's a book called 'The Key To Master Salesmanship,' Bill," he told me. "It's the most amazing thing I ever read. I never dreamed there was so much in salesmanship. You ought to send for a copy yourself. It's free."

"Huh!" said Luke Jones. "Does that book tell you how to become a salesman?"

"It sure does," replied Ed, enthusiastically.

"Don't waste your time," advised Luke. "You can't learn how to be a salesman. A fellow has to be 'born' that way to be a good salesman."

Ed just smiled at that, but he said nothing. Soon afterward he quit the shop, and we forgot about him. And then last night, I met Ed again—driving a snappy new sedan and dressed like a million dollars.

"For Pete's sake," I said. "What are you doing nowadays, Ed?" He smiled. "City salesmanager for the Steel Castings Company," he told me. "What are you doing?"

"Still at the shop," I replied. "But what I want to know is, how do you come to be salesmanager for Steel Castings? They're one of the biggest firms in the business."

Ed smiled again. "Remember that book on Salesmanship that Luke Jones was kidding me about one day? Well, when I finished my Salesmanship training the Association I took it from gave me a choice of twenty-one jobs through their Free Employment Department. I got a wonderful job, and I had wonderful training, so I've had a pretty successful time of it. They made me City Sales Manager three months ago at ten thousand dollars a year."

"Good night!" I said. "And Luke and I are still punching the old time clock!"

Ed looked at me seriously. "See here, Bill," he said. "Are you sport enough to risk two cents that you can do as well as I did? Then spend the two cents to write

to the National Salesmen's Training Association tonight and get their free book. Then take their course. When you have your diploma, their Free Employment Department will help you get a good sales job—every year they have calls for over 50,000 salesmen. Not only will they help you get the job, but they give you an iron-clad money-back guarantee that you must be satisfied with the training received—or they refund your tuition!"

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THE BLUE BOOK

AUGUST, 1930

Cover Design: Painted by Laurence Herndon to illustrate "The Red Star of Islam."
Frontispiece: "Songs of Sea and Trail: XII—"Jesse James.'" Drawn by Allen Moir Dean.

Two Noteworthy Novels

- The Red Star of Islam** By Warren Hastings Miller 6
The great Saharan adventure of an American sergeant in the Foreign Legion, by the man who wrote those famous stories of the Hell's Angels squad. (Illustrated by W. O. Kling.)
- A Fighting Man of Mars** By Edgar Rice Burroughs 64
Extraordinary and tremendously exciting are the events which transpire in swift succession in this amazing story of another planet. (Illustrated by Frank Hoban.)

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The author of "Ebon Joan" and "Driftin'" is at his best in this engaging story of the race-track. (Illustrated by J. Fleming Gould.)
- Racketeer's Mate** By Seven Anderton 38
The story of a man who reformed and a woman who fought, by the man who gave us "Murder for Sale." (Illustrated by Joseph Maturco.)
- Wild Work with William** By Bertram Atkey 46
Mr. Honey skips back some nine hundred years to save the life of William the Conqueror. (Illustrated by Everett Lowry.)
- The Beavertooth Battle** By Reginald Dinsmore 54
A professional North Woods guide tells the story of two lumber-camp champions who fought a strange fight. (Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson.)
- War in the Wilderness** By Alexander Sprunt 85
Life is always close to death among the wild creatures—as this vivid story well demonstrates. (Illustrated by Lee Townsend.)
- Ducktooth Says It with Shotguns** By Arthur K. Akers 96
He fired a mean twelve-gauge—and Gladstone didn't propose to let that darky shoot an apple from his head with it. (Illustrated by Everett Lowry.)
- Desert Gesture** By Anthony Rud 105
A romance of the old West and the new. (Illustrated by William Molt.)
- The Widewater Affair** By Raymond S. Spears 114
The author of "The Mountain Sheriff" here narrates a curious tale of river life on the modern Mississippi. (Illustrated by Frank Hoban.)

THE McCALL COMPANY, Publisher, The Blue Book Magazine

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MAGAZINE

Vol. 51, No. 4

Special Notice to Writers and Artists:
Manuscripts and art material submitted for publication in The Blue Book Magazine will only be received on the understanding that the publisher and editors shall not be responsible for loss or injury thereto while such manuscripts or art material are in the publisher's possession or in transit.

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The Raw Recruit By Laurence LaTourette Driggs 125

A dramatic story of the war above the Western Front, by a noted aeronautical authority. (Illustrated by Hubert Rogers.)

Bennington the Buccaneer By George Allan England 135

The joyous exploit of our old friend Bennington, who went to Central America to buy hardwood and remained to start a revolution. (Illustrated by the unrepentant author.)

Free Lances in Diplomacy By Clarence Herbert New 149

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A Memorable Novelette

Stowaway Gold By Frederick R. Bechdolt 162

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A jeweler tells of the all-but-successful attempt to rob him.

Too Much Adventure By L. V. Cummings 195

A soldier of fortune fights for his life in a South American jungle.

ALFRED M. BAILEY

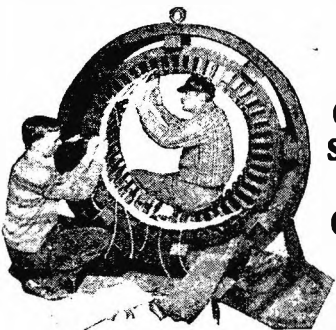


The explorer and scientist who wrote that well-remembered novelette of castaway sailors in the Arctic "The Top of the World" has written another colorful story of that far North country he knows and loves so well. Watch for it in the next, the September, issue, under the title:

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How Writers Learn

"THE people, and not the college," observed Emerson, "is the writer's home." And in looking over the list of writers on the foregoing contents page, we are struck anew with the force of that observation.

It is true that most of them have had good school training. But—

Edgar Rice Burroughs, whose imaginative romances are so fascinating, has been a soldier, a cowboy, a salesman, a policeman, a miner and a ranchman—among other things.

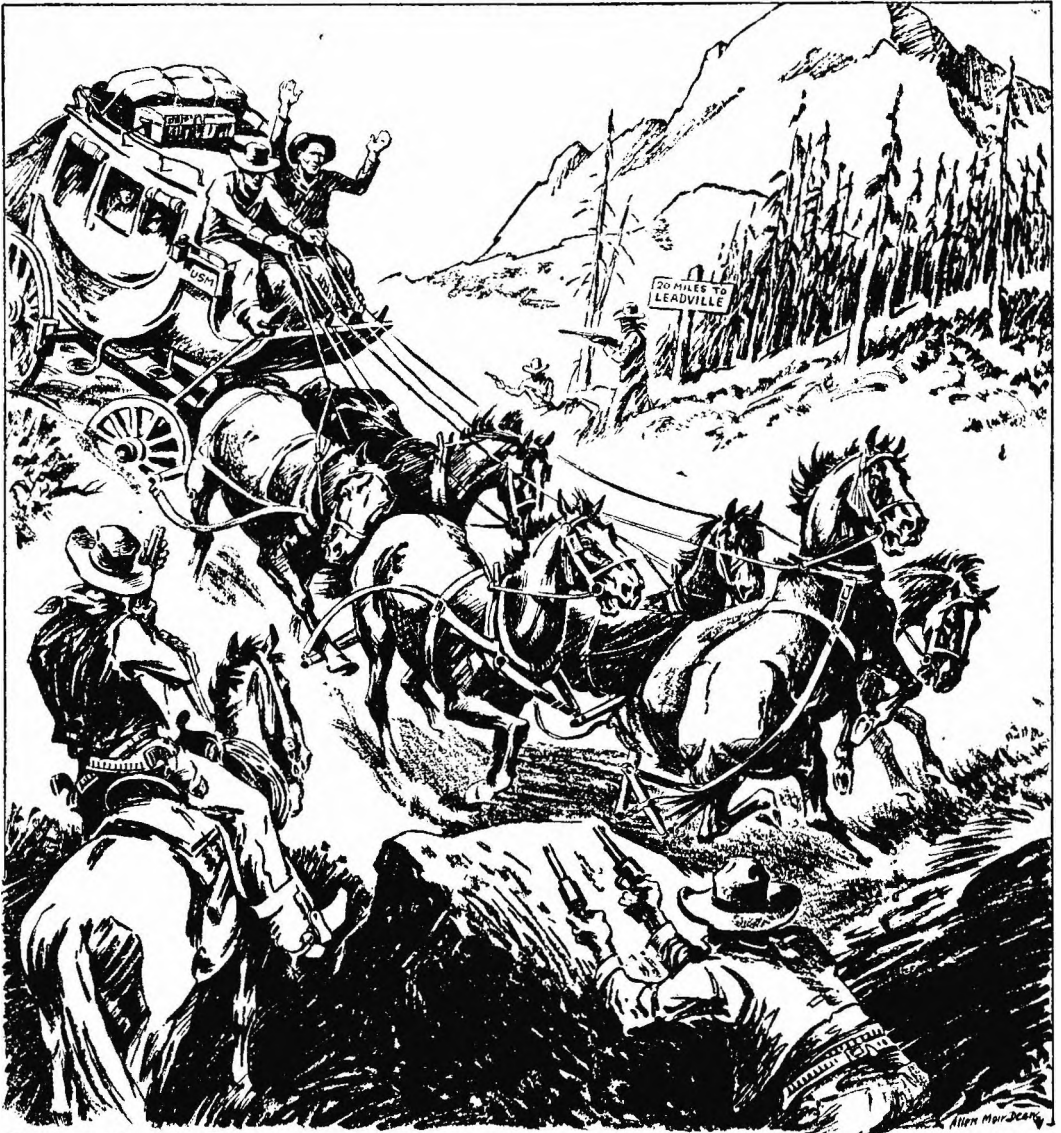
Clarence Herbert New has voyaged around the world five times.

Warren Hastings Miller has made repeated journeys to the Orient and to North Africa.

Seven Anderton has worked as reporter on sixty-seven different newspapers in sixty-seven different cities of this country.

And so on through the list—not excluding the reader-writers of the Real Experience stories. The men who write the most interesting, wholesome and vigorous stories are those who know and appreciate others best—who continue their education throughout their lives in the great school of experience with their fellow-men.

—The Editor.



Drawn by Allen Moir Dean

SONGS OF SEA AND TRAIL

XII—Jesse James

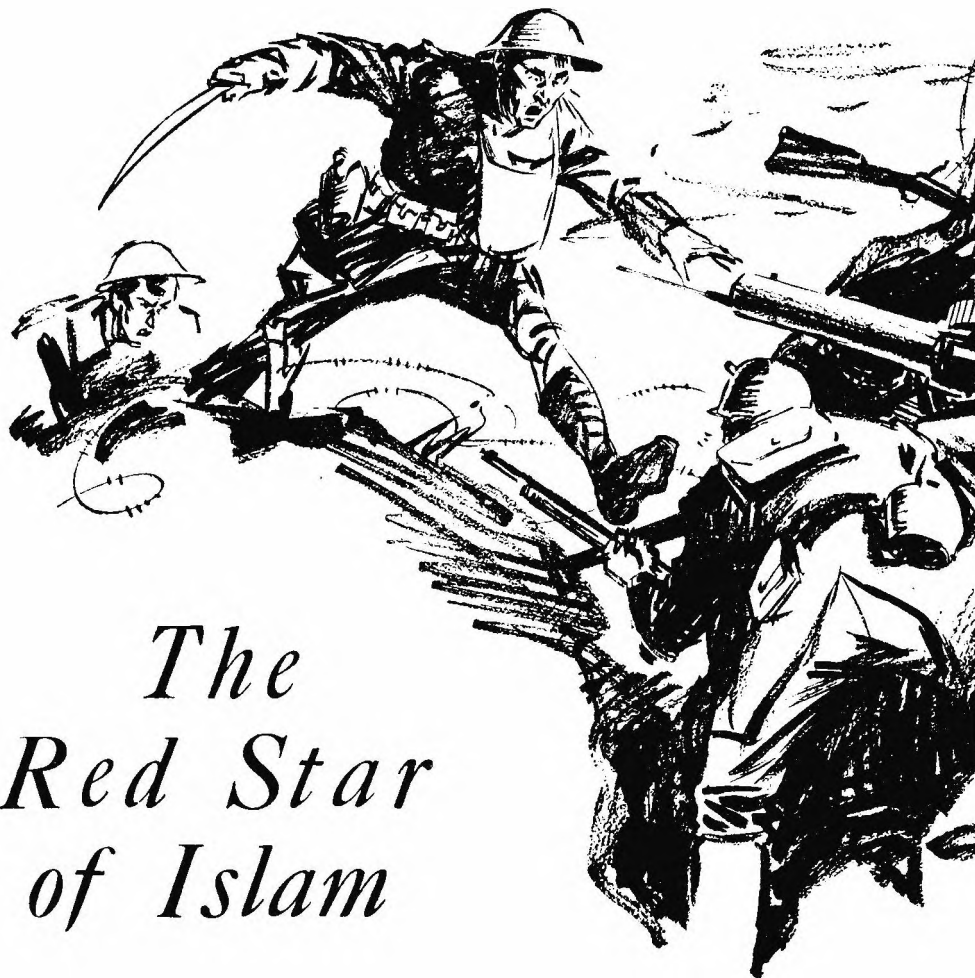
JESSE JAMES was a man, a friend to the poor:

He never would see a man suffer pain.
 And with his brother Frank robbed the Gal-
 latin bank
 And stopped the Glendale train.

They went to a crossing not far from there,
 And there they did the same.
 The agent on his knees delivered up the keys—
 To the outlaws, Frank and Jesse James.

Jesse was a lad that killed a-many a man
 He robbed the Leadville stage.
 Robert Ford came along like a thief in the
 night
 And laid poor Jesse in his grave.

Jesse went to his rest with his hand on his
 breast—
 The devil will be upon his knee.
 He was born one day in the county of Clay
 And he came from a solitary race.



The Red Star of Islam

By WARREN HASTINGS MILLER

JOYCE TIVERTON stood staring at a fellow-passenger in the reading-room of the steamer he had boarded in Oran, North Africa. If that guy was the Druse sheik Yusuf Hamdani, he looked like nothing at all in that ordinary blue suit! He was curled up in a corner reading a book but looked somehow familiar—like Joe Hamdani, in the rug business in New York.

They had been buddies together in the A. E. F. ten years ago, had been demobilized together. But this string-bean in the blue suit—well, Joyce stepped farther into the smoking-room. That long, lean figure, that swarthy, hawk-like face, with its dominant nose and curled mustaches under it! And just then a pair of piercing black eyes lifted from the book and looked at Joyce in his turn.

For a moment Hamdani did not recognize

his old Argonne buddy either. No wonder: a tall, burly sergeant of the Foreign Legion stood before him, smart in polished leather puttees, khaki wool coat with a sergeant's chevrons on the sleeve, blue sash centered by a white canvas belt, red képi with black band and visor, red bomb on the képi—the Légion's corps insignia. The green letter L was on his black coat-lapel tabs; a single black braid around the red top of the képi signified his rank of sergeant.

Hamdani sprang up, grinning, as their eyes met. "You ol' devil!" he cried, cracking Joyce's hand as their grip clasped and they punched each other.

For a moment they stood looking each other over affectionately. There are no comradeships like those of the Great War! Joyce was thinking of that first advance of the 79th against Montfauçon in the Ar-



Hamdani had led the attack on that nest of machine-guns. It was the yataghan that had busted them in the in-fighting after the rush.

gonne, with men dropping like flies all around them and a particularly nasty nest of machine-guns chattering up the hill just in front of their platoon; the shell-hole where he lay shot down; the agony that he, as sergeant responsible for this part of the advance, was laid out by a damned wound, both corporals dead, a difficult flank-and-front maneuver necessary to run the Heinies out of there—and no one left to direct it.

And how Hamdani had carried on for him—that damned firebrand of a Syrian! He had picked up a yataghan dropped months before by some Algerian chasseur in the fighting around Montfauçon. He had it in his belt when he had left the shell-hole, in a creep under the haze of bullets, calling commands and encouragement to the rest of the outfit in broken

An American sergeant of the Foreign Legion is the central figure of this swift-moving and picturesque novel by the author of the well-remembered stories of the Hell's Angels Squad.

Illustrated by W. O. Kling

English. Just a private, one of the gang; but dexterously he had led the flank attack on that nest of Fritz machine-guns. It was the yataghan that had busted them in the in-fighting after the last rush. The boys had told Joyce about it later. What a sword could do at close quarters in the hand of a man who knew how to use it was a revelation to German and doughboy alike! It was Joyce who had got the citation—"ably assisted by Private Hamdani," but that was nothing between them.

"WHAT you doin' in dem clo'es?" demanded Yusuf after a final brotherly thump. "Aint you seen enough fightin' where all was mud and stinks?"

Joyce laughed some more. Hamdani had not changed. No man in the outfit had hated rainy France more than he did! A child of the sun, of the clean open desert, there never were enough cuss-words in either Arabic or English to describe adequately *his* opinion of the Western Front as a battle-ground! Yet, out of two hundred and eighty thousand Syrians in the United States, *eighty thousand* of those children of the sun had volunteered for the War, simply for love of their adopted country—the highest per cent of any nationality. Poor devils, rainy France turned out for them their deadliest enemy, as Army pneumonia statistics proved. For Fritz's bullets they cared nothing.

"Nope," said Joyce. "I got bored, as the Tommies used to say, with things back home. Gettin' too crowded back in Texas, b'lieve *me!* They found a gusher on our ranch. All the scum of the earth came down the Bunkhead Highway to get out the oil, seemed-like. So I sold out. . . . The Légion aint bad—if you got money coming to you. What *you* doin' on this boat?"

Hamdani smiled in a grin that bared all his gold teeth. "Oh, rags. I go to Murzuk."

"*Murzuk!*" Joyce gasped. He knew a good deal about North Africa by now. The nerve of Yusuf! If he had said Jaghub,

that inviolate citadel town of the Senussi in the center of the Libyan Desert, he would have mentioned the one town that connoted more daring to reach than Murzuk. It was in the center of the Fezzan in Tripoli, and is still the capital of the Senussi. The Italian army had never yet reached it. Joyce knew of Hamdani's work in "rags,"—or rather rugs, before the War. Into the Nejd in deepest Arabia, among the Anizeh, the Shammar, the Ouled Ali, the Sokbar, he would journey on the fiery stallion of Joyce's imagination, clad in the *aqhal* and silken *abiyeh* of the Beni Hamdani. Arab tribes hated him cordially as a Druse, but he bought priceless antiquities of famous rugs owned by various impoverished families. They were sold at ten thousand dollars apiece by a noted dealer in New York at the end of Yusuf's long trails. Hamdani paid the Arabian sheiks perhaps a third of that, but it was a fortune to them. And the holy limit of daring rode beside him all the way during those trips. Joyce had often wished that he could go along, just once!

"Eet is special rag this time," Hamdani went on, smiling. "El Ribat, my own family rug. She is made three centuries ago. She is written in de Book of Rugs, dat one of my fam'ly. Was lost in a *rczzou*" (raid) "by the Anizeh on the Mountain. The Anizeh sell him in Nejd. Ibn Saud, he own dat rag some time. He geev him to de head sheik of the Senussi. Eet was go to Jagbub. Is now in Murzuk."

"How do you know all that?" asked Joyce curiously.

"I am expert in rugs, my frien'," said Hamdani simply. It covered a vast background of Islamic intrigue and politics, that "expert." Letters in Arabic script, writ by professional scribes in desert towns hardly on the map, and coming in to New York by camel-caravan, railway and ship. It was Yusuf's world, a commercial world, mainly; but this time it had not to do with money, but with honor and love. For he went on to say: "My girl—ees cousin. Iréna Hamdani!" His eyes glowed as he thought upon this honey of delight, this burner of hearts. Joyce knew that Syrians always had several hundred cousins in every clan, relatives that harked back to some original ancestor. There was generally some degree of consanguinity in every marriage, so close knit was each desert tribe. "She is verrie proud—my gazelle from the gardens of Paradise! Each time there is marriage

among the Hamdani, an Anizeh he come. 'Where is El Ribat?' he say, sly; and it is, 'Swords out!' among my people. Is always so. But Iréna say: 'If in de tent is not El Ribat for carpet, I no marry you, Yusuf! For too long have we endured the shame!' *Shabash Allah!* Next time Anizeh he come, *he* drink shame! We can no keel, for he is guest. But he die for shame, *mashallah!* So I go to Murzuk."

A TALE from the "Arabian Nights" was this, Joyce thought as he listened. He could see it all, that vast encampment of tents that was the Beni Hamdani; the battles between them and the Anizeh, the Shammar, the Ouled Ali, for loot, for chivalry, for nothing at all but glory; Yusuf's girl, that sylph in silks who was his Moon of the World who swayed his heart like a creeper in the wind. In his mind's eye Joyce could see Yusuf himself, not in this cheap blue serge of civilization, but glorious in silver-and-blue Bagdad silk burnous, with lavender-and-gold turban, with sash of yellow silk striped with copper thread in which was a good sword—his rifle near by leaning against the tent-pole. And he could see him venturing now on this daring quest of El Ribat, the Victory Rug. It connoted a victory back in the centuries, its name indicated. It had been woven by the women of the Hamdani to commemorate the valor of their men.

And how would he reach Murzuk? Down as far as Gabès he could go by rail. Then it would be on a racing mehari camel, a lone desert raid to Ghadames, to Ghat, then on into the heart of the Tuareg and Senussi country to Murzuk. Approximately fourteen hundred kilometers, a thousand miles! And, arrived at that hostile town in the Fezzan, there would be the citadel of Murzuk to enter by some strategy. And in it, in the rooms of the Khalif himself, would be kept El Ribat. No money could buy it back, so Joyce gathered that it was Yusuf's intention to—er—return it, to its original home among the Hamdani, back in the Syrian deserts around Palmyra. . . .

"Gosh, bud! Some job you've picked!" Joyce laughed enviously. "Gold-digging for adventure while you still have your youth and strength, eh? Me too, in a way," he added in self-defense. "Funny, what a consular letter will do for you! I got one from Mr. Haskell in Algiers before I went to Bel Abbès. Just a note to Colonel Rol-



The man dodged; Joyce, nearly off balance with the force of his swing, found himself facing a long steel point.

let, Commandant of the entire Légion. It made the Old Man sort of keep me in mind during my training there. Lord, how you'd swear if you had to drill in Bel Abbès, Joe! A one-horse French town, with nothing in it but a few streets of shops, and our barracks of the First Regiment and the Sixth Tirailleurs across the street. And rain, rain, rain! Drill in the mud, hike in the mud, target practice in the mud—hell's delight! So I touched up the Old Man for a transfer to the Cavalry Brigade in Sousse, after it was all over and I had got up to sergeant. Last thing he did, that promotion from corporal, the good old egg! Shows what a consular letter will do for you! We'll see lots of service down where you're going, Joe—"

"Not Joe—Yusuf!" corrected Hamdani with a smile. "For one time I am not American, but Syrian. Then I marry my girl and bring her back home."

HE meant New York. But now he was reverting to a simple tribesman, a sheik of the Hamdani—until his love affair from the Arabian Nights was brought to a conclusion, in a desert tent, on that carpet El Ribat, returned to the tribe after three centuries. Kostikyan would willingly give him twenty thousand dollars for that rug—but *that* commercial destination for it would never occur to Yusuf's chivalrous soul, and certainly not to the proud Iréna's.

Five days later, as the great American freighter was entering the breakwater gate of Sousse to take on a cargo of Tunisian olive oil, Yusuf and Joyce stood together by the rail looking curiously at the ancient Moorish town where they were to part after this brief reunion, with its night after night of jawing over old war times. A scanty French town followed straight boulevards around the square basin of the port that was all filled with shipping. Behind it rose the brown old walls of the real Arab Sousa, up and down the irregular hillside, dented with parapets along the wall top for archers and musketeers. Four miles of wall—built by Christian slaves. Over it floated at one point the Tri-color of France on a great administrative building on the hill; at another the red flag of Tunisia, with white crescent and star, denoting the ancient *hasba* of the town.

Joyce thought of the man at his side as he noted those two flags. Buddies in the Great War, yet they were in worlds apart. The Red Star of Islam hung over Yusuf in this typical adventure of his race; the Cross would go before Joyce in whatever campaigning down along the Tripolitan frontier the Cavalry Brigade of the Légion would be engaged. But their old friendship was stronger than both.

The steamer dropped anchor and swung in slowly to the quay. They said good-by to the jovial Yankee captain and his young

officers and walked along the quay past thousands of drums of olive oil in regular rows, with more of them being added by Arab carts that dumped three at a time amid much shouting and handling of ropes by ragged Arab coolies. Yusuf grinned as their pungent oaths came to his ears.

"Eet is good to hear swears in my talk again!" he laughed. "*Barik Allah!*" He seemed eager to change to turban and burnous and was hastening his steps. Joyce returned salutes to several Legionaries from the Cavalry Brigade loafing about the port off duty. But he was in no hurry to report at barracks. Together they passed through the iron gates of the quays and presently were entering another gate, a thousand years older, a huge portal that gave on a long, narrow, reeking street that led direct to the bazaar. All native Sousse seemed crowded into that street; all were clad in North African Arab costume to Hamdani's eyes. Ragged *hammals*, coolies, in brown striped wool gandourahs; women in white, hideous with black masks over their faces to the eyes; now and then a wealthy sheik in voluminous white-and-brown burnous, with a great domed *khit* for head-dress, a white cloth over his red fez, wound with many turns of brown camel's-hair cord.

But this street was nothing compared to the bazaar of *suks*, shops, that showed up in a long masonry tunnel running uphill at right angles to Sousa's main street. It was simply jammed with all Sousse, a milling and swarming mass of burnouses and red fezzes that yelled and shouted as they haggled with the *suk* men. Up this Hamdani charged, dragging Joyce after him. They elbowed their way and were noticed by nobody. Hamdani stopped at a *suk* hung with yellow sandals to buy a pair, then went on to another where burnouses were being embroidered, to buy one of those, also a gandourah to go under it. He haggled, laughed, jeered in Syrian Arabic, spat on money, argued furiously and at length before buying them, then changed over from his blue serge suit right there in the *suk*. Before Joyce now stood a tall, lean Tunisian sheik, richly dressed as any, needing but the domed *khit* to complete him!

He was disposing of his suitcase and its contents next. A bundle containing his blue suit and toilet articles, an oaken stave, a keen knife in a red scabbard to hang in his girdle; then Hamdani was ready to leave Sousse by rail, in the third-class, for natives only, going south to Gabès.

HE extended his hand gravely to the tall Légion sergeant. "In the Name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate! Peace be with you, my friend!" he said solemnly.

"Good-by, old scout!" said Joyce. "You will write me? Anything funny you find going on down there, let me know. Might help me here, if I could have some inside dope on things to hand to the Commandant, you know."

"I will write—if there is mail!" Yusuf smiled. There were not many mail couriers where *he* was going! Then he had plucked a ring off his brown hand. "Geev me yours, *ya Habibi!*"

His eyes were on a signet that adorned Joyce's left-hand fourth finger. "Eet is custom, in my country. If either is in danger, in prison, in what trouble, he send ring. The other will come."

"Bright idea!" agreed Joyce. They exchanged rings. A last hand grip. But it was not enough for that sacred word, *habib*, with Hamdani. He pressed Joyce to his heart, then was gone in the moiling throng.

CHAPTER II

ON, up the hill, Joyce pressed his way.

The Street of the Suks came out on an immense rear square with camels in it—his first; and beyond that the great gate to the back country. Along the highroad at the top of the hill he marched, looking for his barracks. It was a place of military garrisons—all this high ground back of Sousse. Barracks of the Fourth Tirailleurs sprawled behind loopholed walls to the left of the road; barracks of the Tenth Senegal, with black sentries at the gates, lined the road to the right. Beyond them Joyce came to a long compound of neat white-washed walls, a great area where cavalry could be drilled. A monumental column had been erected in a small plot in front of its gate. It bore a long list of names, already, those of the Légion's cavalry brigade who had died in various desert battles since its formation as a military unit a few years before. The Légion now numbers seventeen thousand men. There are four regiments, the First having nine battalions, the rest four each. And as a result of mounting two battalions of the Légion during the Tafilet campaign of 1918-1920 in Southwest Morocco, this permanent cavalry unit had been formed.

Joyce read the gold and black sign on the gate: "*Brigade de Cavalerie, Légion Etrangère.*" He entered, and was halted by an enormous bearded Légion sentry.

"Reporting from Bel Abbès. Conduct me to the *Bureau de Place,*" said Joyce, returning the man's salute.

"*Oui, mon sergent!*"

shipped off from the First, the Mother of the Légion. The Second at Marrakesh, the Third in the Middle Atlas, and the Fourth at Fez, they all had their hands full with "*dissidence.*" The Second was at that moment pushing a road up into the turbulent valley of the Draa, on the Sahara side of the Grand Atlas, fighting and road-



Joyce struck out with all his strength, in a lunge for the jaw.

THEY tramped together down the gravel road. A long line of horse camions stretched back from near the *Bureau de Place* to the stables along the rear wall of the barracks compound. Those nearest contained four glossy chestnut Barbs each, heads to tails, the horses looking down at the men inquiringly with ears pricked up. Farther back, squads of Légionnaires, in fatigue uniform that made them look like gray Bolsheviks, were busy loading on more giddaps. The brief, savage barks of their corporals, the activity of men, sergeants coming and going out of the *Bureau de Place*, all these signs told Joyce that he had arrived just about when there was something doing. Of course he couldn't go, being a new replacement, but—

"Maneuvers?" he asked the sentry at his side as they neared the Bureau.

"*Oui, urgent!*" laughed the man sarcastically. "Boubekir is *en dissidence* again. A platoon departs for Fort Pervinquière."

"*En dissidence!*" How often Joyce had heard that phrase, meaning "in rebellion," at Bel Abbès! It meant replacements

building simultaneously. The Third had detachments from Ksabi to Erfoud fighting the mountain tribesmen and building *postes* to consolidate what they had won. The Fourth had two battalions operating south from Bou Denib against the raiders of the Tafilet, that great oasis of a hundred thousand hostile Filaliens who mustered guns in their various hard-riding tribes. Evidently here too the Légion had its hands full, on the Tripolitan frontier.

THE sentry had stopped by now at the Bureau door and returned to his beat. Joyce stepped inside the busy *Bureau de Place*, office of the officer of the day. It's anteroom was full of sergeants of various nationalities, all waiting their turn at the officer seated behind the big desk. He had his képi off, that officer, and was busy signing papers. A blond head rose above the stiff collar with the Légion bomb insignia on it in deep green. Joyce studied this thick-set customer, realizing that somehow, somewhere, he had met him before. A man in his forties, and covered with campaign

medal stripes, yet only a lieutenant. He had never come out of St. Cyr, the West Point of France, had that bird, thought Joyce, or he would be at least a lieutenant-colonel at his age. Wavy, tow-colored, curly pompadour that made him look like a German; but the lower part of his face, with its heavy chin and stern mouth and swarthy tan, looked more like an American, English, Australian—any old breed of Anglo-Saxon.

Joyce stood up, saluted and presented his cards of record and transfer when his turn came. Stern blue eyes were staring at him with military impersonality as Joyce answered the questions snapped out. A sun-downer, this guy, he thought as the query went on. He had his letter from the Grand Old Man to Commandant Thomas handy, but did not present that here. An official request for permission to call on the Commandant would be necessary first.

"Surname, Tiverton. *Nom Chrétien*, Joyce," the officer was murmuring without a trace of emotion in his hard mouth as he wrote them down in the report book. The last of the other sergeants had drained outside meanwhile, and they were alone. His eyes noted that in one glance—and then suddenly he had vaulted over the desk and was shouting: "Well, for God's sake, Joyce Tiverton! Don't you remember me?" He had grasped Joyce's hand and was wringing it, his eyes sparkling with joy.

"Bill Van Diemen!" gasped Joyce. "Well, I'm a son! You were *liaison* sergeant in the 77th with the Frawgs on our left!"

"You said an earful, boy!" confirmed Van Diemen, still pounding him. "And you? Well, aint it the truth, the Légion's the place you'll find all the guys that *weren't* fed up on war!"

Joyce had found that out himself. The Légion today was the leavings of the War, those who had survived with both life and the military itch intact. There was no use trying to be a hero in it! Every man in your squad had quite as exciting a record as your own, though they all came from different fronts. The Front was *here*, now; you only had to look at the bulletin board in Bel Abbès to see how much fighting was still going on here in Africa! "How about gettin' me in on this?" asked Joyce with a wave of the hand at the noise going on outside around those horse camions.

Van Diemen looked doubtful. "Gosh, I'd tear my shirt so!" he said. "But you, being a replacement, will have to put in

about two months more training here, dammit! Course you don't need it—and sent from heaven you are, in a way, too. Kolinsky, my sergeant of this platoon, got into some row down in Sousse last night, and is in hospital with a knife-stab. They're giving me Klotz, a lump of a Heimie; good man, but no pep to him."

"Would this help?" asked Joyce, drawing out his letter from Rollet.

"Gimme it!" barked Van Diemen, seeing that signature. Then he was off like a shot out of the *Bureau de Place*. "You stay here," he yelled back over shoulder. "I'm seeing our Old Man himself about it."

WELL, there was nothing like a letter, thought Joyce as he sat down again on the wooden sergeant's bench. Presently Van Diemen was back, his burly figure blocking the door. "Railroaded!" he sang out. "I've got you, fella!" And then suddenly he had turned to the strict drill-master again as Joyce joined him at the door. French was now the official language, the hidebound discipline of the Légion evident as Van Diemen barked, "*Houp!*" and forty men sprang to attention. "Corporal Prevotte, advance! —*Mon caporal*, this is your new sergeant, *nommé* Tiverton. See that he draws all the equipment that is needed. Dismissed!"

They were strangers, to the eyes of the Légion world. Joyce went off to stow his traveling things in the sergeant's billet and draw campaign equipment at the office of the *maréchal des logis*. And then he had come out and taken command in the platoon. Off started the long line of camions, out the gate, south down the magnificent military road that followed the railroad through the back country twenty miles from the seaboard. A rolling and desolate landscape, this. Gone the rich olive groves so characteristic of Tunis. The vast salt marshes of El Hani; beyond it the lonely Roman coliseum of Ei Djem rising out of sparse desert. Eighty kilometers to Sfax.

They passed back of that picturesque Arab town, followed the seacoast around to Gabès, then inland over desolate hills dotted with lonely date palms. It was the country of the Troglodytes, the cave-dwellers; not a house in sight, yet their caravans of thirty and forty camels moved along the road in brown caterpillars of beasts and became riots of frightened camels as the Légion camions charged through them



Yusuf was guiding the bell camel down the valley; straight on loped the drove of mehari, at their fast single-foot pace.

yelling maledictions. And then Medenine, that most peculiar town on earth, composed entirely of three- and four-story caves built of masonry, with long, round roofs that made them look like huge wasp-nests. A primitive people lived here, the marriage ciub with which the groom beats his bride senseless before carrying her off still in force as a custom. No house had any stairs; it was a feat of climbing up jutting pegs of masonry outside to reach your own front door.

Through Medenine and up the bare broiling hills beyond raced the long train of horse camions. By nightfall they had reached the great military station of Bordj Tatahouine and were not far from the Tripolitan frontier. Joyce wondered where his Syrian buddy Yusuf was now. He had taken the train south that morning, was probably in Gabès when they had passed back of it, and from there had, no doubt, taken the bus jammed with natives that went daily down to Medenine. They had passed one of those coming north, also several tourist *char-à-bancs*. And there were all sorts of civilian supply trucks going south. By simply changing back to his blue serge Yusuf could bribe a lift from some colonial driver. It was in that bundle when Joyce had last seen him.

BUT Joyce had no time to look for him now. A great stone fort, with walls thirty feet high and loopholed every six

feet, rose on a defensible eminence in the stony hills. Bastions for artillery and machine-guns cornered its walls. Outside was a vast low compound, also of stone walls with loopholes, enclosing stables, parade ground, quarters of the Génie that were cluttered with artesian-well machinery. Black Senegalese sentries in red fezzes were on duty at the compound gate which terminated their road.

"Fourth, Tenth and *Et!*" laughed Van Diemen. "We all have detachments here. Those troopers with the black stripes around their red fezzes are from the Fourth Tirailleurs' cavalry brigade. The black fellows stick with the Génie well-diggers, mostly. For us, one night here, and then on down to Fort Pervinquièrè—hell of a business!"

They had talked over old times mostly, coming down; but Joyce had gathered that the Azjer Tuareg chieftain Boubekir had raided across the Tripolitan border again with fifty of his warriors, and had driven off two hundred camels, besides killing a number of Abd-en-Nabi's people, the friendly Arab sheik who ruled all the region around Fort Lallemand. Boubekir was operating now against a desert town called Sinaoun, just over the border and halfway between Borj Djenine and Fort Pervinquièrè.

"Horses tomorrow," Van Diemen went on. "We ought to reach Borj Djenine by night. Next day, if we have any luck, we'll get a crack at Boubekir. He beat it into Tripoli after the War, when France

had time to straighten things out in the Tassilis. They say the Senussi are backing him now against the Italians."

SOMEWHAT bewildered, Joyce listened. So much new geography, border politics, all these names he had never even heard of. But a sergeant had to know the local game and not be all day about it learning either! He would be on detached service within a day or so, by the looks of things, and responsible for the lives of twenty men. He knew vaguely that all the Azjer Tuaregs had been in revolt during the War. It had been raid and counter-raid down here, the powerful hand of the Senussi sect of Islam—who hated Italy and her conquest of Tripoli—backing the revolt. There were hardly skeleton garrisons left at the forts during the Great War.

After the Armistice France could spare men again. The Fourth, the Tenth, the *Etrangère*, they had done the mopping up. A few irreconcilable Tuareg clans had fled over into Tripoli; the rest had submitted and since had become invaluable troopers in the Camel Corps. That much Joyce knew by hearsay and reading; now he was plunging right into these doings of recent history and his platoon was bringing her record down to date.

The camions stopped at the gate, and Van Diemen went inside to report at the *Bureau de Place*. Then they rolled on in, and a busy evening followed for Joyce. In the French army the officers ran the campaign; the sergeants ran the men. Van Diemen had disappeared to the officers' mess. Well, Joyce knew his cue was to show him a first-class outfit next morning. He took hold of the job vigorously, had the horses rubbed down and stabled, harness overhauled and polished, put the men through a field-day of cleaning up. And then, tired, at ten o'clock at night, he had time to think of Yusuf, who was going to this Sinaoun place too! It was the first town on the long trek to Murzuk where there was water. And he would run right into those besieging Tuaregs if Joyce did not find him tonight and warn him!

A disturbing thought, but a sergeant had little freedom in barracks. Just to get out the gate would require a permission signed by Van Diemen. Joyce did not want to horn in on the officers' mess with any such request. But this compound wall was no stunt to climb! A. W. O. L.—but here goes, Joyce resolved. A dark alley be-

tween platoon stables with a bit of loop-holed wall showing was tempting enough. A foot in the loophole, a jump, a scramble over the coping, and he had dropped down into outside Africa.

Instantly one was in the midst of her barbaric emptiness, once outside Bordj Tatahouine. A sentry occupied the tower at the far corner, a black man who would challenge and shoot any running figure out in the open near the fort. Beyond Joyce lay open space under the stars, mountains all about, and dim lights from a huddle of Arab buildings that had originally occupied this site because of the big well now within Bordj Tatahouine's walls. Joyce crept out on the plain from where he was, making a wide circuit, prone, of that sentry. That Arab hamlet was his objective. Half an hour of this No-man's-land stuff; then he could rise and walk.

THE hamlet contained one Arab *café*, a mere group of wooden benches along a wall under a grape-arbor, mats on the ground, burnoused figures squatting on them and playing chess or drinking thick black coffee from trays on the benches. It was lighted by torches, the wicks of olive-oil lamps that were earthenware bowls—in nowise changed since the Romans occupied this country. Joyce strolled past the *café*, his eyes searching for Yusuf. A great white mehari camel was parked kneeling just beyond the arbor and gave Joyce his cue that Yusuf was here and had already purchased him. But there had been no sign of recognition from anyone as he had passed the *café*.

For good reasons, Joyce decided. For a Légion sergeant to be seen talking with any Arab would make that man a marked individual among his fellows—perhaps a spy for the Roumi, at any rate a secret agent of the Légion. It would not do, in this country, where half the tribesmen were in secret league with the Senussi to gain protection from casual Tuareg raiders. Joyce continued on; then he ducked into a convenient crevice of a street that led to a blind court and came back on hands and knees till he had reached the camel again. And there he waited. You had to be careful in North Africa, or you got a knife in your back!

After some time a man approached the camel from the other side, and the brute raised his head from the pile of oats on a mat and blubbered the familiar *Groo-*

aw-aw-aw! of complaint that every camel howls out when his master comes, and he knows he will soon have to get up and move. The man gathered up the remaining oats and was busy pouring them back into a saddlebag; then he began strapping on a great pigskin filled with water so it would hang under the camel's belly when striding. All natural actions of a person getting ready to leave for a night's run; but out of it came presently in Yusuf's voice the low greeting: "*Salaamek, ya Habibi!*"

"Hello yourself, you old devil!" whispered back Joyce. "So you made it, did you? So did I—active service, first shot out of the box! The lieutenant in charge of my platoon's an old war acquaintance. *Liaison* sergeant with the 77th, he was. He put me on to take the place of a sick man—and I got news for you, Joe."

"Yusuf," corrected the Syrian. "I make Sinaoun by morning. It is peace there?" He went on, cinching at the water-skin straps as he talked.

"That's just it," said Joyce. "The place is being attacked by a bunch of Tuareg under Boubekir. So I went A. W. O. L. tonight so I could find and warn you, old string-bean."

"My friend!" said Yusuf appreciatively; then he laughed hardily: "Maybe I join dem Tuareg! Dey was friends of the Senussi, so I come easy by my rag."

"Ah, g'wan! You don't speak a word of Berber, Joe! Fat chance!" Joyce protested. It was just like the old string-bean, though; get in with the enemy's allies, get sent on some mission to Murzuk by them; and there you were, in the same town with the rug and provided with a good excuse to have speech with the vizier. His Syrian Arabic would betray him as a foreigner anywhere here in North Africa. But getting in with the Tuareg was something else; they were Berbers and spoke an ancient dialect that had its roots in Cretan Greek. They hated all breeds of Arabs impartially except the Senussi sect, which they tolerated because of the alliance with them against the Italians. Boubekir's people would probably murder Yusuf on sight for her mehari, said Joyce.

"Mebbe," Yusuf admitted. "But I thank you, *Habibi!* I will be there two days before you will, though."

It was about two hundred kilometers. He proposed to stop once at Bir Deribat for water. but the camel was good for a

hundred and fifty kilometers without a stop, while it would take Joyce three long, dusty marches on horses to reach Sinaoun, at best. The next water beyond Sinaoun was Bir Nazra, a hundred kilometers farther into the Tripolitan deserts, Yusuf pointed out, so he had to make Sinaoun or bust.

"What I do there I don' know," he said. "We see! Good-by, Sergeant! *Habibi!*"

Joyce shook hands and backed away from the camel. Once back in the concealment of the alley, he heard the vigorous shout, "*Ooosh! Udrrr!*" as Yusuf whacked his beast with a leather cane, and the scramble of spongy hoofs on dirt. The great swaying beast passed him, presently, a rider sitting in the narrow saddle in front of its hump, his legs crossed on the camel's neck, his long gun rising over shoulder. Out into the night passed Yusuf. You had no idea what he would do, nothing to go on. To get at his rug, the daring thing to do was to side with the Tuareg—in which case he would become one of the Légion's enemies, and Joyce himself might shoot him by mistake in some skirmish. It left the Sergeant full of perplexity as he made his way back to barracks. . . .

Africa is a dozing lion. We humans, like ants, may go our ways unmangled—unless we happen to attract her attention. Then there is the swift smash of her clawed paw, the cruel fang. . . . In this case the fang took the form of a Tuareg dagger, long, thin, double-edged.

JOYCE was negotiating his way along a dry *ouéd* or stony watercourse that meandered widely around that corner of the stables compound where stood the sentry—when Africa took sudden notice of his existence. It was a complete surprise, that meeting of his with two tall masked figures in voluminous *gandourahs* as he crouched below the rim of the *ouéd*, stumbling along its bed and trying not to be discovered by any sentry eyes! He rose with the shock of it, stood facing for a moment that apparition of two native bandits in his path. They were black-masked and appeared headless and immensely tall and menacing. White strips of cloth from their headgear crossed their chests in an X, to end in a broad white sash around their lean waists. The hilts of Crusader straight swords jutted up over shoulders, but neither reached for those weapons. A muttered "*Ughrrrrr!*" came like a lion's

growl from one of them, then instant action.

Joyce's whole instinct in a situation like this was to attack. His nerves still jangled with the violence of this sudden and

fall. Joyce saw a dark red stream dripping off the dagger-blade as his eyes lost their ability to record anything at all.

Joyce had no weapons, but he snatched up a heavy jagged rock and let fly at the foremost Targui.



totally unexpected meeting. Through his mind were whirling thoughts: "Tuareg!" The Headless Men of the ancient Roman writers—the famous raiders of today, and more dangerous than any lion! And then he had struck out with all his strength in a lunge for where the jaw ought to be within that black mask. The man dodged lithely, his right hand leaping for his left side. He had jumped back three feet during the motion, and Joyce, nearly off balance with the force of his swing, found himself facing a long steel point that gleamed wanly under Africa's stars. Before he could recover, it had lunged. . . . The flames of an intense pain were shooting up from his belly, doubling him involuntarily, helpless, agonized, and a giddy faintness enveloped him. He gasped, flung himself at his assailant with the last remnants of his instinct to attack. There was a brief, short laugh from within the mask as the Targui drew back easily and let him

There was a violent thump as his head struck stone; then the whirling blankness of unconsciousness.

CHAPTER III

JOYCE was aware of insistent small pats from something all along his side when he came to. The pats were from the tassels of a rope net, his eyes told him as they began recording impressions again. It was moonlight, and he seemed to be moving swiftly, with a regular swaying motion. Moonlight? Must be past two in the morning, Joyce thought, for the moon rose about midnight these days, he remembered from nights on the steamer. He was on a racing mehari camel and going across the desert like the devil, Joyce discovered next as his faculties returned. A twist of his head to look forward showed a knee jutting out somewhat above, clad in vo-



luminous Oriental breeches. Beyond that, the neck of a white mehari stuck out straight, its small head and round, furry ears dipping and rising very little. The brute went at a fast lope, a singlefoot pace very easy on the rider—*pad-pad-pad*, the spongy hoofs in the sand; a strong cool breeze rushed by him. He was slung in the rope net that forms a barbaric red canopy on a Tuareg camel, ornamental mostly, but very useful if you have a sack or a human prisoner to carry. You simply tie up its lower bolt-rope to various thongs on the saddle tree and have a long net bag. The tassels pendant from that rope were slapping Joyce now as the beast loped on, going some eighteen kilometers an hour in speed.

A dull, deep ache in his lower right side reminded Joyce immediately of his wound from this man's dagger. They had patched it up somehow, but it irked. Joyce tried to reach it and found his arms numb and tied behind his back. His ankles also were tied, and his knees bent up backward within the net so that he made a package about four feet long slung along the camel's smelly side. The air was full of leather scents, coir rope, a strong rancid sweat from the camel.

He tried his fingers and found that they would move, obey his will. And they

touched steel at the first tentative movement—his own spurs. The Targui had not taken them off, nor his polished leather cavalry sergeant's boots either. His heels were pressed flat on his buttocks by the net pressure. Joyce discovered that he could even touch the rope around his ankles by a bit of strain.

Immediately hope came flooding back all over him. Those steel spurs; they could be made to chafe the rope around his wrists. There was plenty of motion furnished by the regular jounce and sway of the racing camel. Once free, he could reach down and untie the knot around his ankles.

Before that, all his awakening senses had been of dull, hopeless misery with Joyce. The ache of his wound, yes; but far beyond that was the mental misery of being A. W. O. L. the very first night of his active service under Van Diemen. What would that old war buddy think of him when the platoon turned out this morning and there was no top sergeant? He had not slept in his bed, even! He had just vanished, and no one knew anything at all about him. That might cause conjecture of having met with some foul play outside the fort with anyone but a *Légionnaire*. The latter would simply be chalked up as a deserter, and every *poste* and *gendarmerie* be notified. They were always deserting, given any chance at all. The colonial trooper had his year of service and then was through: the *Légion* enlistment was five years, and it wore most men out within three months. Just the period of Joyce's service, so far—about the time they usually took to the open spaces! Van Diemen would shake his head regretfully.

Of course he *might* assume that his sergeant had been carried off by raiders. The mehari camel made a tremendous difference down here. It allowed long-distance raids, a run of more than a hundred miles from the base camp, a run back next night. These two Tuareg—they had made just such a raid and were prowling around the fort hoping to pick up a stray soldier. Soldiers were always good for ransom, splendid booty. That fact made Joyce cheer up about his wound. The Targui had not thrust home with his dagger: just given him a touch that would render his man helpless for the time. . . .

Joyce was all this time chafing his wrist rope at the rowels of his spurs. By a cramping strain of his knees he could

make the spurs bite at the rope turns around his wrists. Just hold them to it; the jouncing motion was chafing the fibers bit by bit. An exhausting business, in his weak condition! Again and again his will gave out and he had to let his knees relax. But it was coming. His fingers touched frayed rope now. There was not a sound from the man riding in the saddle in front of the hump. He was probably asleep, for the rein to the camel's nose hung loose and swaying. Only that long neck stretched out straight for some distant silver-and-black mountains under the moon. Under foot the *shijt—shijt—shijt* of sand over a flat plain of tiny sand-ripples made by the wind.

At last! Joyce felt the rope slackening around his wrists. He twisted his arms and freed them. Then came the shooting pains of returning circulation. His fingers were less numb now, and they began feeling for the knot around his ankles. A hell of a knot, tight, stubborn, wearying to work at. But at last his ankles came free.

Joyce lay considering what to do next. A cautious search of his pockets told that they had frisked him of everything. And dammit, this was the Sahara, a place where freedom was almost worse than captivity! For the Sahara was a much more formidable antagonist than any men, however savage. Joyce was thirsty right now. The Targui's leather *guerba*, water-bottle, hung tantalizingly just in front of the net, but the man's thigh rested on it. With that bottle he might risk an escape, though, Joyce decided.

Where was he? According to the moon, the camel was headed due south. He had left Yusuf about ten, and it was now at least three in the morning. Say, four hours' run. That would be seventy-two kilometers from Bordj Tatahouine, roughly. Those mountains ahead must be the Djebel Nefusa. Joyce remembered seeing them on the map as extending eastward from Bordj Djennine, the New Citadel, where the command expected to stop after two days of plugging along southward for Fort Pervinquiére. Those mountains had just one well, Bir Deribat, about fifty kilos from Bordj Djennine. Like all wells, it was marked in blue ink on the Army map that every sergeant carried, and it had caught Joyce's eye when he and Van Diemen were looking over the platoon's route south together. This camel was heading directly toward it and would reach

it in an hour more—if the Tuareg cared to venture there at all. They did not have to. And there was generally an Arab encampment around a well or near it.

THE mehari sped on, his course straight as a string. His own nose would take him straight to the well unless his master woke up and directed him elsewhere. Joyce could hear the plod of the other camel now and then, but they were keeping about abreast. What he was interested in principally was something that would cut. He had to get free of this net within the hour, or the chance would be lost. Well, there were his teeth. One strand of this net cut would do. You could unknot enough of it to get out, once you had a free strand.

It was slow gritty work, chewing that strand! Joyce had an idea, after a while, and undid his belt. Its buckle-tongue made a sort of fid. You could pry out a twist of fiber and cut that with your teeth. After a time the last twist was chewed in two, and Joyce had both hands on the first net knot. It came undone, with much effort and broken fingernails. But he was working fiercely now, for the mountains loomed up just ahead, and then this even pace of the mehari would slow to a jolting walk and the Targui would wake up.

He did, as the camel reached the stony mountain talus and began to climb. The knee just in front of Joyce's head jerked up, and there came a yank on the nose-rope. Harsh jerky speech, all *nn's* and *tt's*, jabbered over at the other man. His own Targui put a hand down to feel the net, and Joyce instantly crossed his arms over his back and froze. The Targui could not do much but assure himself that his prisoner was still there, however. He was guiding his camel now, and Joyce again was left to himself. Feverishly he attacked the second net knot. He could get his elbow through the first opening now, but not his head and shoulders. His plan was to drop out at the first convenient ravine and take to the rocks. With the camel laboring and grunting up the slopes, he would not at once be missed. . . .

The knot opened while they were toiling up and up the trail, through a twisting ravine that was all inky shadows and brilliant moonlit cliffs. Joyce had an opening two feet long now, which he kept closed with a turn of the strand and a slip-

knot. One pull on it and he was free to fall out.

When?

That was sure an aggravating question! Everything depended on that fall. He must not catch his spurs in the net, must fall free of the camel's long five-foot stride, must not startle the brute by any clumsiness in bumping against his moving forelegs. Above all, it must be precisely at the right crevice or cleft in the rocks, so he could disappear immediately off the trail. Aggravatingly, no such place showed up, or they passed it before he could get ready. Joyce was getting desperate. They were in high country now, the ridge skyline not far above. And then they were descending.

Doubly difficult the get-away now, on these steep down-grades! Joyce in his net was pressed forward by his own weight so his head bore against the camel's moving shoulder-blade. Impossible to drop out now without tumbling all over him! And the camel would roar, give a jump, be stopped at once. He had lost his chance, he realized bitterly.

Then both camels stopped and their riders were conferring in their jerky Tamaheque speech. They were halfway down the valley now. Looking ahead through his net, Joyce could see what they were talking about. A rill of smoke rose from the depths of the basin, a smoldering camp-fire. Beside it slept a prone figure, feet to the fire. A camel was parked near by, a gleaming white figure in the moonlight—Yusuf's camel. Joyce realized with a shock! He had sat beside that brute not five hours ago. Near the camel was a rude square of palm logs deeply scored with well-rope markings—Bir Deribat, without a doubt!

JOYCE cursed Yusuf for his careless bravado in sleeping out in plain sight by that well. What would likely happen to him was being planned now, for there was a harsh laugh above him, and the two camels moved on downward. More loot, that laugh seemed to say. They would murder this sleeping Arab and take his camel and all that was his.

Joyce was glad now that he had not dropped out. He was free, could do something for Yusuf if he got a chance. And fifty yards away from the well, the two Tuareg halted their brutes and silently dropped down on the sandy basin. A muttered grunt or two between them; then out

flashed their long daggers from the sheath up the left forearm, and together they raced for the sleeping figure.

Joyce dropped out of his net just as swiftly. He had no weapons, but he snatched up one, a heavy jagged rock off the sands. He had been a fair pitcher on the diamond in his day. Throwing his fast one, as over the plate, he let fly the rock with all his strength at the foremost Targui, who was now not ten feet from where Yusuf lay sleeping.

And at the same time the roar of a long Arab gun rang out from the rock slopes near by, and the second Targui pitched forward and fell on the sands. Joyce's rock arrived about the same instant. It caught the foremost on the back of his head—a corking pitch, that!—and felled him like a log. Joyce rushed on to secure him. He had no time to look for the Arab who had fired that shot, but knew he was friendly, at least hostile to all Tuareg. They could settle it later between them.

But a glad shout came from the ledges near by as Joyce knelt over his man and was busy tying him with his own sash. "*Ya Habibi!*" it cried out joyfully. "Fo' Gawd sake, w'at you doin' here?"

Yusuf! He came running out across the sands brandishing the long gun. He was clad now in the blue serge suit. Stupefied, Joyce reached for and felt of that sleeping figure that he had thought was Yusuf. It was cold and hard, made of packed sand!

"You t'ink I fool enough to sleep out in diss countree, *hein?*" Yusuf was demanding happily as he came up. "I mek a dummy. . . . But you was try to save my life all same, *Ya Habibi,*" Yusuf added tenderly. "And how you *get* here? Tooken by dem two Tuareg, *hein?*"

They clasped hands once more as Yusuf chattered on gayly. This desert life seemed to have raised his spirits to new heights, the intoxication of its freedom, its daring, its adventure. And it was on the cards that they should meet here again at Bir Deribat, the circumstances being what they were. The only well in the Djebel Nefusa; it was Yusuf's first step in the long trek to Murzuk.

CHAPTER IV

"MY friend, you was baby in de Sahara," said Yusuf with his flashing smile as they poked up the camp-fire. Joyce had

had a drink and his wound had been dressed with his own first-aid kit found on the dead Targui. "You stay A. W. O. L. till Sinaoun and go wiz me," Yusuf was counseling.

Joyce growled protest. It was only fifty miles to Bordj Djennine, he was maintaining hotly, and a fellow could make it easy on one of these mehari. Van Diemen and the command would reach there by tomorrow night. If he started off now, he ought to get there by noon and be on hand with an adventure to tell about when his Looie arrived there.

Yusuf laughed shortly. "You know the way through these mountains? You can manage dees camel by you'self? Try it!"

Joyce got up at that challenge and walked over to that brute in the net bag of which he had recently been riding. The creature roared, nipped at him savagely. His long neck covered a twelve-foot circle, and it meant a broken arm to get seized by those teeth. Yusuf stood by and laughed as Joyce cursed him wrathfully and tried to get hold of the nose-ring. "You see? He mind nobody but he master. But I show you, *Habibi*, for you must ride wiz me."

Yusuf jumped in and smote him with the pliant leather cane across the nose. The camel howled, wept tears, tried to bite back but got a rain of savage blows instead. Then Yusuf was in along his neck and pressing down where it joined the hump. "*Kh! Kh! Kh!*" he grunted gutturally. Obediently the mehari folded up its long legs and went down, head first, stern next. "Now you take heem, so," directed Yusuf. He gripped the camel's head in behind the front teeth and began to twist. Joyce took hold there, was surprised to learn that the camel had no back teeth. "Twist him good!" directed Yusuf.

Joyce twisted with all his strength. The camel blubbered, roared, mewed. His head was now looking back at his own hump and a bit more twist would break his neck.

"Enough!" warned Yusuf. "You pet heem now. Geev him to eat." Joyce did that. He had established mastery between them with that twist, he gathered; the feeding a handful of oats was kindness.

"And now," said Yusuf, "we was two Tuareg, you an' me! We go to Sinaoun and see w'at we see. You put on dem clo'es!" He indicated the Targui whom Joyce had rocked. The fellow had a broken head and was now tied, but they

got the great gandourah off him and Joyce slipped it on over his Légion uniform. Yusuf finished dressing him with the masked headgear, the crossed white bands, the straight Crusader sword on back, and finally that long dagger in its red sheath up Joyce's left forearm.

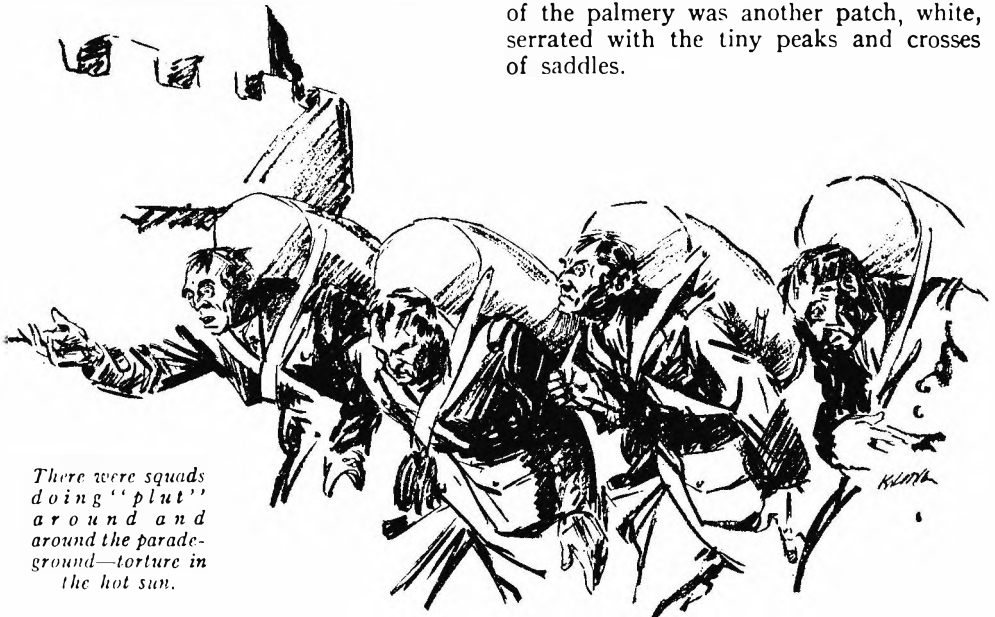
The Sergeant grinned, but he felt thrilled with adventure in these barbaric clothes. With that daring Syrian as companion he did not know what scrapes they would get into before he rejoined his command again, but there would be plenty around Sinaoun! A good disguise in this country, anyhow. What Arab cameleers they met would flee them as two devils incarnate. Légion soldiers would shoot them on sight. The Tuareg themselves? That was a poser that he left up to Yusuf. Neither knew a word of Berber between them!

Yusuf had attired himself in the dead Targui's clothes, and they left the other at the well for his friends to find. They took possession of the two mehari, leading Yusuf's, which had Arab trappings and could be passed off as a captured animal. Southward through the gorges of the Djebel Nefusa they set out. Joyce felt that he had done the best thing possible in thus continuing his A. W. O. L. On an unfamiliar brute and through mountains that he did not know, any attempt to reach Borj Djennine would have almost surely ended in disaster, in blind gorges, or over some trail that was possible only to donkeys, and a camel-rider almost sure to fall off a precipice. Van Diemen would understand. You weren't officially a deserter till ten days had passed.

A LONG green bar of palms appeared over the desert horizon about noon next day. Yusuf took to the rocks at sight of those feather-dusters. The place might have a minaret, he explained, and they would be seen from there. As they were still in the arid foothills of the Djebel Nefusa, there were plenty of rock outcroppings to work the two mehara in behind. Over them they studied that green bar of palm trees that must be Sinaoun. About five miles off it was, and as unreadable as the Sphinx, that lonely desert town. Some spring gushing out of the rocks here was its excuse for existence, a big spring, one that would water perhaps four hundred date-palms. Far back in the Arab invasion of the sixth century some sheik

had seized that spring and built a citadel around it. His descendants had maintained themselves against the Tuareg ever since, slowly extending their palm plantings, constructing a town around the citadel, a mosque. It had become a caravan stopping-place on the long route up from Kano to Tripoli. And always the Tuareg, the Azjer branch of them, as enemies.

ing for higher ground and nearer, so that more of Sinaoun would rise above the horizon. Its oval shape gradually came within the outer yellow skyline, a square mud minaret visible among the tree-tops, the solid outlines of its citadel. Out on the desert was a brown patch that Yusuf said was loot—camels, goats, and donkeys. A few white dots guarded it, lone Tuareg on their white mehara. Near by on the fringe of the palmery was another patch, white, serrated with the tiny peaks and crosses of saddles.



There were squads doing "plut" around and around the parade-ground—torture in the hot sun.

Joyce had read somewhere of their masterpiece, the great raid of 1911 when they had captured the entire Tripoli caravan of thirteen thousand camels with four thousand drivers, and had collected three million dollars' worth of booty—hides, ivory, gold-dust, dyestuff. It had about ruined the merchants of Tripoli! Since then the French had defeated the Azjer Tuareg in four pitched battles, and except for their great rebellion during the War, had organized some sort of order in this region. Joyce thrilled to realize that he was looking on the very town that figured in that masterpiece of a raid, for it was not far below here that the Azjers had fallen on Tripoli's biggest caravan, and it was to Sinaoun that the few surviving camel-drivers had come for refuge.

Well, the Tuareg was at it again, and no one to stop Boubekir, it seemed, for nothing moved on the vast yellow plain of the Sahara that stretched far and wide around the lonely oasis. Yusuf and Joyce circled through the stony and broiling defiles, aim-

"Tchha!" exclaimed Yusuf. "Dey was looting de dates. Don' you see de men in de tree-tops?"

JOYCE couldn't. But it made him sick, this wholesale plundering of a prosperous town. Truly the Tuareg were the Scourge of God to the Arab population! Once they got the mastery and had shut up men, women and children in the citadel of an oasis, they were thorough in carrying off the very lifeblood of the place. Misery, poverty, would descend on Sinaoun when these raiders went their way. Their life was wrapped up in their flocks, their dates. You could not buy wheat, salt—necessities of life, these were—unless you had something to trade with from the passing caravans. Famine itself would be theirs after this. It was like robbing a man's cache in the Far North; you left him good as dead.

"Awa!" said Yusuf. "It iss t'ree days before de Légion gets here. Dey will be gone, dem Tuareg. Unless—"

His eyes were on that white patch. No

one was guarding it, every robber of them up in the palms cutting down the big bunches of ripe dates. Boubekir had left a few men watching the captured flocks, principally to see that none of them strayed off. He evidently felt himself entirely secure here. He had the population securely besieged in their *ksar*, had their palmery and pasturages all to himself.

Joyce looked at Yusuf curiously at that pause after "Unless—" Was the crazy nut thinking of *raiding* those mehara, just they two alone! "By God, you Indian!" he exclaimed admiringly as their eyes met. "One thing, though; if we run off his camels, Boubekir has to stay right here."

Yusuf's thin nostrils expanded as a bitter smile crinkled the tight, curly mustache pinched under his big Semitic nose. Raids were the wine of life in his own Arabia—the more hopelessly daring, the better! He was a Syrian sheik now, and was eyeing that patch of Tuareg mehara with longing.

"Dey go away tonight, yes?" he said. "So we mek de raid today. You come?"

The crazy Syrian would do it all alone if Joyce had one big think about it and decided it was too foolhardy! Not for nothing was red the color of Islam's star—courage! The Caucasian in Joyce could not let him get by with *that* challenge!

"Sure I'm with you!" he answered hardily. "But you'll have to run it, Joe. I may have been your sergeant in the Argonne, but this desert stuff is something else again!"

"Good boy!" said Yusuf briefly. "All right. Coom."

HE goaded his mehari behind the ears and guided him down on the plain. "Good Lord!" gasped Joyce inwardly. Was the damned Indian going to ride straight in on that Tuareg raiding party, not knowing a word of their language, unable to pass even the most casual of challenges? He forgot for the moment that both of them were disguised as Tuareg, were expected back here this morning, had a looted mehari towing astern. But he appreciated this Tuareg gear now, and wished he had his *Légion* uniform off under it as they rode out on the broiling sands. The heat was severe outside but it was comparatively cool within these loose and flowing garments. The black mask jutted out stiffly a short distance in front of his nose, and his eyes looked out comfortably through the slit above it under the turban

that came down low over his forehead. They would have been sand-blind long ago, were it not for that mask protecting his eyes from the hot rays reflected up from the desert. And sand-blindness was worse than snow-blindness, with the same giddy sickness and total inability to open one's eyes for days after. A grand gear, this Tuareg disguise, thought Joyce!

Also its very daring would be the success of their raid. It was so brilliantly casual—riding in openly and impersonating those very two Tuareg who had left the day before for a raid on Bordj Tatahouine. They would be expected back about now, with information about what the French were doing. Boubekir and his people were all up in the palms at the time of their return. They would have a few minutes before anyone came out to ask them anything. Joyce rode along, trusting blindly in Yusuf. What fool plan he had in mind he could not guess, but it would be something casual and natural-seeming.

It was. They came loping in to that park of Tuareg beasts just like any pair of raiders. The guards over at the looted flocks looked their way in expressionless black masks, turned to watch their own charges again. One of them raised an arm to wave at Yusuf, evidently some chum of one of those two. Yusuf waved back, then was busy dismounting from his beast and pressing down his neck to make him fold up. Joyce imitated him. He had established a certain familiarity with his brute by now, and the creature minded his growling "*Kh! Kh!*" Yusuf looked over the park, found what he wanted, apparently, for he turned to Joyce and said in low tones:

"Coom. We go have a look at Meester Boubekir."

Joyce had an inward spasm at that. Yusuf was sure asking for it! Or was he just crazy with the intoxication of this raiding thing? Joyce went along, resigned. He did not expect to live much longer; but he could not stay here alone.

THEY crossed a low mud wall and went a short distance into the palmery. Men were busy among the palm trunks, loading fresh date bunches into striped bags of camel's-hair cloth; more men were up the trees lowering the plundered bunches down with long ropes. They all looked alike, these Tuareg, all in the same dark blue *gandourahs*, the same white turbans with tufts of coarse black hair jutting up

through the center of the white cloth ring, the same black mask that concealed all but the flashing eyes inside. No one paid them any attention. Beyond, some distance farther into the palmery, they could hear shots ringing out occasionally from the citadel, the rip of slugs tearing through the tree-tops.

More shots were answering from behind the palmery's mud walls, white smoke drifting through the dusty tree-trunks. Boubekir was evidently with those of his fighting men who had guns, and was keeping the Arabs from any sortie to save their dates. Despair reigned within that *ksar*, Joyce imagined with sympathy for the population of this stricken town. But he wished Yusuf would turn and get out of here and not be so infernally cheeky about this business! At any moment a messenger from Boubekir would come out to get the news from them, now that their return was known!

YUSUF turned at last. He had seen all he wanted to, and now his strides were hasty, purposeful. They came back over the low outer mud wall again, went out among the parked camels. And this time Yusuf did not stop at his own beast, but went out to where a great gray she-camel was dozing on the sands, and whacked her soundly with the leather cane hanging by a thong from her tall cruciform pommel. She rose squalling, the clang of a large silver bell accompanying her. Then Joyce saw Yusuf's plan at last. She was the bell-mare of the lot. She led them in a compact bunch when they went out to pasture. And as if that bell were a well-known signal, all the rest of the park got to its numerous feet. There was a grand scrambling and blubbering as they all unjointed, stern up, then head up, in a huge heave. "Don't mount—walk," said Yusuf. "Take de rear an' whack dem as try to stray."

So he was a camel-herder now! Joyce choked back his laughter at thought of this last transformation. The loot herders looked over at them without saying anything as Yusuf guided the bell-camel westward along the mud wall, all the rest following, Joyce bringing up the rear. The thing looked natural enough. These two had orders from Boubekir to take the mehari herd out to pasture, apparently, and that was all there was to it! Joyce, with his heart in his mouth, saw that every man working over the date-bags had stopped and was looking at them—a dozen black

masks, any one of which would make trouble if he even came out to say something about his particular beast! Joyce dared to wave an arm reassuringly and point westward. Yusuf had done nothing of the sort, was just plodding alongside the bell-camel as if he had his orders, and no time for them. However, the gesture seemed to assure them that it was all right, for they all went on with their work presently. Joyce was busy rounding up a straying camel, now, and was glad it gave him something active to do.

There was pasturage to the west of the palmery, quite a patch of it, the stubble of millet and barley served by an irrigation ditch. Yusuf's quick eyes had spied it while riding in, and he had guessed that it had been reserved for the mehara, he told Joyce later. At present he was leading the bell-camel through it quite a distance before he stopped her and let her graze. All the rest stopped; long necks went down; yellow chisel teeth cropped at the low stubble. Yusuf drew out a distance toward the palmery and stood watching them feed with that absorption peculiar to Arabs. They were half a mile out now, far enough for a stampede and a get-away, since the Tuareg only had their legs.

"For God's sake!" called over Joyce breathlessly. He was so excited he could hardly tend his brutes as herder. How long, in the name of heaven, were they going to play with the whiskers of Death this way, his anxious soul kept crying out. Hadn't they better stampede these brutes *now*, before anyone came out after them with peremptory orders for recall?

"Slow! Tek heem easy!" Yusuf laughed. "Move dem out, leetle by leetle. I show you."

He moved on the nearest mehari and tapped its hocks with his cane. The brute snarled, relinquished a luscious tuft of fodder, and moved on. He crowded the one ahead, who also snarled and moved. Joyce imitated that trick. But it was slow business; and so help him God, this was playing with dynamite! Half a mile—he wished it was a hundred miles between them and that bunch of Tuareg raiders back there! How long before Boubekir would find out that some one had taken out their camels without his orders? Then there would be inquiry, suspicion, a rush out on the plain, wild disorder among these brutes, futile attempts to get them away—both himself and Yusuf killed.

Too much to attempt, for just two men! It looked that way to Joyce. Exasperating was this slow movement of these forty feeding camels! Half an hour passed, with Joyce on tenterhooks, and they had not moved a quarter of a mile farther out from the Sinaoun palmery. However, the ditch kept with them, a shallow runnel a spade deep; but it was astonishing the distances that water could be led out from the palmery. It was due, Joyce noted, to the gradual slope southwest of this plain. It was a shallow valley, with the dry stony bed of a *ouéd* in it that flowed water when it rained. The townspeople had cultivated it the whole length of the flat. They had gathered the millet by sickle that June. What was left was tinder-dry stubble, at which the camels nibbled hungrily.

"NOW!" barked Yusuf excitedly. "Fire! Queek! Do as I do, *ya habibi!*"

He had snatched up a handful of stubble and twisted it to a torch as he spoke. Ignited, he ran it along the grass in a wide arc behind his side of the camel drove. A trail of smoke and flame followed in the wake of that torch. The strong northeast wind took it in a fierce running pool of small flames that swept down on the camels with amazing velocity. They were grunting, roaring, howling, now, piling up on those ahead, starting a terrific stampede.

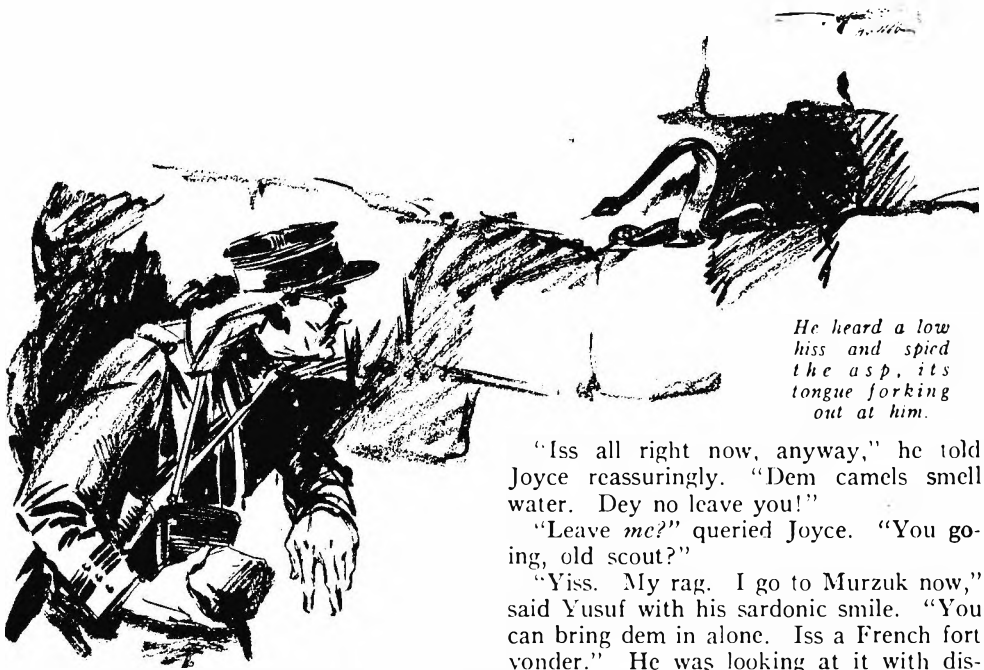
"Watch you'self—*mount!*" shouted Yusuf over at Joyce in the din. He was springing for a beast himself, his arms around the long neck, then a leg over. Joyce dropped the torch with which he had been laying a train of fire and leaped for the nearest. To get left behind—hideous fate! Yet they were going now fast as a man could run. A few seconds more, and no man on earth could catch these galloping mehara!

Joyce swung up and climbed into the narrow saddle. Far ahead was the bell-camel with Yusuf on her. In between, clouds of billowing dust, acres of long curving necks, sardonic furry heads with long pendent lips. Before the pursuing flames they ran precisely like a flock of chickens after a single worm. Looking back toward Sinaoun, Joyce could see dozens of active figures sprinting after them at top speed, waving arms wildly, some shooting at them with long guns. They were gaining visibly, but it could not last. Besides, that belt of burning stubble that kept following them down the valley like a moving wave

was no place to run over with loose-flowing cotton garments! And they had about three-quarters of a mile head-start.

Yusuf was guiding the bell-camel down the valley parallel to the *ouéd* bottom but keeping to the stubble. Beyond him, as Joyce looked ahead, was literally nothing. No mountain range, no rock outcroppings, no tree, bush, weed-tuft, or sign of vegetation, once the stubble came to an end. It was the emptiest part of the world he had ever looked at. Far in the distance, about twenty miles out beyond the horizon rim, was rising smoke, an immense distance of it, reaching from south to north as far as the eye could see. Joyce watched that smoke for some time as he jounced along bringing up the rear guard. Big prairie fire, he guessed—but there was no prairie down here to *make* a fire! And then he had thought it out; that smoke was sand-dust rising from dunes. And those dunes were the eastern border of the Grand Erg Oriental. It was five hundred miles across them to Touggurt, and not a drink the whole way! It was three hundred miles from north to south, and it did not matter which way you went. Put those dunes down in America, and they would cover the entire New England and Middle Atlantic states. Fancy hiking from Buffalo to New York without a chance at a well! And every mile of it sand dunes two hundred feet high to their crests! It seemed what Yusuf was letting him in for now!

STRAIGHT on loped the drove of mehara, every neck now stretched out horizontally, all settled down to their fast single-foot pace. A camel will run on indefinitely where his nose is pointed unless some one stops him. He does not appear to think for himself. Even with no rider, he will run on unless something interesting like a tuft of fodder shows up. Joyce reasoned that Yusuf did not dare to stop them, once he had them going. They would mill and stray and begin heading back for water, once they had their heads, and only two men to round them up. It was the great eastern dunes or bust, Joyce concluded. They would lose even the most persistent of the Tuareg there if they dared follow on foot. And crossing them for about fifty miles, you came to the Gassi Dahar, a long natural alley cutting through the dunes that marked the course of an underground river. Down this ran the military road with its chain of forts and



He heard a low hiss and spied the asp, its tongue forking out at him.

artesian-well stations built by the Génie, the bloomin' engineers. Down it would arrive Van Diemen and the platoon within two days. It seemed that Yusuf's plan was to drive their booty there and wait for him.

But it did not turn out that way. An hour later a lone apparition appeared over the horizon line, that empty, shimmering meeting-place of yellow and blue that always seemed just so far away. It grew to a gray square tooth jutting over the sands to the southwest. Yusuf swerved the bell-mare that way. Joyce watched the tooth grow larger, clearer. A spidery steel tower appeared in the blue high above it, after a time. That tooth of masonry standing in the middle of empty desolation was certainly the loneliest place Joyce had ever looked on! But the tower said it could talk to the distant world, for it was undoubtedly wireless apparatus. He reached into the breast pocket of his Légion tunic and got out the Army map. Sinaoun, where was it? His finger finally rested on that spot, not far within the Tripolitan frontier. And just thirty kilometers southwest of it, right on the frontier, was Fort Pervinquière. *That* was it!

AT Joyce's shout Yusuf reined in. The bell stopped clanging, and all the camels stopped. Yusuf waved for him to come around them and join him. He dared not leave the head of the procession.

"Iss all right now, anyway," he told Joyce reassuringly. "Dem camels smell water. Dey no leave you!"

"Leave *me*?" queried Joyce. "You going, old scout?"

"Yiss. My rag. I go to Murzuk now," said Yusuf with his sardonic smile. "You can bring dem in alone. Iss a French fort yonder." He was looking at it with distaste. "Dey mek trouble for me, mebbe!" He laughed over the irony of it.

Joyce agreed with him there, knowing the French! Yusuf's reward for this daring raid, this bottling up of Boubekir in Sinaoun till the Légion could get at him, would be to be pinched by some fussy officer at this *poste* and be sent back north under guard, so that a proper inquiry could be made into the mystery of his presence down here without an *autorization militaire*. You could look for neither gratitude nor appreciation from these military pint-pots; rather, jealousy that you had stolen some of their thunder, and some scheme to tie you up with red tape. And it would put a crimp into Yusuf's quest of the Victory Rug, a permanent crimp!

"Yes, that's Fort Pervinquière. I just looked it up on the map," said Joyce. "You're right about keeping away from it! But say, son!" he cried out admiringly. "As a raider, in these parts, you've got this Boubekir beat out flat!" Joyce looked over their drove of loot, every damned animal belonging to Boubekir's forty thieves. "Say, you ought to be in Intelligence, that's what!" he went on enthusiastically. "You'd be their ace, down here, in no time! With this raid for a starter—why don't you?" he urged.

Yusuf grinned. "No; was raid my rug in Murzuk, marry my girl in Syria, an' take her home to New York. America iss de only countree, my friend!"

"Yes, but look what you've done already!" urged Joyce earnestly. "I could fix you up with the officer at this fort. You'd be worth a battalion to the French! Hell's delight, how many guys could have run off this whole drove of mehara as you did?"

"It is nothing," said Yusuf. "I see you home safe. Dat was it, really, *habibi*. I go west for your sake. But, for my rag, I go east! *Fi amam Allah*, my friend!"

It was final, that good-by. He was taking off the bell-mare's collar and transferring it to the camel Joyce rode. "Dey follow dat bell. Iss easy. And I like this camel." He patted the docile gray mare mehari. "Iss not finer one in all Arabia! I t'ink she iss Boubekir's own camel!" he added with a mischievous smile. "Mebbe dot help me when I get to Bir Nazra."

So that was his next stop? Joyce looked it up on the map at once, for he wished to keep track of his Syrian as far as possible. It lay a hundred and thirty kilometers to the southeast and was in the middle of a blank space that was gosh-awful desert, apparently. Joyce wished him luck. He was taking off his Tuareg gandourah while Yusuf waited. He had to show up at the fort in proper Légion uniform. And then they parted once more, Yusuf loping off on the fast gray mehari, Joyce starting up his brute. At the clang of the bell the whole drove followed. Ahead about seven miles loomed up Fort Pervinquière, lonely, deserted, broiling in the heat, not a sign of life about it. Hell of a place, thought Joyce. He hoped his service there would not be long.

CHAPTER V

A PRECISE and bookish-looking lieutenant of the Fourth Tirailleurs sat listening at the desk in the *Bureau de Place* of Fort Pervinquière as Joyce made his report. The lieutenant was mean and little and sallow, came from some provincial town in the north of France, apparently, and loved not heat. The fellow had an exasperating habit of never looking you in the eye. He was interested principally in his finger-tips now as Joyce outlined the capture of those Tuareg camels in a brief recital. Deliberately the lieutenant placed one finger-tip precisely touching its opposite until his palms met in the well-known posture of a priest's hands.

"By whose orders was what appears to be a military operation carried out in *my* district?" he inquired acidly.

Good Lord! This guy was sure one of those martinets, thought Joyce, as that jolt to his enthusiastic recital brought him up all standing. What a contrast was this wart to Van Diemen, who would have howled his delight over that super-daring raid and been all for pouncing on Boubekir by a forced march before he could get away from Sinaoun!

"Why, sir!" He floundered helplessly. "Nobody's orders, sir! How could there be? I'm from Lieutenant Van Diemen's platoon of the Légion's Cavalry Brigade, as I told you, sir. I was off duty and had gone out of Bordj Tatahouine to warn this friend of mine, and that started all this business, you see, sir—"

"Your permission, Sergeant?" The lieutenant ordered its production in that dry, sardonic voice of his, and was holding out a sallow, clammy claw for it. He had Joyce there! So far he had been canny enough not to hint that he had gone A. W. O. L. in all this. Joyce made great pretense of searching for it among his papers, the lieutenant's glittering and unbelieving eye on him all the while.

"Sorry, sir. Must have lost it in all that changing clothes from my Légion uniform to Tuareg disguise and back, sir," he lied stoutly.

The lieutenant blinked. "I am *désolé*, too!" he mocked. "So you went absent without leave to warn this precious Syrian friend of yours? May I point out that it was your duty as a Légionnaire to have brought him in with these beasts, so that I, the commandant of this fort whose authority you seem to take so lightly, might examine his papers? What is he doing in my territory without reporting here? I cannot allow unauthorized civilians, let alone foreigners, wandering around unaccounted for in *this* district! You said something about a rug?"

JOYCE stirred uneasily. He was boiling with rage over this cold reception, and had repressed with difficulty the urge to beg this officer not to waste any more time in pressing his military advantage of having Boubekir trapped for the time in Sinaoun. But Yusuf's quest of El Ribat was a private matter. The less he said about it to this sundowner the better!

"He's a rug-buyer for a noted dealer in

New York," Joyce explained. "I believe he has an *autorization militaire*."

"Ah?" said the lieutenant, baring his teeth in a freezing smile. "We shall see!" He tapped a bell and issued his first orders since Joyce had come to Fort Pervinière with his Tuareg loot and his great news—news Van Diemen would have hopped on with a yell and sent the whole platoon scurrying eastward with Joyce at its head.

"Sergeant Brea," he said in a thin, vitriolic voice, "advance two paces!" The Tirailleur sergeant who had answered the bell stepped before the desk, stood like a block of wood at salute with hand at ear and palm outward.

"Sergeant Brea, there is a Syrian at large in my district, disguised as a Tuareg raider, and without an *autorization*. You will send a squad to arrest him. He will camp at—let's see—Bir Nazra, most likely, tonight." The lieutenant glanced at the big army map on the wall.

"The squad will proceed there. . . . For this man, put him in the guard-house—the *disciplinaire* one, for Légion deserters. And, Sergeant Brea, you will send two messengers up the road to meet Lieutenant Van Diemen, who is coming here with a platoon of the cavalry brigade. They are to instruct him that Boubekir has raided Sinaoun and retired with all his force farther into Tripoli. He may use his own judgment as to pursuit. Also tell Sub-lieutenant Baranés to report here to me immediately."

Well, could you beat that, thought Joyce, flushing hotly with exasperation. His own treatment he scarcely gave a thought to, outrageous as it was. But this dirty trick on Van Diemen and the boys—to head them off with a false story, so the garrison here could have Boubekir all to themselves and cop all the credit! That eternal jealousy of the Légion! And there was Yusuf. They would not nab him at Bir Nazra, simply shoot him down where he lay and bring back a story of a fight. These guys took no chances with anything in Tuareg clothes—their long daggers were too quick and too handy at close range!

Gloom! Joyce scarcely felt the paw laid on him at the lieutenant's nod. He went out of the *Bureau de Place* with a stiff and sardonic hand to visor of his képi; otherwise he was seeing red so much as to have no thoughts at all save boiling indignation. The salute was not returned, for a deserter did not rate one.

OUTSIDE he stumbled across the sandy parade-ground trying to collect his wits. His thinking apparatus had to get busy right away, for he would only have a few minutes with Brea before being thrust into the solitude of some disciplinary cell. He noted that there were few soldiers about, no murmur of voices from the barracks hall, no laughter.

"Where's all the garrison, buddy?" he asked Brea.

The latter remained wooden. He was but the lieutenant's badly scared yes-man here, browbeaten by a martinet lieutenant.

"Loosen up, guy—I wont squeal on you!" Joyce said easily.

The sergeant managed a grin. "*Tcha!* Three-fourths of them are in clink," he said. "A man gets fourteen days here if *he* finds a speck of sand dust on the barrel of the rifle! But he will go on campaign with the rest—we'll all get killed anyhow."

He had added that in a mournful tone. Hopeless the men who had no faith in their commander! But it was the men's attitude here. They expected nothing but unreasonable punishment while in garrison, slaughter when led out against the enemy.

Joyce began figuring rapidly. This company of the Fourth Tirailleurs, two hundred men. The guard-house was jammed, he could see by the heads crowding its barred windows and changing incessantly as men fought for fresh air. He could smell it, also, by the odor of sweat and foul breath that smote his nostrils as they passed it. There were large squads doing *plut* around and around the parade-ground, the sixty-pound sack of sand torturing each man's back with its harness in the hot sun. These were receiving the lighter punishments. A hundred and twenty men at least in clink, Joyce estimated with a low allowance for those crowded in the guard-house. This little sallow monster—a veritable Robespierre—was doing that to his men for this and that infinitesimal offense!

Eighty men left, then. There was that squad sent after Yusuf, the two messengers to Van Diemen, and, say twenty men left here as a skeleton garrison of the fort. That left him fifty men, all told, that he would lead out to operate against Boubekir's forty, entrenched in a good palmery. What wouldn't the Tuareg do to them!

IT looked like a massacre to Joyce, and never a man getting back alive to the fort—but he had no further time to think

on it. They had reached the farther angle of the parade-ground, and here was a door leading into a small room. In the center of it was a square hole, the mouth of a cistern to which drained all the rain water of the barracks roof. Not much fell in a year, here, but all of it was saved.

"Jump!" ordered Brea.

Joyce looked down and drew back. It was about ten feet deep, that cistern, had a floor of black slimy mud projecting here and there above the shining surface of a few inches of water. "How about snakes?" he asked.

"That is up to you. Jump down!" ordered Brea impersonally.

"All right. Glad it wasn't the guard-house, at that!" laughed Joyce, and lowered himself, then let go and dropped. "S'long, Sergeant!"

"You'll get bread and a sack of donkey-feed," called down Brea from above, and then left him to himself.

JOYCE had grabbed for a brick on the floor he had noticed before dropping down, and stood now searching the walls of his cell for cretalinid asps, as the dunes and all wet places abounded with them. He heard a low hiss, and spied the beggar, crooked in a crevice, its tongue forking out at him. A smash of the rock settled that. Only one; there were a few imprisoned frogs to look at, hopping aimlessly up the wall and falling back; otherwise there was nothing to do but stand propped against the wall till his sack of straw should come.

So this was what that "sooner" did to Légion deserters down here? Joyce smiled grimly. There would be a chance to get back at this officer some day—if Boubekir didn't get him first—and there would be a cartridge to spare for *him!* That was the Légion way, in some convenient battle. Their own officers knew it. Not since the War had killed off most of those old bullies had there been this sort of thing going on in the Légion! The tirailleur didn't care. He had but his year of service to endure, then he'd get back to business. The Légion had five years, so would not put up with it. . . .

The straw sack came tumbling down—also a hard loaf of bread like a brown tam-o'-shanter in shape. Joyce caught it deftly, held up the straw till he could kick

a bench of mud on one side of the cistern to lay it on.

"Be careful, *misérable!*" called down the young tirailleur who was to be his guard—one less man on that precious campaign! "You have plenty of water *là-bas*, but it is not good when muddy."

He had a smooth young face. A youth of about eighteen, from some good family in Tunis, Joyce judged, serving out his military term of one year. "All right by me!" Joyce laughed. "I'll strain it through my handkerchief or something."

"You are English, no?" asked the boy, noting his accent.

"Nope. American. Friend of Commandant Rollet's, that's what! He'll sure lam your lieutenant when he hears of this!" Joyce said wrathfully.

"Bluff!" retorted the youth. "Americans are big bluffers! Also very rich," he paraded his knowledge of America and Americans that is the fixed creed of all bourgeois Frenchmen.

"That so?" came back Joyce. "Well, look at this, feller." He drew out that famous letter from Rollet that had helped him before. The tirailleur could read that historic signature as Joyce held the letter up, and a whistle of awed appreciation came from him. Almost legendary was the fame of the Grand Old Man of the Foreign Légion! "I hope he does get our lieutenant cashiered!" he said vindictively. "He is *un malin*, this Quervel! Thinks he must do nothing but find fault! Me, I'm glad I have to guard you and not go out to fight Boubekir. Quervel will not take along a single *disciplinaire*. All our best men, they are, too. Those that go with him are doomed."

HE seemed to accept that as foreordained. The ringing call of a bugle, sounding distantly down in his cistern, told Joyce that the *Rassemblement Generale* was being blown. They were being mustered, those doomed ones. The brief yelps of their sergeants, clatter of marching feet. *thrrump!* of grounded arms, all were familiar and significant barracks noises. A sharp voice challenged Joyce's guard above. The murmur, "*Je garde le déserteur, mon caporal!*" Then the bugle sounded "*En avant!*" Then came the *clap—clap—clap* of marching feet in unison as the column swung out the gate.

Even more thrill-crammed are the episodes that follow in this stirring drama of the Sahara.



*A memorable story
of the race-track by
the man who gave
us "Ebon Joan" and
"Driftin'."*

*"If ever you plan runnin',
hoss, do that runnin' now!
Come on, you Jumboree!"*

J. Fleming Gould

White Rose

By EWING WALKER

Illustrated by J. Fleming Gould

MAJOR PEABODY glanced toward the half-wilted flower in his buttonhole, twisted his sleeves so that the worn elbows were hidden and made his way to the street. His short plump figure stiffened; a smile stole to his lips; he walked with a pleasing admixture of dignity and good cheer. Why shouldn't he be content? Broke? Of course, save for a few small coins and maybe three or four dollars. But the sun shone brightly, there was a hint of autumn in the air and—somethin' would turn up. Somethin' always did. Besides, he need only half look to see Fortune peeping around a distant corner—it's always a distant one!—and beckoning. At least, it seemed to him she was beckoning, for the Major's eyes are not as young as once they were.

He turned into Marlborough Avenue and was nearing Laclede when he found it. A gamin sheet of paper had flounced along the gutter, drunkenly clung a moment to a

hydrant, floated across the sidewalk and finally settled upon it, completely hiding it from view.

Most of us would have passed it by, but not Major Dorsey Peabody. The years have taught him that Fortune hides her favors in the strangest and most unexpected of places. He paused long enough to lift the paper with the toe of his worn but shining boot. Then, eyes a little wider, he stooped quickly, and a little wheezingly, picked it up, swiftly glanced about, thrust it into an inner pocket and continued upon his way.

He turned into a cigar-store and, with a, "Good mornin', suh," to an unresponsive clerk, entered the telephone-booth. With his back to the door, he drew his find from his pocket.

For a long moment he stood, holding it upon his palm, studying it. He was afraid to open it—afraid it might be empty. He had known mischievous boys to play such

tricks, snickering when a gullible one discovered his error. But no one had snickered; and besides, this was a new purse—a lady's.

WITH fingers a trifle unsteady, he opened it. In one side were the usual articles—a compact, a dainty lace-bordered handkerchief, a small vial of perfume, fragments of what seemed to be a shattered flower.

It was entirely characteristic of Major Peabody that, momentarily passing over more material things, he took out the vial of perfume and examined its label. In the old days—the old days along the Yalobusha in Mississippi—the grass and weeds might threaten his revenue-bearing cotton and corn, but his rose-garden was at all times cared for; and the darcy that touched ax to his dogwood or Judas trees was sure to feel the Major's quickly fading wrath. Major Peabody's state and the lines of his figure and—more's the pity!—the expression that lurks in his eyes have changed, but not that other thing which some call folly and others call sentiment.

So, of course, it was the vial of perfume he first examined. As he read the words *White Rose*, his lids for a long moment ceased blinking; his eyes, it seemed, stared unseeingly. In truth, they were seeing all too clearly that which had so long lain buried in the dimming past.

SLOWLY he withdrew the stopper and held the vial under his rather bulbous nose. His eyes closed; his head was thrown back; as the fragrance came to him, the gossamer past came real, and wraiths of the long-ago came marching and tripping before him, with blooming cheeks and smiling eyes and waving hands. And of the number there was one that paused before him, smiling wistfully and slowly moving her head in negation, and whose fingertips rested a moment upon his arm—perhaps touching a worn elbow, the while.

To Major Peabody, standing in a telephone-booth, the clanging of cars without and the ringing of a cash register within were forgotten. In their places in his consciousness came a flow of melody, and, eyes yet closed, his head moved rhythmically to the fancy-born strains of "Bohemian Girl" and "The Blue Danube," of "Ben Bolt" and "Juanita."

Abruptly, Major Peabody straightened. He thrust the vial of perfume back into

the purse, and opening the other side—sucked in his breath. He took from the purse a pad of bills, and glancing over his shoulder to make sure none looked on, counted them. An even four hundred dollars—twenty twenty-dollar bills.

A moment his lips pursed thoughtfully; then they relaxed into a glad smile. Yes sir, didn't matter how bleak the day, the sun'd come out by-and-by; things could be lookin' powerful bad, but somethin' always turned up. Here he was, broke, when, all of a sudden—

Money! Plenty of money! Right there in his pocket, as a warming toddy on a chill day. A cloud of smoke hovered over the city; but to Major Peabody as he left the cigar-store the day was warm and bright and cheering.

Yes suh, four hundred dollars. With four hundred dollars he could pay his past-due board bill and forthwith clump into the house as noisily as he pleased; he could, if he wished—

THE next hour was, perhaps, the most trying one of Major Dorsey Peabody's life. Four hundred dollars! He paused before the window of a clothing store and approvingly examined a number of suits displayed, especially a claw-hammer creation. Glancing toward a worn elbow, he started toward the store's entrance. He halted. . . . White rose! Money belonged to somebody. . . .

Moistening his lips, he proceeded down the street. Four hundred dollars! In reality the money was his. Somebody had lost it, just as somebody would lose money on the stock-market; he had found it, just as somebody else would win money on the stock- or cotton-exchange. His money. Ab-so-lute-ly no doubt about it. Losers, weepers; finders, keepers. He wasn't responsible for folks' carelessness. Ought to be more careful. Suppose—just suppose, now—somebody else had found it. What would they do? They'd take it and spend it. That's what they'd do. Spend it. Somebody loses; somebody wins—and it isn't the winner's fault if the other loses. And it isn't the finder's duty to locate the loser. Let the loser locate his loss.

The Major found himself standing before a department store. Before him was a window of shoes. Certainly did need shoes. Those tan ones were just a lee-tle too spry-like; but those black ones, now. . . . He turned, meaning to enter the

establishment, when his eye rested upon another window. Toilet articles. Soap, rubber sponges, bath salts, perfumes. . . .

White rose! *She'd* always used it—even that last night when he'd ridden over on old blaze-face Pilot—Fates certainly were unkind to him. Instead of white rose, why didn't they put violet or lilac or even just plain rose in that pocketbook? Then he could have taken that four hundred dollars, and—

MAJOR PEABODY turned from the window in which shoes were displayed. He entered the Claremont Hotel, sank into a deep chair and picked up a newspaper another had abandoned. Casually he glanced over columns having to do with divorces, tragedies, hold-ups, Congressional battles. Leisurely he turned the pages. Abruptly he dropped the paper and rose. His eyes had chanced upon a column headed "Lost and Found." Major Peabody did not care to hazard the reading of such a column. He couldn't trust himself.

As he passed from the hotel lobby to the street,—his sleeves twisted so the worn elbows were hidden,—an air of benign assurance soon returned to him. The consciousness of four hundred dollars in his pocket fetched courage to his heart and a pleasing blitheness to his manner. It's a way with money. Though not ours, there's a something about it that sticks to us and stiffens our backs. Forty-dollar bank-clerks have more of an "air" than forty-dollar grocers' clerks—if there be such.

Major Peabody proceeded with confidence, for though he hadn't figured out a way of spending the four hundred dollars with a clear conscience, he was pretty sure that sooner or later he'd find a way. Somethin' would turn up to show him.

HE passed into a florist's shop, tossed away his wilted flower and purchased a white rosebud. "It's my one extravagance," he once explained to me. "A bachelor-button'd be a heap cheaper, an' a carnation'd last twice as long; but there's somethin' about a white rose—I don't just rightly know what it is—" he concluded, glancing away.

I've an idea he was not wholly truthful with me; that he knows well enough what it is—a something long dead and yet a something that shall be alive to him so long as he has life and memory.

As the Major left the florist's, a car drew up to the curb. On its windshield was a placard: "*To the Races.*" An idea came to Major Peabody. He entered the car and contentedly sank back. Hadn't been to the races for the longest. Last time had cost him money—plenty of money; but now he could afford it. Anybody with four hundred dollars in his pocket certainly could afford an afternoon at the track.

Stepping from the car at the race-course, and giving the proper twist to his sleeves, he purchased his ticket, passed through the turnstile, bought a program from one of the blind vendors and was upon the point of proceeding toward the grandstand when he halted abruptly.

A fragrance—just the faintest trace of a rose fragrance—had come to him. His eyes flashed about. Two or three paces away, a young man was purchasing a program. It seemed a process the youth was unused to, and that his surroundings were strange.

At his side stood a girl, her rich brown hair nearly hidden beneath her small hat, her hands at her sides, her eyes pensive. It struck the Major there was a something in those young eyes that should not be there, and he fancied he saw a hint of lassitude in her manner.

WHITE rose! You reckon, by any chance— The couple moved on, and the Major fell in behind—as close behind as discretion permitted. Funny world! Hadn't been blessed with a whiff of white rose a matter of forty years; and then, of a sudden, he comes upon a vial of it tucked away in a lost purse, and the same day at a race-track a faint sweet breath of it steals into his consciousness to disturb his meditations and to revivify what he had fancied was dead.

Major Peabody followed the boy and girl into the grandstand, and, his eyes ostensibly surveying the track, took a seat by the girl's side. If it was she that used white rose— He pressed his arm over the spot where lay the purse—and four hundred dollars.

Glancing out of the corner of his eye Major Peabody saw the young fellow looking about him—at the crowd in the stands, toward an occasional horse ridden by an exercise boy, toward the low-walled barns across the track. All of it, Major Peabody saw, was new and strange to the boy.

Major Peabody cocked his head to one side, the better to listen. Boy and girl were bending over a program.

"Let's make a bet," she proposed haltingly, "on Daffodil, Will. It's—it's a nice name."

The boy pondered that. "Yes, it is; but somehow, I've got a hunch on Cornerstone. Sort of—well, I believe he'll win."

Major Peabody moistened his lips. Poor

a moment? Some of the hosses in the first race are sort o' blurred on mine."

The girl smiled in return.

"Gladly." She handed him the folded card.

Major Peabody, frowning judiciously, glanced over the entries for the first race. "Six furlongs—Cantilever. Quite a hoss! May get home in front." It seemed the Major was thinking out loud. "Shiloh Boy



babes in the wood! Pickin' 'em by their names. Certainly must have plenty of money to be able to toss it away in that fashion.

"Tell you what I'll do," abruptly proposed the boy. "I'll go down to the paddock and look the horses over. We'll bet on the one that looks best."

Shades of Stonewall Jackson! Thinks he can pick 'em by the way they look! The Major saw two young hands clasp hurriedly and a young face upturned and striving to smile confidently. Then the young fellow started toward the paddock.

No time to lose. Four hundred dollars! It wasn't up to him to find who had lost it; but still, if this young lady at his side happened to be the one— Surreptitiously he thrust his folded program into his pocket, then, smiling only as Major Dorsey Peabody can smile, he turned to the girl beside him.

"I beg yo' pardon, ma'am; but would you mind lettin' me glance at yo' program

—just a lee-tle bit too much weight. Daffodil—not a chance! Not—a—"

A young and a somewhat strained voice interrupted him. "You—you mean Daffodil—has no chance?"

Major Peabody smiled. "Not the least in the world, ma'am. She's just out of her class."

The Major resumed the study of the card. "Square Rigger—doesn't like this track; wants a heavy one. Black Pearl—umph! Well, she's been showin' pretty good lately, and I wouldn't be surprised. . . . Cornerstone." He fancied he heard the young girl draw in her breath. "Cornerstone! Yes suh, he may win a race, but not *this* one." He turned, still smiling, to the young girl, and returned her program. "It's a good race to stay off of; but if I was makin' a bet, I b'lieve I'd play Cantilever win and show."

"Show?"

"That means to run third, ma'am. You see, we horsemen—"

She brightened. "Oh, you're an owner!" (Well, if she wanted to draw such conclusions, it wasn't *his* fault!) "I wish I'd known before Will went down to make a bet."

"The young man that was with you?"

She nodded.

"Yes."

"Well," — encouragingly, — "maybe he wont bet. Maybe he'll—"



Jamboree faltered. Slowly, surely, Zanzibar thrust a nose, a neck in front.

"Oh, yes, he will. You see,"—she glanced away,—“we—have to.”

The Major's brows raised. This was something new. “Have to?”

She nodded.

MAJOR PEABODY chuckled. “You wont mind my sayin', ma'am, I've seen a heap o' races, but I never knew anybody that *had* to bet on a race.”

She studied his face a long moment. Evidently she found what she unconsciously sought in the kindly old eyes and upon the plump, ruddy cheeks.

“You see,” she said at last, “we—we lost some money. A great deal of money.”

Major Peabody caught his breath. “On—the races?”—a little fearfully.

“No—somewhere in town. It was in—my purse.”

It seemed Major Dorsey Peabody, leaning forward, was trying to locate something over toward the stables. “But why—*have* to bet on the races?”—huskily. “It's a

mighty hard game to beat; and you may just lose—”

The girl bit her lip. “I know; but we— we just have to take the chance. We *might* win.”

Major Peabody's mind worked rapidly. Four hundred dollars! His, but *not* his; no sooner found it, when it looked as if he'd lose it. He turned to the young girl, smiling.

“Peabody is my name, ma'am,”—he bowed,—“Major Peabody. If there's anything I can do—” Umph! Four hundred dollars! All he had to do was get up, move to the other end of the stands, and later on buy that new claw-hammer coat and black shoes, pay that board-bill, talk as bigoty as he pleased. . . . Something held him back. That confounded conscience, that— He moistened his lips. “You—you figurin' on playin' the races today, ma'am?”

“Yes,”—hesitantly,—“all of them.”

“Lost some money, you say?”

“Yes.”

"Right—smart?"

"A—a great deal. Four—hundred—dollars."

There you are! Luck? If it was raining soup, the best he'd have would be a fork. And besides— A whiff of white rose came to Major Peabody's nostrils, and as though borne upon it, a vague memory of an air from "Bohemian Girl."

"Excuse me, ma'am; but, we've all lost things—various things—durin' our lives, I reckon. Some of us,"—for some reason, his voice lowered,—“have lost a heap—have lost things we can never recover.” A moment he glanced away; the next he smilingly looked into the eyes of the young girl at his side. "You say this four hundred dollars—meant a heap to you?"

"Everything! You see, we'd saved and saved—"

"To get—well, you know what I mean."

She nodded. "We were buying an interest—in a small business, a good business. We'd just drawn the money from the bank. I had it in my purse, and was going along the street, when there was a crash, and a crowd—"

Major Peabody interrupted with a strange question: "Excuse me, ma'am, but—don't think me foolish, ma'am! I've really got a good reason for askin'—what kind of perfume do you use?" Had to make sure! Had to! Four hundred dollars was a heap o' money. Mighty nigh manna to the starving, courage to the faint-hearted, nectar to the—

"Perfume?" Surprised, of course. "Why—white rose. But—"

For some reason, for a brief moment, the smile faded from Major Peabody's lips and his eyes closed.

"You see, ma'am—"

IT was unnecessary for Major Peabody to finish. Will had returned and seated himself at the girl's side.

"Did—did you make a bet?"—eagerly.

He nodded. "On Daffodil."

Major Peabody wheeled upon him. "How much?" he demanded.

Will looked up, surprised.

"This is Major Peabody," the girl interposed. "He's an owner and knows—"

"How much?" persisted the Major.

"Ten dollars."

Major Peabody stiffened. "Go right down there," he ordered, "and bet ten dollars on Cantilever to show. You ought to at least get your money back."

"But—"

"You've barely got time," interrupted Major Peabody.

"Please!" entreated the girl.

Will hurried away. Major Peabody mopped his brow.

CANTILEVER finished second. For third he paid \$4.05, which meant a profit of \$10.25 on a ten-dollar bet, or twenty-five cents more than the boy lost on Daffodil, who finished in the ruck.

It wasn't easy to do, but Major Peabody smiled. "See? In this game, the outsider's got mighty little chance. Mighty—little! If he wins on one race, there's a dozen losses to take away his profits. There's not—"

"I want to thank you, sir," muttered Will, tearing up his ticket on Daffodil and hurrying away to cash his bet on Cantilever. Major Peabody studied his program; the girl, looking on, leaned close—leaned so close there came to Major Peabody the faint but disturbing odor of white rose.

Soon Will returned. He looked at the Major a little apologetically. "I—I certainly thank you, sir."

"That's all right, my boy. Glad to serve you. It don't take a wizard to pick a show hoss. Now,"—studying each eager young face in turn,—“let's get to the bottom of this, as the frog said divin' down the well. If I understand you, you want to win fo' hundred dollars. Is that right?"

Both nodded.

"Right! Fo' hundred dollars. How much—how much you got to bet today?"

"Ninety dollars," acknowledged Will.

"Ninety dollars!" Major Peabody pondered that. "Ninety dollars!" He pursed his lips, peered toward the stables across the infield, placed his stubby fingertips thoughtfully together. Soon he turned to them. "I'm goin' to help you young folks—on one consideration: Give me your promise that, no matter how the day turns out, you'll never make another bet on the races—that is, till you can afford to toss the money out of the window. How about it?"

The boy and girl looked at each other and then toward the Major. "I promise," said the girl. "It's a go!" stated Will.

"Right!" And gently, Major Peabody touched the flower in his buttonhole. "Give me eighty dollars," he said.

Will hesitated.

"Please!" the girl whispered.

A little reluctantly, the boy handed Major Peabody eighty dollars.

"Now then," pronounced the Major, "I contract to see you win fo' hundred dollars 'tween now and when you leave the track." He rose—twisting, the while, the sleeves of his coat so that the worn elbows were hidden. "Now,"—smiling,—“I'm goin' down to look 'em over and maybe make a wager—and maybe not.”

WITH eyes not quite as confident as they might have been, the boy watched the Major's squat figure slowly make its way toward the palm garden. When he came back, the boy looked at him expectantly. "What—what did you bet?"

Major Peabody rubbed plump hands together. "Son, there's nothin' nicer than apple pie when you're 'spectin' cracklin' bread. There just aint no tellin' what I bet on—or whether I bet at all. Just—no tellin'." He turned smiling toward the girl. "Old Aunt Nancy used to say, 'Count yo' chickens when the hen's took off.' You-all will just naturally have to wait."

A bugle called; a pinto pony, with scarlet coat atop it, came from the paddocks, followed by eight mincing thoroughbreds. A march past the stands, a slow wheeling, a rearing horse here, a wheeling, crowding one there. A flashing barrier, with its "Z-i-n-g" of a song, and a cloud of dust, somewhere in the center of which were eight hurtling, struggling horses. A tense-faced boy, gripping the back of the chair before him; an eager-faced young girl, watching those horses make the first turn and the second and straighten out in the far stretch; a ruddy-faced, short-figured man answering to the name of Major Peabody calmly observing eight thoroughbreds whirling around the oval and worried only over seeing that his worn elbows were hidden and that the wilted flower in his frayed buttonhole was straight.

A horse flashed across the finish line; behind him, a half-length separating them, two more tore by.

An eager hand rested upon Major Peabody's arm. "Did—did we win?" asked the boy.

The Major smiled easily. "Just a minute, son! Just—one—minute! Don't never crowd your luck."

A brief pause—but a pause that seemed interminably long. Then three numbers were posted across the track:

	1	2	3
8	14.10	6.40	4.20
2		9.30	6.70
6			5.70

The boy glanced toward Major Peabody. "Did we have—the winner?"

The Major, complacently folding his hands upon his ample lap, smiled. "No suh. We did not."

"You—you mean—"

"We didn't have a bet, son. I didn't like the race. You didn't win a penny—or lose one."

SHORTLY before the third race, Major Peabody rose. "Well, you.g people, I'll be back just before the barrier goes up. And by the way: remember that condition: You must agree that you'll leave the track just as soon as you get back the four hundred you lost. Some tracks are fast and some are slow; some are heavy and some are hard; but after all, they're all made of quicksand! The further you go and the longer you stay, the harder it is to pull yourself out." And, glancing toward them whimsically: "I—know." For the moment he forgot his worn elbows. He rose, shook his plump shoulders as though to fling off an unpleasant thing and started down the steps toward the betting ring.

The boy, a puzzled look on his face, turned to the girl. "He didn't have a bet on the race!"

Silently she acknowledged this.

"Do you suppose—"

Slowly she shook her head. "Somehow, I think it'll turn out all right."

Major Peabody returned as the horses were going to the post for the third race. Two anxious young faces looked up into his.

But the Major held up a silencing and pudgy finger. "Don't you ask a single question! Did I bet—and on which hoss? You'll just natchally have to wait and see. Now then!" A little wheezingly, he seated himself beside the girl. "Look 'em over as they come along and pick what you think's the likeliest. Umph!" . . . A brief pause. "That chestnut in the lead is Zanzibar. A lee-tle short in the barrel, but plenty o' heart, they say. Heart, though, wont win *this* hoss race. The one next to him's Banjo B. Bred in the purple, but some says a front-runner. Just let a good hoss challenge. . . . The third one, that bay, is Whippoowill. Black Oak stable. His blood-lines would indicate he likes the mud;

but then"—chuckling—"hosses, after all, are like folks: They don't always take after their parents. If more of us did— Now, how you like Number Fo—Black Ann? Run? Can she *run*? Like a scared rabbit; but they've got enough weight on 'er for two hosses. I don't hardly see— Number Five—Jamboree. Look at 'im! Coat like satin an' eyes like burnin' stars! If *he* aint fit, then I'm a Republican! Still, you can't cash tickets on fitness alone. Look out! Hold that six-hoss back, boy, or you'll sho' get 'im crippled. Troubadour— by Selim out o' Tyler's Meg. This past-gone Saturday he showed a clean pair o' heels to as good a field as that; but—this aint last Saturday! What's that last hoss?"

Swiftly the girl consulted her program. "Appomattox," she stated, a little tensely.

"For sure! Ap-po-mat-tox! I been knowin' him. He likes the track and the route, and he's gettin' a big play; but"— and soberly Major Peabody shook his head—"a terrible thing happened at a place called Appomattox, and—somethin' else might happen today."

A light hand rested upon his arm. "You—you bet?" she asked.

Smiling broadly, Major Peabody nodded. "Yes, honey, I made a bet—a right sizable bet, in fact."

The boy moistened his lips. "On which one?"

Major Peabody's fleshy hand patted a young eager hand beside him. "Children, yonder's nine hosses. Some are in over their heads; some are supposed to stand out; some have bottom; some can't take it; several of 'em have fightin' hearts; just about as many are dawgs if you crowd 'em. Yes suh, yonder's nine hosses—and they can't all win. That's the sad thing about racin'—and about life. We can't all win. Some tries—desperately hard; but the going's just too much. Just—too—much. Now!" He shook off his mood; he smiled broadly. "Yonder's nine hosses. All nine of 'em's carryin' a jockey and a certain amount of lead; but one of 'em's carryin' something else. He doesn't feel it, and yet it's a great weight. Our bet. Maybe it aint puttin' it too strong to say it's our destiny. Which one is it? I mustn't tell you. Just humor an old fellow that far. If I was to tell you—"

Z-i-n-g! The barrier flashed; nine trim-limbed thoroughbreds tore down the track. Two tense, eager young faces looked on.

Major Peabody's hand pressed a moment

over that spot where were a purse and four hundred dollars.

"Umph! Good start. Nobody left flat-footed. . . . That's it, Banjo! Sing yo' song! You're sure in tune today."

THE girl leaned behind the Major's short broad back. "He's bet—on Banjo B," she whispered to the boy.

"Well, what do you know? Look at that Troubadour movin' up. Come on, you ramblin' singer! It's a long road with heaps o' turns, but you sure seem to like it!"

"He's pulling for Troubadour," the boy whispered back.

The horses had turned into the far stretch and had divided themselves into two hurtling groups. Major Peabody leaned over farther. "I can't just rightly see— That's her! Great Marse Robert Lee, look at Black Ann run!" He reached for two young hands and gripped them frantically. "Weight? What does she care for weight? She's totin' it like a blue-darter does a biddy! Wheel along, black gal, wheel along! It aint so far as once it was, and sure's— Now! *Now!* See? What'd I tell you? What *did* I tell you? Maybe heart alone don't win no hoss-races, but it's sure a handy thing to have. See that hoss movin' upon the outside—movin' up and passin' 'em by? See him? That's Whippoorwill. Old honest Whippoorwill. Runnin' true to form and true to his name. Just like the bird, he likes to be alone—and he's gonna be alone out in front. That's the boy! Show 'em what runnin' is!"

A bewildered girl sank back. The boy peered at the Major, toward a horse called Whippoorwill and back at the Major again, his hands opening and closing convulsively, his eyes blinking the while.

Seemingly, Major Dorsey Peabody had forgotten them. The horses were turning into the stretch home. "Now for a hoss-race! Now for— Yonder! Looky yonder! See 'em? It's a two-hoss race, and if I don't miss my guess— There sure must be asbestos in that track, or Zanzibar'd have it burnin', the way he's runnin' now. That's the way to show 'em, Zanzi! That's what I call comin' home! What's—what's that with him? Hunh? Jamboree? Of course! Just for a second it seemed— If ever you plan runnin', hoss, do that runnin' now! Look out, Jamboree! Look o-u-t! He'll crowd you into the rail. Come on, you Jam!"

THE day was cool, almost chill, but the boy, sinking into his seat, mopped his forehead. Somewhere out there was a horse with his money on him; that money had been wagered by a squat, ruddy-faced, smiling-eyed gentleman who called himself Major Peabody. And that same Major Peabody had, in less than a mile of running, pulled for just about every horse in the race.

Two horses were less than a furlong from the finish line—two horses running nose-and-nose, two horses so close a single blanket would have covered them—Jamboree on the rail, Zanzibar rubbing stirrup leather with him. Major Peabody's short arms were pumping back and forth, as those of a woman bending over a tub of clothes.

"Zanzibar, I'm waitin' right here to tell you—" Jamboree thrust a nose in front. "There's where bottom and heart win out! Show 'im up, Jamboree! Show 'im what real runnin' is. Tell 'em all—" A dozen lengths from the finish, Jamboree faltered; he had shot his bolt. Slowly, surely, implacably, Zanzibar thrust a nose, a head, a neck in front. "Whew! Lawdy, lawdy, welcome home! I've made mistakes in years gone by, but when I looked that Zanzibar over—"

Limply, Major Peabody sank upon his seat, his hands hanging at his sides. He turned to the girl at his left, lips pursed; slowly he faced the boy at his right, his eyes wide as though seeking sympathy. More slowly he turned back to the track and waited for them to post the winner's—Zanzibar's—price.

19.80 10.90 5.60

Though his gills were purpling and he seemed a little unsteady, he rose smiling.

"Children, you two wait right here. I might—only might, understand!—have a lee-tle surprise for you."

Slowly he made his way through the jostling crowd toward the palm garden.

SOON he was back. Making sure the flower in his buttonhole was straight, he seated himself so that he could face them both. Again a smile came to his lips and a twinkle to his eyes—his eyes that are not as young as they once were. "My son, you gave me eighty dollars to bet for you. Here it is." From a roll of bills he counted off eighty dollars.

"Now then,"—into voice and manner there stole a certain vague ceremoniousness

—"if you'll glance across the track, you'll find Zanzibar paid nineteen-eighty to win, which, as a little figurin'll show you, is eight-ninety to one. Therefore,"—was there a bit of a catch in his voice, as though the words came unwillingly,—"whoever happened to bet forty-five dollars on that hoss to win won ex-act-ly four hundred dollars and fifty cents."

He paused. So broadly did he smile, it would seem he was striving to hide some emotion by that smile. He studied two eager young faces, and, out of the corner of his eye, approvingly observed two hands clasping. Slowly—it was a trial!—he drew a roll of bills from his pocket, pressed it into the young girl's moist hand and folded her fingers over it.

"My dear, a wedding-present!"

He straightened; his shoulders squared. The momentousness of the occasion was not lost upon Major Peabody. He would not have it lost upon others. "You'll find there, my dear, fo' hundred dollars—and fifty cents. Next time,"—he pretended to speak lightly, yet meaning they should see it was but pretense,—"next time, be more careful with your purse. And remember: No—more—races! All tracks are made of quicksand; and playin' the races is just huntin' for the end of the rainbow."

Two young hands gripped his lapels; a young face was upraised to his. A faint trace of white rose came to him.

"I believe," she whispered, "I'm going to kiss you."

"DID you," I asked, when he had finished telling me, "really bet forty-five dollars on Zanzibar?"

He turned upon me an expression of pain. "Of course not. Do you think I'd risk that young lady's happiness on a mere hoss-race?"

"Then why," I persisted, "when you found the money was hers, didn't you simply—well, hand it to her, and tell her you'd found it?"

There were reproof and disappointment in the look he gave me. "When you write a story, suh, do you confine yourself to the bald statement that 'They met, they wooed, they wed?' You do not. Such things require finish and finesse. Besides,"—a little wistfully,—"I wanted to keep that fo' hundred dollars as long as possible."

Twisting his sleeves,—he believes the process hides his worn elbows,—he left me with an abruptness uncommon to him.

Racketeer's Mate

By SEVEN

ANDERTON

A MUD-SPATTERED car swung into a drive which led through several acres of grounds to the side entrance of a huge frame house just a few hundred yards outside the corporation limit of St. Louis. The man behind the wheel halted the car, switched off the lights, then leaped from the vehicle and ran up the three steps and across the dark porch. The door opened just as he reached it. For a moment a flood of yellow light fell across the veranda and lay on the mud-stained car. Then the visitor stepped through the door, and it closed quickly behind him. The big two-story house was dark—except for narrow slits of light that showed below the drawn blinds of two windows facing the drive.

It was a warm night in early spring. A fine mist that could hardly be called rain had fallen all day and was still falling. The thick darkness lay like a blanket over the grounds, rank with shrubbery which shut the house almost completely from view of the highway and the other houses in the neighborhood. It was nearly ten o'clock.

Inside the house, in a well-furnished but untidy library and living-room, two men stood facing each other. One was the man who had arrived in the car—a tall and splendidly proportioned individual, well dressed and well groomed. His features had once been handsome in a coarse way; but a long livid scar that started near the corner of the right eye and ran to the point of the chin had given his face a twisted, sinister appearance. His name was Benjamin Govelli, better known as "Dandy Govelli," notorious and infamous in St. Louis and its environs. The other man—he who had admitted the nocturnal visitor, for whom he had evidently been waiting—was a burly fellow, under medium height and possessing swarthy features upon which villainy and dissipation had written their unlovely story. He was known as Black

Gentry and was co-chieftain with Govelli over the most ruthless and lawless gang of racketeers in the Missouri metropolis.

"YOU'RE taking a long chance, coming back here so soon, Dandy," said Gentry as Govelli removed his overcoat and tossed it into a chair. "They'll hardly bother you in Chi, but if Minter and his crew catch you in these parts, it'll be just too bad. They'll land you in Jeff City."

"I know what I'm doing, Black," retorted the tall gangster. "This dump is still safe enough, aint it?"

"Yes," answered his partner. "We've been so damned careful that no suspicions have been aroused. The neighbors think I'm just a caretaker staying here to look after the place while the guy that owns it is in California. The tunnel from the cellar to the garage over at the other place makes it safe for the loading and unloading. But you won't be safe if you poke your head outside."

"Don't intend to," answered Govelli. "I'll stay under cover while you carry out a little plan I've got in mind. Then we'll clear out of these parts with a real stake."

"What's the plan?"

"We're going to nick Tim Mitchell for a million."

"We're going to—" gasped Gentry. "Say—you gone nuts?"

"Not by a damned sight," answered Govelli. "Tim's got the million, aint he? Three of them, as a matter of fact."

"Yes," answered Black Gentry, "but he's quit the racket. Reformed entirely since he married that wench from Mobile. He's running a legitimate real-estate and brokerage business. Tim's a smart bloke. If we never managed to beat him when he was fighting us in the booze racket, how we going to get to him now?"

"I know he's a smart baby," growled Govelli. "He made more of his boodle out

Illustrated by
Joseph Maturo



The post-graduate star reporter who gave us "Floptown Pearl" and "Six Bombs" is at his best in this story of a girl caught in a desperate dilemma.

"What's the plan?"
"We're going to nick Tim for a million."

of the stock-market than he did out of the racket. He only used the racket because he was forced into it by a jam he got into after he came from the war. Just the same, I've got a plan that will nick him for a million."

"I hope you're right," retorted Gentry. "Nothing would be sweeter than to get hold of a million and slide out of here. The racket is sure going on the fritz fast. Since Minter got in the money we put into protection don't buy us anything. The bad breaks offset the good ones, and if Minter keeps on, he'll have us all in the big house. What's your plan?"

"HERE it is," answered Govelli: "Tim's only been married a little over a week—and you know how crazy he is about the dame. Know where they're living?"

"Sure," answered Gentry. "Tim bought a swell dump out on the edge of Webster Groves. It's only about a mile and a half from here. But they still stay in town at a hotel most nights. The wench from Mobile is still working at the Purple Parrot. She's under contract for two more months—read it in the paper when they married."

"Aint she ever out at the house alone?" asked Govelli.

"I hear she goes out about every afternoon with a truckload of expensive furniture," answered Gentry. "Why? What you driving at?"

"We're going to grab the wench and put her in a safe place," said Govelli. "Tim Mitchell will get her back when we are headed for the tall timber with a million of his jack."

"Holy Moses!" cried Gentry, staring in astonishment at his dapper partner. "Think we can get away with that?"

"Why not? All we have to do is get the girl. Tim will kick in the million without any argument, after he hears from me. He's got plenty—and he got it quick and easy. And he's still plumb coo-coo about the dame."

"Yeh," nodded Gentry. "That wench from Mobile sure made a monkey out of Tim in short order."

"And I'll tell you something else about the wench," grinned Govelli. "She aint any more from Mobile than I am from Borneo. I found out up in Chi that she's the sister of the Belzoni boys. She's the

only one of the Belzoni family left since the last battle with Humpy Pete's gang. She ducked Chicago right after the funeral of the last of her brothers. She came down here to Domenico, who was a friend of the family. He put her to work in his cabaret, and announced her under a phony name as a new singer and dancer from Mobile. The dame made a hit, and Domenico saw that she and Tim Mitchell were getting sweet on each other, so he tied her up in a contract. That's that."

"Wonder if Tim knows that?"

"Probably. Why shouldn't she tell him? He was a red-hot himself till she coaxed him into taking up a respectable graft."

"That's so," nodded Gentry. "By thunder, it looks like this stunt might work. There aint much danger of Tim's going to the cops. How we going about it?"

"Rustle us up a drink and I'll give you the layout," answered Govelli.

AT eleven o'clock that night Tim Mitchell, ex-racketeer, sat at a small table in the Purple Parrot cabaret, waiting for his wife to appear in her last dance-number of the evening. Tim Mitchell was a tall, clean-cut American, in his late thirties. He looked the prosperous business man he had become.

All credit for his reformation, however, was not due to the beautiful little dancer he had married. Disgust with the slimy thing the booze racket had become had come before that. His romance and its happy culmination had only precipitated a move that would have come anyhow.

Tim Mitchell sat waiting for his bride to appear on the glassy dance-floor in the center of the room. It galled him that he could not prevail upon Domenico, the proprietor of the place, to release Maria from her contract—and that his wife firmly refused to quit unless Domenico gave his consent. . . . Suddenly Tim Mitchell's body stiffened with interest. An attendant pushed a pedestal, upon which rested a huge bowl of beaten brass, into the center of the polished dance-floor.

Then the lights went out, and the place was plunged into darkness. There was the flicker of a match as the attendant lighted a liquid in the brass bowl. A red flame flared up—a flame that touched even the farthest corners with a crimson glow.

Suddenly a slender and graceful figure whirled onto the floor. It was Tim Mitchell's bride, known to fame as Maria

Martinez. In her scarlet dress with her blue-black hair and white skin bathed in the ruddy flare from the bowl, she spun into her dance. And how she did dance! Like a demon. She was living rhythm. The slender body in its sheath of vivid silk seemed a flame in reality. Graceful as a serpent, the girl darted over the polished floor. Every move seemed as easy as the flow of water and as quick as the flash of powder. The dance was an acrobatic masterpiece in spite of its unbroken grace.

For almost ten minutes the wild dance continued. Then the dancer sank in graceful exhaustion to the floor near the pedestal that bore the bowl of fire. The crimson flame flickered suddenly up, revealing a bare floor. The crimson dancer had vanished. . . . The crowd went wild, but there was no encore.

Carlo Domenico, the big Italian proprietor of the place, dropped into a chair opposite Tim Mitchell.

"Mr. Mitchell," cried the host in a low but intense voice, "your wife is a marvel—a sensation—an incomparable artist."

"I wont dispute you," smiled Mitchell.

"You must let her stay," begged Domenico. "It will ruin me to lose her. I will double her salary."

"No, you wont," differed Mitchell quietly. "Because she is not going to stay after this contract of yours expires. She is my wife, you know. I've more than plenty of money. Maria and I are going to do nothing but enjoy life from now on."

Domenico's answer was a hopeless shrug. Fifteen minutes later Tim Mitchell, his tiny bride clinging to his arm, left the Purple Parrot and entered Tim's big closed car, parked at the curb. As it started and moved down the street, another auto which had been parked several spaces behind them came to life and rolled smoothly along on their trail. Black Gentry was behind the wheel of the trailing car.

JUST before one o'clock in the morning Black Gentry walked into the living-room of the gangsters' stronghold where Dandy Govelli and another man waited. The other man was known to the police and his associates as "Slats" Gardner.

"We've got 'em!" announced Gentry. "They went to their place in Webster Groves."

"Good," answered Govelli. "Then they are there alone. I got their telephone number from Information, and have rung



"Frisk the wench too," Govelli added. "She's no tame kitten."

it half a dozen times. There was no answer. They probably haven't hired any servants yet. They stop anywhere to eat?"

"No," said Gentry.

"Then the bride will be cooking something for her tootsy with her own little hands," grinned Govelli. "We'll catch them at the table, if we move along. I've told Slats, here, what he's to do. The three of us will be enough to handle this."

"And we split three ways," put in the gangster Slats. He was a slender, hawk-faced chap with shifty black eyes and the mark of the gun-man all over him.

Govelli nodded, and the three men tossed off drinks that Gentry had poured. Then each inspected and pocketed an ugly automatic and prepared to leave the house.

IN their new home, Tim Mitchell and his bride sat over a late supper that they had prepared together.

"Gee, Tim," cried Maria, "this all seems too good to be true. I'm going to start hiring the servants next week. Then when my contract with Domenico is up, we'll settle down out here. Think of it."

"And you're not sorry you quit the racket?"

"Sorry?" laughed Mitchell. "Silly kid! I'm a respectable business man and glad of it. I can sleep with both eyes shut—and have a tailor instead of a blacksmith make my vests. By the way, Minter called on me at my office today. He congratulated me on having washed my hands of it."

"What did he want?" demanded Maria, fright in her voice and a swift shadow in her eyes.

"Wanted me to give him some information that would help him break up the Govelli-Gentry outfit and land those two red-hots and a lot of their friends behind the bars," smiled Mitchell.

"Tim, you didn't—didn't—"

"No, I didn't snitch," said Tim. "And I gave Minter to understand once for all that I never will. He admitted that he hadn't really expected I would, and we parted good friends. Minter is a persistent party, however; and if I were Gentry and his crowd, I'd check out of this town—the way Dandy Govelli has already done."

"Oh, Tim," breathed Maria, "I'm so glad you're out of it. There is nothing to it. Who should know better than I? Oh, I want to forget all—"

THERE was a sudden sound of breaking glass, and a crash as the French windows at one side of the room burst open before the rush of three men—Govelli, Gentry and Slats Gardner. The gangsters' guns covered the pair at the table.

"Keep your hands on the table—both of you," snapped Govelli.

"What's the meaning of this, Govelli?" demanded Mitchell, his voice steely.

"I'll explain in a minute," answered the dapper gangster. "Gentry, take a look for guns. And frisk the wench, too," Govelli added. "She's no tame kitten."

"You keep your hands off my wife," snapped Mitchell. "She has no weapon—I'll give you my word for that. I have none either, for that matter. What is it you want?"

Govelli did not answer until Gentry had searched Mitchell, passing up Maria at a nod from his partner.

"We're going to take your wife away for a little visit," smiled Govelli. "She will return unharmed if you do just as we tell you. If you don't—she may come back, if she is able after we get through with her. If you don't think she's worth a million, you'd as well tell her farewell right now."

"So you've turned kidnaper?" growled Mitchell, his face growing a shade paler.

"Now you listen, Tim, and I'll do the talking," retorted Govelli. "We have no time to waste. As you know, this town has got too hot to hold me. The racket has blown up since Minter began his damned meddling. We have got to have money to blow the country—and you're going to furnish it, unless you want to be a widower. We're going to take your wife along with us to a safe place. Tomorrow you get busy and rustle up a million in good, unregistered, negotiable bonds. Pack them in a suitcase and keep them in your office until a messenger comes after them. Don't try

any funny business if you care anything about your wife. The messenger will have no idea what it is he is calling for—and you'll have no luck if you try to follow him. I've attended to that. Now we've got to get moving."

Ten minutes later Tim Mitchell lay on the floor beside the table, trussed up with a rope the gangsters had brought with them. Maria, a gag in her mouth and her small body wrapped tightly in a blanket, was carried out to the waiting car by Gentry and Slats. Before following his companions, Govelli paused a moment beside Mitchell's bound form.

"Don't forget, Mitchell," said the gangster. "Get those bonds together tomorrow and have them in a suitcase, ready for the messenger."

"I'll get them," snapped Mitchell, "but if any harm comes to my wife, I'll hunt you down and kill you by inches if it's the last thing I ever do."

"She won't be harmed," answered Govelli, "if you kick in the million without any trouble. If you don't, she'll die—but not before she wishes she had never been born. I'm going now. You ought to be able to get out of those ropes in half an hour or so."

IT was a few minutes past two o'clock in the morning when the three gangsters entered their hang-out and placed the bound and blanket-wrapped form of Maria in a chair. Govelli undid the bonds and removed the enveloping blanket. Maria motioned for him to remove the gag.

"Why be so rough?" demanded the girl as the gag was removed. "Perhaps you don't know it, but I'm one of you. There's no need to muss me up. Tim will still have enough for me to take away from him even after you get your million."

"So that's it!" grinned Govelli. "I know who you are, all right, Maria Belzoni. Sorry to have to cut down your pickings, but we need the money."

"Well, go ahead and get it," answered Maria, "but untie my feet and let me be comfortable. And you cheated me out of my supper. Have you anything to eat in the house?"

"You're a cool sister," smiled Govelli, kneeling to remove the bonds from the slender ankles. "There's stuff in the kitchen if you want to cook."

"Better watch her," growled Slats. "She's a skirt, and they're all crooked."



Slats pitched limply to the floor. Maria swung the chair again, but Govelli caught the blow on his arm.

"Mind your own business," snapped Govelli. "I had this dame figured out all the time."

"Aint nobody ever figured one of 'em out," muttered Slats, pouring himself a drink from a bottle on the table.

"There's the kitchen," said Govelli to their captive. "You might rustle a bite for all of us."

"You might give me a drink first," replied the girl.

Govelli went to a sideboard and brought a fresh quart bottle and a clean glass. He opened the bottle.

"You'll have to take it straight or with water," he apologized. "There don't seem to be any ginger ale."

"Now I'll cook," smiled Maria, moving toward the kitchen after tossing off the liquor.

"I got a hunch that dame is up to devilment," growled Slats. "Better watch her close."

"Rats," retorted Govelli. "She's right. Let her get us some grub. Anyhow, she

can't do anything. We've all got guns, and she can't get out of the kitchen window. It's boarded up like all the others except in this room."

THE men sat discussing their plans in low tones. From the kitchen came the rattle of pots and dishes as Maria rummaged for victuals.

"It will be a cinch," said Govelli at last. "The road is all greased for us to Honduras. We'll be on our way as soon as we get those bonds. There's no extradition from there—and with a million bucks, we'll own the damned country."

Out in the kitchen Maria had found a pail of lard. She transferred all the lard to a huge kettle and set it over a gas burner. Then she found a can of olive oil and poured its contents in with the lard. Next a pound of butter, discovered in the ice-box, went into the mixture. The girl continued to putter about the kitchen while the mess in the kettle melted and began to get hot. There was a grim set to her lips, and a look in her eye that boded no good for her captors.

Presently the stuff in the pot was at the boiling-point. Making sure she was not being observed, Maria lifted the pot from the stove and poured about half of its contents over the floor of the kitchen and on the bottom shelves of the two cupboards. Next she took some matches from a wall box and thrust them into the top of her stocking; then—she lighted one and dropped it onto the floor. A merry blaze sprang up. With a quick motion she struck another match and dropped it into the half-gallon of hot grease that still remained in the kettle. The fluid blazed; and Maria, uttering a cry of simulated fright, grasped the kettle in both hands and dashed into the living-room. As the startled gangsters sprang to their feet, she halted and dropped the kettle and its blazing contents to the floor beside the table.

"Look out, damn it!" cried Black Gentry. "You'll set the place on fire!"

"No!" cried Maria, the fright gone from her voice. The flaming grease had spread in a three-foot circle on the rug, and the soiled cloth on the table caught. There was a glitter in the eyes of Tim Mitchell's bride. With the quickness of a cat, she snatched the quart bottle of whisky from the table and sprang toward the open door of a bedroom at one end of the living-room.

As she was almost to the door, Slats

Gardner whipped his automatic from his pocket and whipped its muzzle toward her.

"Don't do that!" snarled Govelli, striking Slats's arm down just as the automatic flashed. "Catch the damned wench!"

The three gangsters rushed toward the door that had slammed shut behind Maria. Smoke was now pouring from the door of the kitchen as the hungry flames Maria had kindled caught the woodwork and crackled at their feast. Black Gentry reached the bedroom door first, but it resisted his attempts to open it.

"Smash it down," ordered Govelli. "Grab her. We've got to get away from here with her before the fire-wagons come."

"Damn her soul!" cried Gentry. "They'll find the booze in the cellar."

"To hell with the booze!" snapped Govelli. "We would have left that, anyhow. Get the girl, quick."

The air in the room was now stifling hot, and thick with rancid smoke. Tears were running from the gangsters' tortured eyes.

"I told you that broad couldn't be trusted," snarled Slats Gardner, hurling himself savagely at the door, which Maria had bolted behind her.

IN the bedroom, Maria pulled the stopper from the whisky bottle and began to empty its contents over the bed, rug and furniture. When the bottle was empty, she took the matches from her stocking and set the liquor-soaked things on fire. Then, seizing a small, solid chair, she leaped toward the room's solitary window. It was boarded up on the outside. One blow with the chair shattered the glass; another blow crashed on the boards that barred her way.

As she swung the chair for a second blow at the boards, Maria heard a splintering crash as the door gave before the onslaught of the gangsters. She whirled with the chair uplifted to meet their rush. Slats was in front; and Maria, with the strength of desperation, brought the chair crashing down on his head. His arms went up too late. The edge of the chair struck him just above the temple, and Slats pitched limply to the floor. Flames licked greedily at his garments.

Govelli and Gentry came lunging on. Maria swung the chair again, but Govelli caught the blow on his arm, which hung limp afterward. Then Black Gentry's arms folded around the fighting girl; and Govelli, his face white with pain, closed in, using his good arm to help subdue the captive.

Quickly the pair gagged the girl and bound her arms to her sides with a sheet. A pillow-slip was knotted about her ankles, and Black Gentry swung her to his shoulder like a sack of meal.

"Get her to the car, quick," ordered Govelli. "I'll look to Slats."

GENTRY dashed toward the outer door with his burden. Govelli knelt beside the fallen Slats for a moment, then rose and followed Gentry. Slats would never feel the flames that were leaping about him.

"She got Slats," snapped Govelli as they reached the car parked in the drive. "And I think she cracked my arm. Dump her in the back seat. I'll get in there and keep her quiet. Take the wheel and get away from here quick. Pull into a dark side road somewhere, and we'll figure this out."

Ten minutes later Black Gentry stopped the car in a byroad, having driven half a mile from the highway.

"Now what?" asked Gentry, turning in his seat to face Govelli. The girl was slumped in a corner of the seat, and Govelli was covering her with his automatic.

"We've got to get this hell-cat to some safe place to hide her," answered Govelli. "We'll keep her tied up so tight she can't move a finger until we get Mitchell's bonds. Where can we take her?"

"We might take her to Big Bell's place down by Manion's park," answered Gentry. "Only we'd have to drive through town."

"That's where we'll go," answered Govelli. "It's three o'clock. There won't be many people on the streets, and we'll roll down the curtains back here. If she makes any fuss, I'll send her where she sent Slats. Is there a silencer in this car?"

"Two of them," answered Gentry. "In the door pocket."

"Put one on your rod and hand it to me," ordered Govelli. "Then head for Big Bell's. Drive slow, so as not to attract any attention."

Presently the big car was headed toward town. In the darkness of the back seat Maria squirmed, and Govelli shoved the silencer on the automatic into her side.

"Keep still, you little devil," snarled the gangster. "I'll kill you damned quick if you don't. I can do it without making as much noise as opening a bottle."

Maria subsided—but she had accomplished her purpose. Working off her left slipper, she had pulled her tiny silk-stockinged foot out of the pillow-slip that bound

it to its mate. The car was now rolling through the outskirts of the city. The gangsters were grimly silent. Maria's eyes watched the street ahead. Except for parked or prowling taxicabs and an occasional private car, there was no traffic on the streets they traveled. Suddenly the girl's body tensed ever so little. On the corner a block ahead stood several people, evidently waiting for an owl street-car. Among them were two policemen.

"Turn here and dodge that mob," said Govelli. He too had seen the uniforms.

They were at the intersection, less than a block from the group on the curb. Gentry twisted the wheel and the car began the turn. Then it happened.

Maria's right knee shot upward, striking the wrist of Govelli's gun hand and knocking it upward. Then the slender, dance-trained leg straightened like an uncoiling serpent. The sharp French heel crashed into the back of Black Gentry's head, just above his collar. Gentry slumped limply over in the seat, his nerveless fingers slipping from the wheel. Twisting like an eel in the seat, Maria flung her legs upward, and Govelli found his gun arm suddenly locked in a scissors hold between those slender, steel-muscled limbs.

The car, driverless in its half turn, careened across the street, climbed the curb and stopped with a crash against the front of a shop. Plate glass rained to the sidewalk, and Govelli and Maria in their tangled embrace pitched to the floor of the car. The gangster struggled vainly to free his right arm from that desperate grip. His broken left refused to function.

The two officers and the group that had been waiting for the street-car were racing toward the scene of the crash.

FIFTEEN minutes later Maria was telling her story at headquarters.

"And now please call a taxi for me," she concluded. "They left Tim bound out at our house."

"We'll take you out," the sergeant assured her.

When Maria and the officers arrived at Webster Groves, they found only tangled ropes on the floor. Racing back to town, they found Tim Mitchell at his office, making ready to get the ransom bonds together speedily in the morning.

"Oh, Tim, darling!" cried Maria as she flew into his arms. "I've been so afraid you'd do something violent!"

Wild Work With William the Conqueror

By BERTRAM ATKEY

WHILE traveling in India Mr. Hobart Honey of London happened to be walking behind a most reverend Tibetan lama along a Benares street when a vicious dog rushed at the lama. Mr. Honey promptly flung his camera at the dog. Immensely to the surprise of both Mr. Honey and the target, the camera landed fairly upon the dog's skull, flooring it abruptly, and so completely and instantaneously dissolving its ferocity that within a second and a half it had vanished round a corner, complaining bitterly of the English.

The old gentleman in front—who proved to be one of the most distinguished and competent lamas ever exported from Tibet—was almost embarrassingly grateful to Mr. Honey, and bestowed upon him a remarkable gift—namely, a bottle, itself a rare and most valuable example of Chinese glassware, containing certain pellets possessing the singular power of temporarily reinstating the swallower of any one of them in one of his previous existences.

Mr. Honey—unmarried, middle-aged—had taken some months to screw himself up to the point of an experiment. Nothing but an insatiable curiosity and a very good opinion of himself would have driven him to it. If he could swallow a pill and be certain of finding himself back in the days when he was, possibly, King Solomon, Julius Cæsar, Richard the First, or some such notable man, that would be quite satisfactory. But there seemed to be a certain risk that he might select a pill which would land him back on some prehistoric prairie in the form of a two-toed jackass, or on the keel of an ancient galley in the form of a barnacle, or something wet and uncomfortable of that kind.

It was undoubtedly a risk. He wished the lama had been a little less sketchy and haphazard about things; at least, he might have dated and labeled the pills. It would

have been quite simple—"King; B. C. 992," for instance; or "Centurion; Early Roman." Or, if clammy incarnations had to be introduced: "Eel; 1181 A. D." or "Squid; Stone Age." Then he would know which pills to take himself, and which to set aside for editors and publishers.

At length Mr. Honey made the experiment—and found himself the court chiropodist to Queen Semiramis! He had a hard time in Babylon, and rejoiced when it was over; but curiosity drove him to further ventures—in which he found himself, successively, a singularly miserable cave-man, an unsuccessful and sorely bedeviled pirate, and an anthropoid ape condemned to fight a lion in a Roman amphitheater.

ON the evening which he had set aside for the swallowing of the fifth of his pills, it is worthy of note that Mr. Hobart Honey, for a considerable time before proceeding with the matter, sat in profound and somewhat melancholy reflection.

To deny that he was bitterly disappointed with the results produced by the first four pills would be to deny the truth. He had that day vaguely discussed the question of reincarnation with a Fleet Street friend, who had cheerfully presented Mr. Honey with his somewhat flippant views upon the subject.

"If there is anything in this reincarnation business at all, Honey, old man," that individual had said, "and mind you, it is a pretty useful notion,—cheery idea,—my view is that it is like going up a ladder or a staircase. Every succeeding incarnation is a bit of a lift—promotion, you may say. Take me, for instance. Millions of years ago, say, I started life as a bingosaurus, or whatever they were called.* I was on the bottom rung of the ladder of life. After a bit, I got killed and eaten by a dandaloorus,

* The Fleet Street man clearly meant "dinosaurus." There was never a bingosaurus.—*Author.*

Illustrated by
Everett Lowry

An amazing chain of circumstances gave Mr. Honey the ability to leap back across the centuries to a former incarnation. But it was a great gamble—he never could tell whether he'd become (for a time) a king or a slave—or a fly in a spider's web. On this occasion he deals with a great king.



or something of that kind. Right. I am not done for. A bingosaurus is done for, true; but I—me—have passed out into another incarnation—say, for the sake of argument, a woolly rhinoceros, which is a much brainier and better-class animal than any bingosaurus—which was only a reptile, anyway—ever knew how to be. Second rung, see? Promotion! One up on the bingo, so to speak.

“Presently the woolly rhinoceros has a mammoth fall on him and render him extinct. Very well—don’t matter to me! Rotten for the rhino, of course—but as for me, why, I’m going as strong as mustard. I’m reborn as a large ape. See, Honey? Getting brainier—on third rung. Getting on in the world—see what I mean? Great idea, reincarnation! And so on—up and up and up—until finally, after millions of years, I become—well, what I am. A Fleet Street reporter—top of the ladder, practically speaking. Surprise the bingosaurus a bit if he only knew how he’d got on in the world, eh? Well, that’s my idea of this reincarnation business, see? Moving up.”

It was upon the words of this inspired young gentleman that Mr. Honey meditated before consuming Pill Five, and considering that all his pills were designed to

“’Twas the click of a spear-shaft upon this!” snarled Unna—guiding her hand to a lump upon the side of his head.

take him down the ladder,—back towards the bingosaurus era,—it is not difficult to understand that the author was not in an altogether outrageous hurry to swallow the pass that would send him sliding back to those doubtful ages of which he had already had such jarring experiences. But as usual his curiosity presently overcame his disinclination to risk the discomforts of possibly yet another violent death; and so, abandoning unprofitable speculations, he darkened the room slightly, abruptly swallowed the pill and—left it to Luck.

AS usual his luck, good or bad, was not long in arriving.

Almost before he had settled comfortably back in his chair, Mr. Honey perceived that there seemed to be something wrong with his left hand, which was resting upon the arm of the chair. Mr. Honey had very good hands—white, well-shaped and well-kept. But the hand he was now gazing at was neither white nor well-shaped nor well-kept. It was, indeed, a desperately dirty, grievously gnarled and calloused, very big

and shockingly badly kept hand—the sort of hand, indeed, that might belong to a charcoal-burner in the days of the Norman Conquest.

But Mr. Honey was not surprised at the appearance of his hand, for if that had changed, so too had the author's entire physical make-up, his environment, and a good deal of his psychological equipment.

He was, in short, precisely what the look of his hand suggested—a charcoal-burner in the days of William the Conqueror. The transformation from a Twentieth Century author had been so smooth and swift that Mr. Honey had not even noticed the "clock" of whatever invisible mechanism—if any—the pill had set in motion.

With a somewhat melancholy attempt at self-congratulation upon the fact that at any rate he had not become anything more unpleasant—for instance, a badger fuming silently in his burrow, or a lugworm upon a prehistoric fisherman's flint hook, or a medieval gudgeon dodging a medieval pike—Mr. Honey began to take stock of his present situation.

It was, he speedily decided, not too enviable. Although his prospects were tolerably good, food was extremely scarce; clothes, save the ragged leatherish raiment he wore, were non-existent; and the rain came through the roof of his hut.

He brushed the matted hair from his forehead, and pulled rather aimlessly at his well-smoked whiskers as he glared dully up at the hole in the thatch.

"It lets the smoke out," he muttered in the uncouth Saxon that was fashionable among the New Forest charcoal-burners at that period. "But it lets the rain in."

HAVING thus set the credit of the hole against the debit, he sat worrying out, in a thick-headed, wooden-witted way, whether there was a balance on either side, and if so, which.

He decided that, although personally he preferred to be smoked rather than soaked, he would leave the hole, as probably his wife—and his wedding was to take place on the following day—would prefer the extra ventilation. Being a field-hand upon the land of the local abbot,* she was less accustomed to smoke and more used to the open air than he—Unna, the charcoal-burner.

This settled, he began to brighten up a

* In those days abbots were as plentiful as rabbits nowadays.—*Author.*

little. After all, he was one of the lucky ones. The abbot was favorable to him, or if not favorable, at any rate the abbot knew of his existence. He began to eat a queer-looking lump of breadlike stuff and an onion, and to turn over in his mind his prospects. For although at the moment things were not very flourishing with him, his prospects were good. He had recently enjoyed a great stroke of luck.

Passing through the wood by a deep, high-banked brook, he had seen an ass fall into the water—owing to the collapse of that part of the bank upon which the ass—like an ass—was standing. Recognizing the donkey as the property of the abbot, Unna had promptly jumped in and rescued the animal. He had pushed the creature up the slippery bank, and as luck would have it, the couple gained the firm soil again just as the abbot, and a dozen attendants, had passed that way. The abbot had been pleased. He proved it by ordering that the groom in charge of the ass department of the abbey should be whipped daily for a few weeks—until, in fact he learned to be careful.

As regards Unna, the abbot, being in a good temper, asked him to name the reward he wished.

Unna had humbly begged permission to marry Hild the haymaker. The abbot put a few inquiries to the steward, bailiff and other agricultural hirelings accompanying him, discovered who Hild was, and graciously agreed.

"So thou shalt, charcoal-burner, so thou shalt. I look favorably upon thee, my son. Marry the wench, by all means!" He turned to the steward. "Let the good charcoal-burner be given a couple of pounds of bacon for his wedding feast, and an iron halfpenny wherewith to buy him ale," he added generously, threw in a blessing gratis, and expressed a hope that Unna's married life would be happy and—the abbey lands being short of hands—crowned by the inestimable boon of a great family of sons.

No wonder Unna, eating his supper in his hut in the year 1070, reflected that, on the whole, things were going well with him. The all-powerful abbot not only knew of his existence—a rare stroke of luck in those days—but had given him a ha'penny! True, he had not got it yet; but if the steward did not forget it, that would be all right. If he went on like this, he would die worth a shilling, at least; and who knew but what, with luck, he might even rise in

*The guard clouted him across the ear.
"Get thee gone to thy sty, pig," he re-
plied, "lest I take my battle-ax to thee!"*



the world to be a horse-cleaner in the abbot's stables! It was a tall order, true; but Unna was an ambitious man.

As he sat thinking, some one entered the hut. He turned on his stool, and beheld Hild the haymaker.

In the year 1070 they had ideas about beauty which varied considerably from those which were in vogue during the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. Hild, therefore, did not resemble to any extent the oftentimes charming young ladies who may occasionally be observed nowadays haymaking in the meadows. She wore her hair differently, for instance. It hung upon her head like ivy upon a wall. She was a large girl, with bare feet and arms. She had muscles like a strong man. The chiseling of her heavy features was crude. Her clothes were about eight hundred and forty-six years behind the fashion. But she had a good heart, and adored Unna with an adoration which he returned.

Unna put down his bread and half-fin-

ished onion, and rising, kissed her long and warmly.

"Hild, thou art pale and overcome!" he said presently, releasing her.

She leaned against the wall, panting, gasping for breath.

"I have run all the way from the huts of the field-workers, Unna," she said.

"Sit down and rest," replied Unna. "Have some bread and onion."

"Nay, there is no time for pleasure," said the girl. She came close, whispering: "Unna, there is foul work afoot."

"Where?" asked Unna, naturally enough.

"Here—in the forest!"

"Hah!" said Unna. "Go on, Hild."

"There is a plot to take the life of the King!"

Mr. Honey—Unna, that is—guffawed.

He had not brains enough to accommodate an idea of that size. As well tell him that some one was proposing to switch off the light of the sun, or to renew the silver plating of the moon. He was a plain man—a singularly plain man, indeed; and there were four things which he always took for granted—the sun, the moon, the weather and the King. Anyone who talked of killing the King was, in Unna's opinion, simply talking through the base of his or her skull. The idea, in short, was too big for Unna—it was a balloon-sized idea, and he only wore a bean-sized head.

So he laughed.

"When thou laughest like that, Unna, thou art like unto a human goat," said Hild sharply. "Listen to what I say."

Not wishing to offend her, Mr. Honey listened. And what she told him nearly rendered him deaf with shock.

IT appeared that on the previous evening she had been working in a newly broken field some distance from the abbey, and was returning home through the twilight, taking a shortcut through the woods, when she saw two strangers riding slowly toward her. Concealing herself in a hollow tree, for fear that they were robbers or outlaws, she waited for them to pass. They did not pass, however; but oddly enough, came to a halt at the very tree which sheltered her, and there proceeded, in low voices, to discuss certain plans to kill the King. The proposed mode of procedure was simple. The Conqueror was to hunt the stag in the woods close by, on the following day; and the conspirators, if an opportunity occurred, were to aim an arrow ostensibly at a stag, but in reality at the Norman King.* Hild had not learned the names of the knights, but on peering through a knothole, she had gleaned a very fair idea of their appearance. She would know them again.

Her idea was that Unna should go to the abbot and inform him of the plot. He would thus gain even greater favor and, it might easily be, promotion.

Unna thought it over. It seemed to be an excellent idea. The abbot could warn the King, who doubtless would reward him immensely, and subsequently the abbot would reward Unna and his wife. Undoubtedly it looked good—very good.

Mr. Honey said so, and rose.

* Some years later the same infamous plan was carried out against the successor of the great Norman, with what result is known.—*Author*.

"Come, Hild, let us go to the abbot," he said. "It may be that he will give us a little farm."

Hild was more than ready to accompany him, and they hastened toward the abbey.

HALFWAY thither a gleam of caution penetrated through the matted hair of the charcoal-burner.

"Thou art sure of the words overheard, Hild?" he asked.

Hild was, and said so emphatically. Satisfied, Mr. Honey—we mean Unna—pushed on until the great building of the abbey loomed before them. They worked their way round to the gate, which in those strenuous and still unsettled days was guarded by a covey of men-at-arms.

Unna approached them deferentially. One of them demanded his business—briefly and somewhat profanely.

"What dost thou need, sooty pole-cat?" he inquired, with verbiage.

"Word with His Grace the Lord Abbot," said Unna ambitiously. "I have news for his ear alone."

The guard simply clouted him across the ear with the butt of his spear.

"Ass!" he replied. "Dost think His Grace the Lord Abbot hath nought better to do than converse with the likes of thee? Get thee gone to thy sty, pig, and swiftly, lest I take my battle-ax unto thee!"

Mr. Honey perceived that as far as the guard was concerned, he was "declined without thanks." He gulped, and slunk back into the darkness, where Hild, too well aware of the character of the men-at-arms to venture near them, was waiting.

"Unna," she said in surprise, "I heard a clash as of wood upon wood, and I thought it was the closing of the postern gate as they conducted thee to His Grace."

"Nay," snarled Unna. "'Twas the click of a spear-shaft upon this."

And he guided her hand to a lump upon the side of his head that was already the size of a medium tomato, and still growing.

Hild comforted him, and thought hard for some minutes.

"It is clear that thou wilt never gain the ear of His Lordship save by stealth," she said at last, thoughtfully gazing at the lighted windows of the great dining-hall of the abbey. Then her face lighted up, and she swiftly whispered a plan. It was desperately bold—being, indeed, none other than a suggestion that the wooden-witted charcoal-burner should climb up to the win-

dow nearest the end of the table at which the abbot sat, smash it with a stone, thrust his head in, and shout his startling news to the reverend gentleman before the servants or guards had time to perforate the messenger with arrows.

At first Unna abruptly refused, but the girl drew such a tempting—though sketchy—picture of the imaginary farm which would probably result, that she speedily convinced the charcoal-burning clown of the wisdom of the plan.

“But they will be certain to kill me, Hild!” he demurred feebly.

“Not they, Unna. Hast thou in all thy

He rested a little, regaining his breath; then, taking a firm grip on the shank of the stone, he announced his presence to the abbot and his associates by the simple process of totally and noisily destroying the window.



Then the window gave way and Unna fell among them.

life ever heard of a charcoal-burner being killed at the window of an abbey?”

Unna was forced to confess he had not.

“Very well, then. What is there to fear?” said Hild.

Vaguely conscious that there seemed to be something decidedly rocky about Hild’s logic, but being quite unable to discover what it was, Unna moved forward, grumbling a little, but fortified by the vision of that farm.

He found a pole, placed it against the wall, and after some desperate work, managed to scramble up to the base of the window. Once there, he discovered that, very intelligently, he had omitted to supply himself with a stone, an omission which he laboriously clambered down to rectify. Presently, provided with an enormous flint, he struggled again to his perilous perch.

The glass fell in showers, and Unna thrust his liberally be-sooted face through, calling humbly upon the abbot.

To describe the crowd of monks assembled in the refectory as being “confused” would be to commit the fault of inadequacy. They were completely and utterly be-buffaloed *en masse*. The sooty face, the white-rimmed eyes, the black matted hair, the gleaming teeth, the scrambled whiskers of Unna, as he glared in upon them with a curious expression of anxiety and fear

upon his very "early English" face, froze their blood.

The abbot dropped his glass with a yell, and one of the more pessimistic of the monks announced in a howl that the end of the world had arrived, and that they were being fetched—presumably by the only being who, at the end of the world, could possibly have any animus against men of their profession—Satan, to wit.

Then the window gave way and, accompanied by a shower of glass, Unna fell among them.

The abbot was bawling to the servants and guards in a thin, frightened voice, and Unna hastened to reassure him.

"It is only Unna the charcoal-burner, Holy Father," he said anxiously over and over again, grinning doubtfully as he spoke. "I bring grave tidings—of a plot against the life of our lord the King. They would not admit me at the main gate—"

WITH an effort the abbot recovered himself.

"Silence, rash prater!" he growled, and took a little stimulant. "Thou hast utterly spoiled my evening meal!"

"The tidings I bring are grave," mumbled Unna. "A plot against our lord the King."

The abbot looked uneasy. "A what?"

"A plot, my lord!"

"Describe it!"

Unna did his best to describe it, but he became grievously entangled. The only part of the mumbled and confused story which seemed clear was the fact that King William was to hunt in the neighborhood on the following day, and the abbot knew that already.

Acutely conscious of the meal which was still awaiting his attention, and easily dismissing the remainder of the unfortunate Unna's story as an absurd invention, quite possibly due to the fact that the charcoal-burner was weak in the head, the abbot dismissed the matter abruptly.

"Take him away, and let him be generously flogged by the men-at-arms. Also let the bounty which was to be bestowed upon him for the rescue of the ass be forfeited! Clear him away," said the abbot curtly, and turned to his goblet and platter.

Stunned by the loss, not only of the visionary farm but of the bacon for his wedding feast and the iron halfpenny, the wretched Unna was on the point of being led away and turned over to the men-at-

arms when a sudden clamor rose just outside the entrance to the refectory. Before the abbot and his monks quite realized what was happening, a black-haired man of enormous build, of extraordinarily commanding presence, with a hard, fighting face, shrewd eyes and an arrogant manner, strode into the hall.

"*Per la resplendar Dè!*" he said loudly, indicating the well-spread table to a press of knights crowding behind him. "But we have arrived at an auspicious hour. How sayest thou, good abbot?"

It was none other than William the Conqueror. The house at which he purposed spending the night had taken fire late in the afternoon, and he had ridden on to the abbey.

His keen gaze took in the broken window, and settled on Unna.

"What is this?" he said dourly.

"Only a poor charcoal-burner, my lord King," muttered Unna.

"Ha! What dost thou here, charcoal-burner?" barked the Conqueror.

The abbot, very deferentially, ventured to say that the man was not right in his head, and had entered—by the window—with a rigmarole which no one could understand. He had already ordered the creature to be well flogged—presumably to sharpen up his wits.

But the King was a shrewder man than the abbot. He had need to be.

"Rigmarole, sayest thou, Abbot? Let us hear it. Nay, not thou, but the charcoal-burner. Speak, man, lest I have thine hand lopped, pardex!"

Unna spoke.

IT seemed as though the frightful danger in which he stood had stropped his wits. And without daring to look at the terrible presence towering before him, he most marvelously managed to blurt out quite a creditable account of Hild's story.

The Conqueror listened to the end in absolute silence. Only his hard, shrewd face changed. His lips set in a thin, bitter line; his black brows bunched together in a gnarled frown; and his eyes gleamed like pike-points.

He ground out a few of his favorite Norman oaths as Unna finished, and whirled on the abbot.

"Callest thou that a rigmarole, Belly?" he snarled. "I will learn thee somewhat soon, Fat-wit! Thinkest thou I bestowed this good abbey upon thee for naught? I

looked to thee to keep thine eyes and ears open, so that thou shouldst be aware of the plotting of those in the neighborhood who are evilly disposed toward us. But thou hast no eyes save for thy dish, and no ears save for the gurgle of wine. Thou art an oaf and an ass, and but for this good charcoal-burner I should doubtless have come by a perforated mazzard ere the setting of tomorrow's sun."

The furious monarch turned to Unna.

"Knowest thou the knights who conspired against our well-being, charcoal-burner?"

Unna scratched his head so diligently that he might have been trying to excavate

"String me Sir Uther up to the stoutest tree in the merry greenwood," said he.

"The other, my lord King, stammered in his speech a little, and upon his upper lip was a large wart," said Unna.

The King looked inquiringly toward the crafty-eyed monk.



"Knowest thou the knights who conspired against our well-being, charcoal-burner?"

a recollection of Hild's description of the men—as indeed he was. And he succeeded.

"I know not their names, my lord King, but the hair of one of them was of a glowing and fiery red, and his face was bespotted of moles."

"Hah! That is Sir Uther Jagon Baven-pile!" exclaimed a young monk with crafty eyes. "As disloyal a hound as went unhanged!"

William nodded approval, and ticked off three of his knights—grim-looking sportsmen in armor.

"Sir Uther's uncle," said that one.

"That is worth a bishopric to thee, monk," said William, and ticked off three more knights.

"Cure us the stammer of Sir Uther's uncle—with rope—upon the same tree," he ordered.

The knights rode forth, and the Conqueror turned again to Unna, whom he commanded to strip.

Greatly wondering, Unna did so.

Then addressing the abbot, William said: "Thou wert abbot, and thou sawest

Wild Work with the Conqueror

nothing nor didst thou hear anything. Thou art therefore a species of abbot which is valueless to me."

He turned to Unna.

"Thou wert an humble charcoal-burner, but natheless, thou and thy wench wert keen to scent danger to thy king, and swift to incur grave risk to warn those who could save us, but yet were too slothful to bestir themselves. Thou art an altogether superior charcoal-burner. And if at any time hereafter there shall arise any man in all this fair land to question my judgment in this matter,"—the Conqueror glared round at the shrinking crowd,— "then, *per la resplendar Dé*, I will so deal with him that ever thereafter he shall fail to distinguish the front of his face from the back of his head! Now, dress—and quickly; for thou, Abbot, art somewhat sooty and in sore need of ablution—while thy gross habit is offensive to mine eyes, charcoal-burner."

And so saying, the Conqueror swaggered to the head of the table. The ex-abbot slunk out—presumably to occupy Unna's hut; and Unna, feeling dazed, donned the monkish costume awaiting him.

"Sit thou here at our right, good Abbot," said William graciously.

MR. HONEY, so dazzled with his good fortune that he saw things but dimly, moved forward, and suddenly was aware of a stream of perfectly frantic language issuing from under his feet.

He started and looked down, to discover that he seemed to be treading upon the tail of Peter, his white-eared black cat. He moved his foot and glared round, sick with disappointment. He was back in his London flat again. The power of the pill had waned once more, but this time at a highly inconvenient moment.

It is regrettable to have to record here that for a second or so the language of Mr. Honey rivaled that which the disgusted Peter, who had retired under the settee, had used.

"Just as I was beginning to mix in decent society!" he snarled. "To be switched off like this! Too bad—it's too dashed bad!"

And so, reluctantly resigning himself to the situation, he settled down to sulk for the remainder of the evening.

"The Private Assassin," another of Mr. Honey's astonishing adventures in reincarnation, will be narrated by Bertram Atkey in our forthcoming September issue!

The Beavertooth Battle

*The war of two North Woods
lumber-camp champions is
fought to its finish under
extraordinary conditions.*

By REG
DINSMORE

Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson

"**Y**OU guys are crazy!" Jerry Pollard arose, kicked over the box upon which he had been sitting, and with a disgusted glance at the circle of lumberjacks about the stove, strode to his bunk and began to undress.

"A-r-rh, an' why be a kill-joy, ye big hunk of bologny?" It was old "Spud" O'Leary, the camp cook, speaking. "If ye wanta stay here in camp ter-morrer, why, *stay*, says I! Shur-r-re, go ahead an' stay here, an' toast yer shins by the fire, an' play a hundred games of solitaire. But it's not mesilf that would be a grouch an' a slacker whin the riputation av the Eastern Pulp is at stake! Me an' the bunch here air headin' fer Beavertooth Landing mighty early in the marnin'. Aint that r-right, b'ys?"

"Right!" chorused the lumberjacks by the stove.

No other man of the crew would have spoken to Jerry Pollard like that. They wouldn't have dared, for had they done so the big chopper's fist would have driven the words back down their throats. As it was, Pollard half turned and glared at old Spud while he finished undressing. Then, though his bunk was a full seven feet above the floor, he laid his hands upon its edge and vaulted up into it with the effortless ease of a lynx. Again he remarked scathingly:

"Crazy! Plumb crazy! Here we've wrestled spruce from daylight till dark every day for three months, and tomorrow you birds are going to ram off to Beaver-



The huge Swede lifted Pollard as he would have a doll, and hurled him against the camp wall.

tooth Landing and work harder than ever—for the fun of it. Go ahead—and see if I care!”

“But the Lumberman’s Carnival only comes once a year,” ventured some one by the stove.

“Lumberman’s Carnival—rats! What d’you think you’re going to get out of the Carnival? I’ll tell you what you’ll get. You’ll get an eighteen-mile trip each way, to and from Beavertooth. You’ll work harder than you do any other day this winter in those fool contests. Frog Labrec’ll fill you up on that high-tension moose-milk he brews, and then he’ll clean you of money the way an otter cleans a pool of trout. You’ll probably get into a mix with that Cleartimber outfit, and they’ll hammer you to a pulp. You’ll come draggin’ back to camp here like a passel of licked pups. Shucks! Why not wait till we go out with the drive in the spring and then have a *regular* time? Carnival—not any for me!”

Pollard flopped over, faced the log wall, pulled the blankets over him and composed himself for sleep.

A tote-teamster took his pipe from his mouth and winked broadly at the men about him. “They was tellin’ me down to Beavertooth yesterday,” he said casually, “that Swede Larsen’s comin’ to the Landin’ with the Cleartimber bunch for the carnival. The Swede allows he and his gang are gonna cop off all the prizes in chopping, sawing and log-loading events. And that aint all; he—the Swede, I mean—has kinda

give out word that things at the carnival are goin’ about as he says this year.”

Jerry Pollard sat up so suddenly that he cracked his head against a low rafter above his bunk.

“Like hell Swede Larsen’s taking over Beavertooth for the carnival! Where’d that big bohunk get the idea he’s the big cheese in this neck of woods?”

Pollard clipped out the words like rapid rifle-fire; then, as if ashamed of his outburst, he rubbed his bruised head and again lay down facing the wall.

The men about the stove grinned knowingly at each other. Old Spud O’Leary doubled over in silent mirth and gleefully shook hands with himself. Pollard’s words had been as good as a promise that he would accompany them to Beavertooth. With an old grudge between Pollard and Larsen, and with the principals the two ablest men north of Bangor, it began to look as if the annual Lumberman’s Carnival would be an interesting event.

JERRY POLLARD had been educated in a hard school—the school of the spruce camps. Orphaned at fourteen, he had been taken under the wing of Spud O’Leary, a logging-camp cook, and put to work as his “cookee,” or helper.

The duties of a logging-camp cookee are many and varied. His work is never done. It’s the cookee who pounces out of his warm blankets long, long before the first gray streak of daylight and builds the fire in the cook-camp range. It’s he

who slings the grub onto the long tables for the hungry crew. It is he who washes the dishes and sets up the tables for the next meal.

Between meals there are potatoes to be pared, beans to pick over and put to soak, water to fetch. Wood for the cook must be sawed, split and stacked within easy reach beside the range. Supplies must be brought in from the storehouse camp. A cookee has little time to twiddle his thumbs.

And as cookee under old Spud O'Leary, Jerry Pollard had still another duty, one which his hard-boiled boss insisted should never be slighted.

This duty was to thrash, or attempt to thrash, any lumberjack, regardless of size, nationality or reputation, who found so much as a single word of fault with O'Leary's cooking.

Upon one or two occasions, when Jerry Pollard was new to the job, he sidestepped the issue. He allowed some grouchy lumberjack to get away unchallenged with a slurring remark concerning the grub. The extra work that O'Leary piled upon him as a punishment for his laxity taught him that it was far better to fight. He also discovered that the harder he fought, the easier the old cook made his work. He came to accept cheerfully that fighting was a part of his job—and by no means a small part.

At seventeen Pollard had, in stand-up, give-and-take, ding-dong fights, whipped men twice his years and weight. Men who now ate at Spud O'Leary's table thought twice before they sneered at the beans or reviled the coffee. Jerry Pollard, though still a boy, had become dangerous.

Abnormally large for his age, Pollard was also unusually fast for his size. He was a flash on his feet, packed a wicked punch in either capable fist, and could think and act with a rapidity that was painfully disconcerting to his opponents. Moreover three years of this merciless schooling had taught him every known fighting trick of the north-country—and in the lumberjack's fighting code nothing is barred but axes, knives and guns.

Fighting continually, taking and giving the worst kind of punishment, became a part of the day's work with him. In the beginning he was prone to lose his temper with the first blow; but as time wore on and he gained age and experience, his fighting underwent a transformation. At nineteen he had become a slashing, long-range fighter who battled with the impersonal

mercilessness of a machine. He took or he meted out punishment with amazing equanimity.

In the lumber camps a fighter's reputation spreads with the swiftness of a fire in a dry slashing. Pollard's super-ability had become a never-ending topic among the different crews. Incredible as it may seem, the time came when Jerry Pollard, a nineteen-year-old boy, was acknowledged as the top-hole fighter of the region.

Strangely enough, his success did not seem to go to young Pollard's head. Ambitious lumberjacks who would have almost given an arm for such a reputation, looked upon the boy and wondered at his indifference. Pollard never picked a fight, never talked fight. Never, to any man's knowledge, had he fought save for one reason; and that because some one passed a derogatory remark concerning Spud O'Leary's cooking.

THEN came Swede Larsen.

Straight from the Michigan pineries came the Swede. An ox of a man, he was. Two hundred and forty pounds of burly bone and muscle. Bullet head, close-cropped. Jaw like a granite ledge. Mouthful of strong, square teeth. Square face out of which a pair of china-blue eyes peered with questioning mildness from beneath hairless brows. Huge, square hands, dangling awkwardly from anthropoid arms. Young, only two years older than Jerry Pollard.

Fate decreed that Larsen should find work at the Eastern Pulp Company's camp where Pollard was employed. The men of the crew saw to the rest of the details. It was easily arranged. They simply told the dumb-looking Swede that he hadn't the nerve to bawl out O'Leary about the grub.

The Swede wasn't half as dense as he looked. He knew lumberjacks pretty well, and he judged there must be a joker somewhere in the woodpile. However, he figured that he was big enough to find out what that joker was without getting seriously hurt. At the next meal he yelled across the cook camp at O'Leary:

"Hey, coo-o-ok! Ay tank yo' gat fony wid de coffee. What yo' put in her, eh, hedgehog tracks?" Then he sat up straight and stiff to see what was going to happen.

Things happened fast enough.

O'Leary turned grinning from the range to watch. Every man at the tables laid

down his knife and fork and looked expectantly at Pollard.

The cookee walked calmly around the end of the table. When he reached the Swede, he said not a word but swiftly plastered a right to Larsen's jaw that would have knocked a common man cold.

on his face like swift trip-hammers, the huge Swede lifted Pollard at arm's-length as he would have a doll. He then pivoted once, swiftly, and hurled his struggling adversary against the camp wall.

The heavy log building trembled to the impact of the cookee's body. Pollard



The blow seemed hardly to feaze Larsen. Mildly surprised, he began to untangle his legs from beneath the table, and while he was doing so, Pollard crashed three more sizzling swings to that ledgelike jaw.

Larsen's head rocked to the blows, and he blinked stupidly, but he got to his feet and began a slow advance upon the cookee.

Pollard danced away, kept just out of the Swede's reach and cut up the big man's face with well-timed hooks and jabs. It was easy to do. Larsen had no defense. His long arms were wide-spread, exactly like those of a person who is trying to corner and catch a frightened hen. Finally he succeeded in backing Pollard into a corner between the range and the water-barrel, and closed with him.

Somewhere Jerry Pollard had picked up a bit of *ju-jitsu*. Now, as Larsen's hands touched him, he twisted, flashed like a squirming eel—and one of the Swede's arms fell limp and helpless at his side, broken. But—Larsen had succeeded in fastening his uninjured hand onto Pollard's belt.

With the cookee's knotted fists playing

dropped to the floor, limp and crushed. He twitched spasmodically and lay still. Larsen watched him for a moment, then fainted from the pain of his broken arm.

BUT that was the end of Jerry Pollard's job as cookee. When his four broken ribs and dislocated shoulder had mended, he came back from the down-river hospital, told Spud O'Leary to go to hell with the job the old man had been holding open for him, and went to work with the swamping crew.

Larsen, who went to the settlements where he could have surgical treatment for his broken arm, failed to return. Later it was learned that he had drifted over onto West Branch waters and hired out as a "sled-tender" with the Cleartimber outfit.

Though the Eastern Pulp and the Cleartimber companies were rival lumber concerns,—the rivalry being shared even down to the most menial of their employees,—there was a certain amount of fraternization between the men. Gossip traveled back and forth. That's how it happened that the Swede was told, and

truthfully, by his fellow-workers that Jerry Pollard was planning some day to give him the beating of his life.

Also, through insidious channels, Pollard learned that Larsen had taken the sled-tending job so that the handling of heavy logs would build up his strength and put him in shape for the inevitable grudge fight.

Neither man spoke a single word of the other, but by the shadows of hate that crossed their faces when the other man was mentioned, their crew-mates read their feelings plainly enough. And loving a good fight, as most true lumberjacks do, they saw to it that Jerry Pollard and Swede Larsen did not forget.

Yet neither Pollard nor Larsen seemed anxious for the fight to take place. They did not openly avoid a meeting, but it was sensed by their friends that they were in no hurry for it. And as the two camps were separated by some thirty miles of wilderness, and the spring log-drives of the two companies went down different rivers, there was little to bring the two men together. A year passed—three of them—and still the grudge remained unsettled.

AFTER quitting the cook-camp, Jerry Pollard remained a swamper but a short time. It was discovered that he was extremely clever with an ax. Expert ax-men are not wasted in swamping crews, and so Pollard was made a chopper. The man who admits that physical betterment may be obtained by the occasional swinging of a golf-club can easily conceive the sort of muscles a four-pound ax will build when swung steadily from daylight till dark for three long years. Jerry Pollard, now twenty-two, stood six-feet-two in his moccasins and tipped the storehouse scales at two hundred and ten pounds. His muscles lay beneath his smooth skin not in hummocky bunches but in long, sliding, writhing bands. When he moved it was with the grace of a panther. The clearness of his level, granite-gray eyes told of superb health and the cleanest kind of living.

The Swede too, so it was rumored by Cleartimber men, had developed amazingly. Although no heavier, the handling of great logs had hardened him. His strength was unbelievable, his prowess a thing of which to speak in tones of awe.

North-country giants, these two, giants who having met in their more immature

days and finding the other equally dangerous, had retired to gather strength for the conflict which each knew was inevitable.

CARNIVAL day at the little sawmill town of Beavertooth Landing! The day when lumberjacks from all the far-flung spruce operations gathered to match strength and skill. Games of many kinds were to be staged. Contests with the ax, saw and peavey. Teamsters' contests and foot-races, snowshoe-races and wrestling matches. A day set apart by the different lumber operators for play. A gala day to break the monotony of the long winter.

But on this particular day the weather man had been unkind. The white smother of a raging nor'-easter swept the squat log cabins and unpainted board shacks of Beavertooth. It whistled down the single street of the place with such searching intensity that the contests had been postponed in the hope that midday would bring better weather. To pass the time, the wrestling matches were being staged indoors.

In the big "office" of Frog Labree's lumber-jack hotel things were warming up fast. A steady procession of moccasined and mackinawed men was moving between the office and a back room. With each visit to the back room they became more boisterous.

On the caulk-marked floor in the center of the office a couple of young swampers were wrestling. Sweat trickled in streams down their effort-convulsed faces as they strove mightily to determine which was the best man. At battered tables, ranged along the sides of the room, card-games were in progress.

Already the feeling between the rival factions—the Eastern Pulp and the Cleartimber outfits—had begun to show. To be sure, the men of the two factions visited the back room and talked and drank together, yet beneath it all ran an element of distrust. In the office each outfit kept to its own side of the room. With half an eye one could see that it needed but some trivial act or word to set this hard-bitten crowd at each other's throats.

At a table by a window Jerry Pollard, Spud O'Leary and a couple more of their crew sat playing cribbage. Pollard talked but little. His eyes seldom left his cards. He visited the back room not at all.

From across the room the Cleartimber men watched him furtively and whispered



It was good teamwork: when they let go of Labrec at the count of "three," the Frog sailed high and far.

among themselves. Swede Larsen, their champion, had not yet arrived. Though the young wrestlers on the floor were putting up a good exhibition, little attention was paid them. Everyone knew that a bigger game was soon to be played.

ABOVE the howl of the storm the approaching clangor of team bells was heard. Spud O'Leary scratched clear a spot on a frosted pane with a blunt thumbnail and peered out. "The rest av the Cleartimber outfit!" announced the old man, and tossed down his cards.

Every man in the room—with the exception of Jerry Pollard—came to his feet. He, with his usual nonchalance, continued to sit at the table and to toy with his cards. By his face one would have never read that within the next minute he expected to engage in the battle of his lifetime. Men watched him slyly out of the corners of their eyes, and marveled at his indifference.

The door banged open. Snow, swept in by the howling wind, sifted across the floor. With it came the Cleartimber men.

No one spoke until the last man had entered and had finished beating the clinging snow from his leggings.

Then a voice from the Eastern Pulp side of the room inquired belligerently:

"Hey, where's the Swede?"

"Who wants to know?"

"We do!" the first speaker shot back meaningly.

"Well, don't get all het up about it. Larsen dropped off the tote-team down at the store. He'll be up soon. Plenty soon for you birds!"

The tension relaxed somewhat. The newcomers filed out to the bar in the back room. Card-games were resumed. The wrestlers again got down on the floor, took the same holds that they left off with, and renewed their struggle.

Spud O'Leary lowered his voice.

"Jerry, lad, it's mesilf that's thinkin' the Swede aint over-anxious to meet ye; else why didn't he come along an' have done wid it?"

Pollard scowled at his cards and said nothing. O'Leary was still the same blood-thirsty little Irishman, always spoiling to see a fight. And O'Leary was no worse than any other man in the place.

Pollard thought of the beatings he had taken in past years. He thought of the men he had hammered down in defeat. What had he gained by all this fighting? What mattered it to these lumberjacks who won? Those savage contests in which both he and his opponents had suffered

severely had been but spectacles to these men—a show.

What lay between himself and Larsen was no business of these men. Why should he give them the satisfaction of seeing him fight the Swede? The grudge must be settled, of course, but why in the presence of this blood-hungry pack? That's all they had come here today for, anyhow, the trouble-hounds! He'd been a public entertainer plenty long enough.

SUDDENLY Jerry Pollard tossed down his cards and arose. His fellow-players looked up in surprise. "Be back in a few minutes," he told them, and stalked out into the back room.

To Frog Labree, behind the rough bar there, he said:

"Office fire's getting low, Frog."

He went on through the door that led from bar-room to woodshed, leaving with the Frenchman the impression that he had gone to fetch wood.

Once in the shed with the bar-room door closed behind him, Pollard leaped out into the storm and ran toward the store. With the windows of the hotel frosted as they were, he knew that no one in the office would be likely to see him. He hurried down the storm-swept street and reached for the latch of the store door. Even as he laid his hand upon it, the door swung open.

Framed in the doorway, filling its ample height and width, stood Swede Larsen.

The surprise that swept Larsen's face as his glance fell upon Pollard was almost ludicrous, but there was nothing of fear in it. He stood riveted to the spot, staring.

For a long moment the two big men searched each other's eyes. Perhaps in that moment the thought flashed through the minds of each that a big change had taken place in the other, that he had become more dangerous. Yet no hint of such thought showed in their bronzed faces.

Behind the counter the storekeeper stood petrified. He as well as everyone knew what lay between these giants. Was the battle of the decade to be staged right here in his store?

Pollard was first to speak:

"Step outside a minute, Larsen. I want to talk to you private."

LARSEN stepped out. He held a big bundle that he was carrying with one hand, and closed the door behind him with

the other. His eyes narrowed. His free hand knotted into a maul-like fist. He braced himself, ready for any hostile move that Pollard might make.

"When do we go?" Pollard asked it with tense sharpness.

A troubled look swept Larsen's broad face. He shifted uneasily on his feet and glanced up the street. "Ay fight yo' a' right—but not right now. Me, I go oop de street wid dis." He glanced at the bundle beneath his arm. "Den pooty kvick I coom back an' we fight, huh?"

"All right. But where's it going to happen—at the Frog's?"

The Swede nodded. "Sure! Why not?"

Pollard scowled. "I'll tell you why: I've given that scum up there about all the free shows they're going to get outa me! I'm going to beat the livin' daylight outa you, Larsen, but I'm not crazy about doing it before that bunch!"

"Ay tank yo' not beat me," said Larsen stolidly. "Ay tank I break yo' back dis tam—break yo' back an' twis' yo' neck. Mebbe yo' don' want dem fellers see yo' gat licked, huh?"

Pollard recognized the futility of argument. The Swede had no more imagination than a stump. What could you expect of a big hunk of beef like him anyhow?

"All right," he barked savagely. "If you want to pull off the deal at the Frog's place, it's your funeral! But I'm warnin' you, Swede—what I did to you three years ago will be just boy's play to what you'll get today!" Turning on his heel, he walked into the store.

"A pack of butts," he said to the storekeeper.

THE man tossed the cigarettes onto the counter and looked up at Pollard. "I'm glad you didn't jump Larsen just now. It would have been a danged shame to've mussed up that stuff he was carrying."

"What stuff?"

"Them groceries—aigs, an' butter, an' sugar, an' flour, an' everything."

"Groceries!"

"Yeah, the Swede just bought ten dollars' worth. Said he was gettin' 'em for them Clayson kids."

"The Clayson kids?"

"Sure, you know Clayson, the teamster that got sluiced on a ram-down over on Bald Mountain? Went off the road and landed in the bottom of a ravine with four horses an' a bunk-load of spruce on top



*Ah, what blows!
The spat of them
on bare flesh was
like the kick of
a horse!*

of him. Busted nigh every bone in his hide. Lives in the last shack down the street here."

"Yeah, I remember. Happened the first of the winter, didn't it?"

"Yep; an' Clayson aint been able to do a tap of work since. Family's in pretty hard sledding. Clayson's wife aint none too well neither; an' them kids—there's five of 'em—don't get none too much to eat."

Jerry Pollard did some swift thinking. Swede Larsen, the only man among the hundred that were now in Beavertooth to think of those hungry kids! Yet only a minute ago Jerry had been telling himself that Larsen had no imagination!

Slowly the chopper reached into a pocket and pulled out some crumpled bills. He tossed a twenty onto the counter, and said to the storekeeper:

"I'm coverin' that ante of the Swede's and raising him ten. See that that many dollars' worth of cats gets over to Clayson's shack in a hurry!"

He picked up his cigarettes and turned to go.

"Say," asked the storekeeper, anxiously, "air you an' the Swede settlin' that grudge today?"

"You should worry whether we do or not!" snapped Pollard. "Now get busy with that grocery order—and be damned sure you don't gyp those kids!"

Pollard went out, and the grocery-man

busied himself with the order. As he worked, he waggled his head in frank puzzlement and muttered over and over again: "Now don't that just beat seven assorted varieties o' hell!"

OUTSIDE, Jerry Pollard glanced down the street. Larsen had just left the Clayson shack and was returning, his head bent against the drive of the storm.

What a broad-shouldered, deep-chested devil the Swede was! It would never do, thought Pollard, to let the man get those beamlike arms about him in the coming fight. Under their pressure a man's ribs would crunch like matchwood. He'd see to it, however, that Larsen didn't corner him as he did three years ago. Oh, he'd show the big cheese where the bear camped in the buckwheat! But it was going to be some fight. *Some fight!* If—

A thought leaped from nowhere into Jerry Pollard's brain. It fairly sparkled with possibilities; there must have been something humorous about it, too, for the big chopper's white teeth gleamed in a swift grin. He waited for Larsen.

"We'll go and have it out now, Swede?"

"Yo' bat!" growled Larsen, plodding on.

"All right," said Pollard, falling into step beside him. "And fight your cussedest, big boy, for this time I'm going to get you *right!* But listen—before we start, there's something I want to get off my chest."

As the two battled through the storm

toward the hotel, Pollard talked swiftly. With a face as blank as the end of a saw-log, Swede Larsen listened.

Just before they reached the hotel door, Larsen nodded owlishly. "Ay tank dat a good idea," he agreed. "A tam good idea!"

The men in the hotel looked up in amazement as the two strode in together. Spud O'Leary came to his feet with a galvanic leap.

"The two of yez aint gone an' made up, have yez?" he cried in dismay. "Don't tell me yez aint gonna settle it like the gintlemin yez are!"

"Yes, you old weasel, we're going to settle it!" Pollard cried back at him. "You started me in on this fighting game, and now I'm going to show you the fight of my life!"

Wild cheers.

POLLARD held up a hand for silence.

"Larsen and I," he told them quietly, "are going to fight for an hour—if we last that long. There'll be no rounds to this fight. It'll be a continuous performance from start to finish, *nothin' barred*. If one of us is knocked out, the other shall stand back and wait for the kayoed one to come around. Then, if the kayoed one wants more, all he's got to do is to sail in and get it."

Louder cheers—oaths of approval!

"At the end of the hour," continued Pollard, "the man that's on his feet shall be declared winner. If both are still up, the fight shall stop and be called a draw. Right, Larsen?"

"Right, by tam!" grunted the big Swede, and pulled his shirt off over his head.

Men stared, spellbound for a moment by the perfection of the man's Herculean torso. Then breaking into excited conversation, they hustled chairs, tables, and every other movable object but the stove from the room.

Such a spectacle as was to be theirs! Such a scrap! For years to come this event would be told and re-told from end to end of the spruce country. Lucky indeed was the lumberjack who was in Beavertooth Landing this day. Having witnessed the forthcoming conflict he would have a tale well worth the telling.

Having cleared the room, the two factions separated and, ranging themselves along their respective sides of the room, stood grinning expectantly.

Jerry Pollard, now also stripped to the

waist, looked at the Swede. "Ready?" he asked.

Larsen nodded—and did a strange thing. Instead of advancing upon Pollard, he stepped to the outside door and opened it. Then, going to his own side of the room—to the Cleartimber side—he clenched the nearest man, led him forcibly to the door and hove him far out into the snow.

Promptly Jerry Pollard did the same with one of the Eastern Pulp crew.

Before the men could recover from their surprise, a half-dozen of their number were struggling out of the snowdrifts. They cursed wonderingly, clawed the snow from their necks and ears and stood watching the steady stream of sprawling humanity that came sailing out to join them.

Hauling his fallen jaw back into place, Spud O'Leary yelled: "Hey, Jerry, Jerry! Is it daffy you've gone? *It's the big squarehead yer gonna fight, not the b'ys av yer own crew!*"

Pollard plucked the old cook from the wall with a mighty hand. He led him squirming to the door and there lifted him up to a level with his own face. He handled the pugnacious old fellow as if he possessed no more weight than a doll.

"You bet your scrawny neck I'm fighting the Swede!" he growled. "But I'm giving no more free shows! Get that one? For years, now, I've fought just to amuse you and the rest of these spruce-hogs! I'm all through, see? If you see this fight, you're *paying for it—and paying plenty!* Larsen feels the same way about it!"

To corroborate his opponent's statement, Swede Larsen set his mighty hands upon the necks of the two largest Cleartimber men present. They kicked and struck, and tried to dig their moccasined heels into the floor, but he led them to the door with no more effort than if they were two children, and ushered them into the storm.

"But Jerry!" screeched old Spud. "Jerry, ye wouldn't do a thing loike that to me, would yez? Not afther wot I've—"

A four-foot drift smothered his lament.

THERE were arguments, which were short and useless. There was profane remonstrance, which was breath wasted. In one or two instances there was physical violence, which was foolish. In a short time the room was cleared and the two half-naked giants were standing in the doorway, grimly surveying the shivering crowd.

"Now," said Pollard, "the show starts in exactly seven minutes. It starts whether there's an audience or not. Before it starts, the door will be locked. Mr. Larsen and I are offering you birds the privilege of witnessing our performance for the ridiculously low price of five berries per head. Who's first, you bums?"

For a moment there was indignant, shivering silence. Then, in the crowd, began a muttering that swiftly arose to an impatient yell. Spud O'Leary, snow-covered and fuming, fought himself into the clear and sprang for the doorway. In his hand was a bill. He shoved it at Pollard.

"Here's your fiver, dom ye! Not fer tin times that would I miss this mix!" And O'Leary, squeezing his way inside, began yelling for others to hurry with their money.

Others did. A steady stream of bills and silver poured into the hands of Pollard and the Swede.

At the height of the harvest a hand was laid in an apologetic manner on the chopper's arm, and Pollard turned to find Frog Labree standing close behind him. The ratty little Frenchman was wiping his hands nervously on his soiled bar apron. His eyes were fastened greedily on the money. A kind of hypnotic chant was issuing from his loose and drooling lips.

"A cut for ze house, gents! A cut for ze house! Don' forget ze li'l cut, m'sieurs!"

Pollard and Larsen exchanged meaning glances. They crammed their handfuls of money into their breeches pockets. They grasped Frog Labree firmly by his collar and the slack of his pants. Pollard counted slowly and impressively, "One—two—three," and they swung the Frenchman with each count.

It was good team-work. When they let go of Labree at the count of "three" the Frog sailed high and far over the heads of the crowd and disappeared completely in a snowdrift. When he had dug his way to the surface, and the hot tears of anger and despair had melted the snow from his eyes, it was just in time to see the last lumberjack hand over his money and enter the house. The door closed with a bang, and he heard the heavy bolt shoot home.

FOR a long cold hour Frog Labree huddled on his doorstep. He pressed his ear close to the crack at the bottom of the door and listened to what was taking place inside. What a shameful thing it was that

he should be evicted from his own hotel and the place turned into an amusement hall! He who never drugged a lumberjack to rob him if he could take the man's money by marked cards or loaded dice! Yet there was huge satisfaction in knowing that the exciting sounds that leaked through the crack of the ill-fitting door were costing him nothing.

Ah, what blows! The spat of them on bare flesh was like the kick of a horse, yes? Now those Cleartimber swine were cheering. Now the curs of the Eastern Pulp. Those shifting feet, hear them slip and thud and seek for a grip on the floor! Those labored, whistling breaths! *Sacré*, what a contest!

Ha! The very house was rocking now to wild cheers. What had happened—had some one won? But no, above the din a voice was yelling that the hour was up. How quickly it had passed! And now that the fight was over and that they would want a drink, the swine might let him in. Labree hammered upon the door with a half-frozen fist. The bolt was drawn, the door yanked open.

Men were clustered about the bleeding Pollard and Larsen. With wet bar-towels they were wiping away dark stains and binding up bruises and cuts.

"A draw! A draw!" excited men were crying. "Oh, man, oh, boy, what a whale of a scrap—and a draw!"

Pollard broke away from the men about him and crossed to the Swede.

"Shake, Swede?" he panted.

Swede Larsen grinned a battered grin and held out a hand.

Old Spud O'Leary groaned in disgust and turned away, a disappointed man.

THAT night, after the forest had again swallowed up most of Beavertooth Landing's carnival visitors, Jim Clayson, the crippled teamster, heard some one knocking at his door. He struggled up from his bed, found his crutches and hobbled to see who was there.

Two huge forms bulked in the darkness. A package was jammed into Clayson's hands. The package had about it the rustle of bank-notes and the clink of coins.

"Them kids of yourn has got to eat, Jim," said a voice.

"Yo' bat!" corroborated a Scandinavian growl.

Arm in arm, the two forms melted away into the darkness of the winter night.

A FIGHTING MAN

The distinguished author of the famous Tarzan stories is at his best in this brilliantly imagined story of adventurous life on another planet.

By EDGAR RICE
BURROUGHS

The Story So Far:

THE great scientist Jason Gridley had constructed a simple automatic device for broadcasting signals into space by means of that advanced form of radio communication known as the Gridley Wave—and before he departed on his journey to that strange world Pellucidar at the Earth's core he had evolved also a device for recording whatever might be received during his absence. So it happened that one day, entering my friend Gridley's deserted laboratory after a long absence, I saw with astonishment upon the ticker tape the dots and dashes which recorded a message in his code.

In brief, the message explained that for months mysterious signals had been received at Helium (Mars), and while they were unable to interpret them, they felt that they came from the planet Earth.

Repeated attempts to transmit answering signals to Earth proved fruitless; then the best minds of Helium began the task of analyzing and reproducing the Gridley Wave.

They felt that at last they had succeeded, and they were eagerly awaiting an acknowledgment.

I have since been in almost constant communication with Mars, but out of loyalty to Jason Gridley, to whom all the credit and honor are due, I have made no official announcement; nor shall I give out any important information, leaving all that for his return to the outer world; but I believe that I am betraying no confidence if I narrate to you the interesting story of Hadron of Hastor, which he told to me one evening not long since.

It seems best to let Hadron of Hastor,—the young Martian nobleman who is the hero of this story,—give it in his own words. But first let me tell you a little about Mars and about the difficult predicament Hadron got himself into. The dominant race in

whose hands rest the progress and civilization—yes, the very life—of Mars differ but little in physical appearance from ourselves. The fact that their skins are a light reddish copper color and that they are oviparous constitute the two most marked divergences from Anglo-Saxon standards.

The military forces of the red men are highly organized, the principal arm of the service being the air navy, an enormous air force of battleships, cruisers and an infinite variety of lesser craft down to one-man scout flyers.

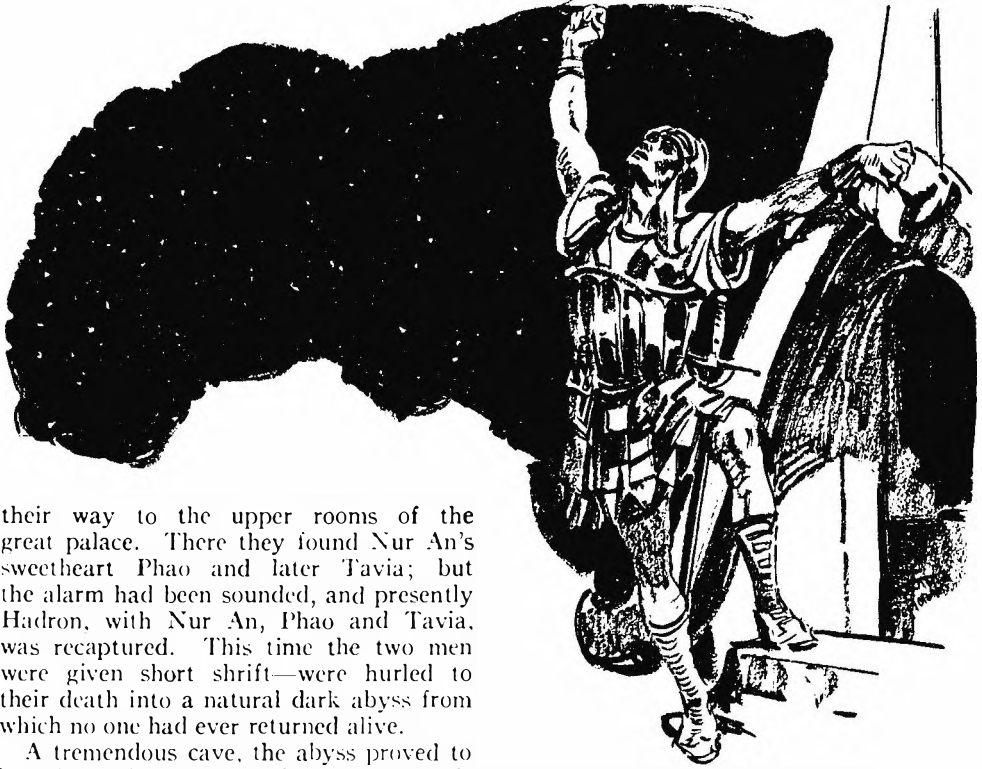
It was, indeed, aboard one of these one-man flyers that Hadron embarked on his great adventure. For Hadron had fallen in love with Sanoma Tora, lovely daughter of a Martian dignitary, and when she was abducted by the crew of a mysterious foreign airship, Hadron impetuously leaped aboard the first craft handy and set out in pursuit.

He failed to come up with the abductors, however, and passing over a city of the green men, he was fired upon and his ship so damaged that later he had to land. After various adventures he contrived to rescue Tavia, a girl of his own race, who had been abducted in childhood from her native city of Tjanath by the people of Jahar; and recently attempting to escape had been made captive by the green men.

Mounted on one of their gigantic throats, and guided by Tavia, the two presently reached the grove where Tavia had concealed her flyer shortly before her capture; and embarking therein, they set out through the air for Tavia's native city, Tjanath. This place they reached in safety; but the people of Tjanath refused to believe either Tavia's story or Hadron's, and Hadron was cast into a dungeon. There he won the friendship of Nur An, a fellow-prisoner from Jahar, and together they contrived to kill their guards and make

OF MARS

Illustrated by Frank Hoban



their way to the upper rooms of the great palace. There they found Nur An's sweetheart Phao and later Tavia; but the alarm had been sounded, and presently Hadron, with Nur An, Phao and Tavia, was recaptured. This time the two men were given short shrift—were hurled to their death into a natural dark abyss from which no one had ever returned alive.

A tremendous cave, the abyss proved to be, with a river running through it. Landing unhurt, Hadron and Nur An armed themselves from the weapons of less fortunate predecessors, and after a battle with a gigantic cave lizard, at length made their way out. Perils even more dire at once beset them, however—first from enormous spiders that stretched their incredible webs about the trees near the cave mouth; then from the treacherous hospitality of the diabolic Ghron, who welcomed them to his walled city, then imprisoned them in a high tower, with dreadful torture in prospect. But from that captivity they also escaped—by contriving a hot-air balloon from the spider-web-cloth hangings of their prison, climbing to the roof, inflating their balloon over the chimney, and by its aid floating high away over the savage city of Ghasta.

They came to earth at an ancient castle inhabited by an old scientist and his staff—*one Phor Tak, who had invented the deadly disintegrating-ray and the protective blue paint which made the fleets of Jahar so formidable. Now an exile, old Phor Tak lived in hope of revenge upon*

Tul Axtar for betraying him; and with this purpose he had invented an aerial torpedo and a substance which rendered objects covered with it invisible. Perforce becoming Phor Tak's helpers, Hadron and Nur An built a flyer and covered it with the veneer of invisibility. Then leaving Nur An as hostage, Hadron set out for Jahar but turned aside to Tjanath to rescue Tavia.

There, however, he was captured; and his invisible ship, unmoored, drifted away. He won freedom again, however, by seizing and threatening the Jed; and manufacturing a "cloak of invisibility" by means of a vial of Phor Tak's invention he had brought with him, he seized another flyer and rose into the air. Astonished, a sentry sprang forward.

"Blood of our first ancestor," he cried. "There is no one at the controls!" (*Hadron himself here takes up the story:*)

ONLY for an instant, however, were the two sentries overwhelmed by astonishment. Immediately I heard the shriek of

sirens and the clang of great gongs; and then, glancing behind, I saw that already they had launched a flyer in pursuit. It was a two-man flyer, and almost immediately I realized that it was far swifter than the one I had chosen; and then to make matters even worse for me, I saw patrol-boats arising from hangars located elsewhere upon the palace roof. That they all saw my ship and were converging upon it was evident; escape seemed impossible; each way I turned, a patrol-boat was approaching; already I had been driven into an ascending spiral, my eyes constantly alert for any avenue of escape that might open to me. How hopeless it looked! My ship was too slow, my pursuers too many.

It would not be long now, I thought; and at that very instant I saw something off my port bow at a little greater altitude that gave me one of the greatest thrills I had ever experienced in my life. It was only a little round eye of glass, but to me it meant life and more than life, for it might mean also life and happiness for Tavia—and of course for Sanoma Tora.

A patrol-boat coming diagonally from below was almost upon me as I drew my flyer beneath that floating eye, judging the distance so nicely that I just had clearance for my head beneath the keel of my own ship. Locating one of the hatches, which were so constructed that they could be opened either from the inside or the out, I scrambled quickly into the interior of the Jhama, as Phor Tak had christened it.

Closing the hatch and springing to the controls, I rose quickly out of immediate danger. Then, standing to one side, I watched my former pursuers.

I COULD read the consternation in their faces as they came alongside the royal flyer I had stolen, and realized it was unmanned. Not having seen either me or my ship, they must have been hard put to it to find any explanation for the phenomenon.

As I watched them, I found it constantly necessary to change my position, owing to the number of patrol-boats and other craft that were congregating. I did not wish to leave the vicinity of the palace entirely, for it was my intention to remain here until after dark, when I should make an attempt to take Tavia and Phao aboard the Jhama. I also had it in my mind to reconnoiter the east tower during the day and try to get into communication with Tavia if possible. It was already the fifth zode.

In fifty xats (three hours) the sun would set.

I wished to initiate my plan of rescue as soon after dark as possible, as experience had taught me that plans do not always develop as smoothly in execution as they do in contemplation.

A warrior from one of the patrol ships had boarded the royal craft that I had purloined and was returning it to the hangar. Some of the ships were following, and others were returning to their stations. A single patrol-boat remained cruising about, and as I watched it, I suddenly became aware that a young officer standing upon its deck had espied the eye of my periscope. I saw him pointing toward it, and immediately thereafter the craft altered its course and came directly toward me. This was not so good—and I lost no time in moving to one side, turning the eye of my periscope away from them, so that they could not see it or follow me.

I moved a short distance out of their course, and swung my periscope toward them again. To my astonishment I discovered that they too had altered their course and were following me.

Now I rose swiftly and took a new direction; but when I looked again, the craft was bearing down upon me. Not only that, but it was training a gun on me.

WHAT had happened? It was evident that something had gone wrong and that I was no longer clothed in total invisibility; but whatever it was, it was too late now to rectify it even if I could. I had but a single recourse, and I prayed to my first ancestor that it might not now be too late to put it into execution. Should they fire upon me, I was lost.

I brought the Jhama to a full stop and sprang quickly aft to where the rear rifle was mounted on a platform just within the after turret.

In that instant I had occasion to rejoice in the foresight that had prompted me to rearrange the projectiles properly against the necessity for instant use in an emergency. Selecting one, I jammed it into the chamber and closed the breech block.

The turret, crudely and hastily constructed though it had been, responded to my touch, and an instant later my sight covered the approaching patrol vessel, and through the tiny opening provided for the sight I witnessed the effect of my first shot with Phor Tak's disintegrating-ray rifle.

I had used a metal-disintegrating projectile, and the result was appalling.

I loved a ship, and it tore my heart to see that stanch craft fall apart in midair as its metal parts disappeared before the disintegrating ray.

But that was not all: as wood and leather and fabric sank with increasing swiftness



*"Quick, Tavia,"
I said. "Come!"
"There is no
ship!" she said
in a slightly
frightened tone.*

toward the ground, brave warriors hurtled to their doom. It was horrifying.

I am a true son of Barsoom; I joy in battle; armed conflict is my birthright, and war the goal of my ambition: but this was not war; it was murder.

I took no joy in my victory as I had when I laid Yo Seno low in mortal combat: and now, more than ever, was I determined that this frightful instrument of destruction must in some way be forever banned upon Barsoom. War with such a weapon completely hidden by the compound of invisibility would be too horrible to contemplate. Navies, cities, whole nations could be wiped out by a single battleship thus equipped.

BUT meditation and philosophizing were not for me at this time. I had work to do, and though it necessitated wiping out all Tjanath, I purposed doing it.

Again the sirens and the gongs raised their wild alarm; again patrol-boats gathered. I felt that I must depart until after nightfall, for I had no stomach again to be forced to turn that deadly rifle upon my fellow-men while any alternative existed.

As I started to turn back to the controls, my eyes chanced to fall upon one of the stern ports; and to my surprise, I saw that the shutter was raised. How this occurred I do not know; it has always remained a mystery; but at least it explained how it had been possible for the patrol-boat to follow me. That round porthole moving

through the air must have filled them with wonder, but at the same time it was a clue to follow, and though they did not understand it, they, like the brave warriors that they were, followed it in the line of their duty.

I quickly closed it, and after examining the others and finding them all closed, I was now confident that, with the exception of the small eye of my periscope, I was entirely invisible and hence under no immediate necessity for leaving the vicinity of the palace, as I could easily maneuver the ship to keep out of the way of the patrol-boats that were now and again congregating near the royal hangar.

I think they were pretty much upset by what had happened, and evidently there was no unanimity of opinion as to what should be done. The patrol-ships hovered about, evidently waiting orders, and it was

not until almost dark that they set out in a systematic search of the air above the city; nor had they been long at this before I understood their orders as well as though I had read them myself. The lower ships moved at an altitude of not over fifty feet above the higher buildings; two hundred feet above these moved the second line. The ships at each level cruised in a series of concentric circles and in opposite directions, thereby combing the air above the city so closely that no enemy ship could possibly approach. The air below was watched by a thousand eyes; at every point of vantage sentries were on watch, and upon the roof of every public building guns appeared as if by magic.

I began to be quite apprehensive that even the small eye of my periscope might not go undetected, and so I dropped my ship into a little opening among some lofty trees that grew within the palace garden, and here I waited some twenty feet above the ground, with my periscope completely screened from view—unseen and, in consequence, myself unseeing—until the swift night of Barsoom descended upon Tjanath; then I rose slowly from my leafy retreat.

ABOVE the trees I paused to have a look about me through the periscope. Far above me were the twinkling lights of the circling patrol-boats, and from a thousand windows of the palace shone other lights. Before me rose the dark outlines of the east tower silhouetted against the starry sky.

Rising slowly, I circled the tower until I had brought the Jhama opposite Tavia's window.

My ship carried no lights, of course, and I had not switched on any of the lights within her cabin—so I felt that I might with impunity raise one of the upper hatches; and this I did. The Jhama lay with her upper deck a foot or two beneath the sill of Tavia's window. Before venturing from below, I replaced my cloak of invisibility about me.

There was no light in Tavia's room. I placed my ear close against the iron bars and listened. I could hear no sound. My heart sank within me. Could it be that they had removed her to some other part of the palace? Could it be that Haj Alt had come and taken her away? I shuddered at the mere suggestion, and cursed the luck that had permitted him to escape my blade.

With all those eyes and ears straining

through the darkness, I feared to make the slightest sound, though I felt that there was little likelihood that the open hatch would be noticed in the surrounding darkness; yet I must ascertain whether or not Tavia was within that room. I leaned close against the bars and whispered her name. There was no response.

"Tavia!" I murmured, this time much louder; and it seemed to me that my voice went booming to high heaven in tones that the dead might hear.

This time I heard a response from the interior of the room. It sounded like a gasp, and then I heard some one moving—approaching the window. It was so dark in the interior that I could see nothing, but presently I heard a voice close to me.

"Hadron! Where are you?"

She had recognized my voice. For some reason I thrilled to that thought. "Here at the window, Tavia," I said.

She came very close. "Where?" she asked. "I cannot see you."

I had forgotten my robe of invisibility. "Never mind," I said. "You cannot see me, but I will explain that later. Is Phao with you?"

"Yes."

"And no one else?"

"No."

"I am going to take you with me, Tavia—you and Phao. Stand aside well out of line of the window so that you will not be hurt while I remove the bars. Then be ready to board my ship immediately."

"Your ship!" she said. "Where is it?"

"Never mind now. There is a ship here. Do just as I tell you. Do you trust me?"

"With my life, Hadron, forever," she whispered.

SOMETHING within me sang. It was more than a mere thrill; I cannot explain it; nor did I understand it, but now there were other things to think of.

"Stand aside quickly, Tavia, and keep Phao away from the window until I call you again." Dimly I could see her figure for a moment and then I saw it withdraw from the window. Returning to the controls I brought the forward turret of the ship opposite the window, upon the bars of which I trained the rifle. I loaded it and pressed the button. Through the tiny sight-aperture and because of the darkness I could see nothing of the result, but I knew perfectly well what had happened, and when I lowered the ship again and went



*I drew my sword;
as it slithered
from its sheath,
Tul Axtar heard,
and faced me.*

on deck I found that the bars had vanished entirely.

"Quick, Tavia," I said. "Come!"

With one foot upon the deck of the flyer and the other upon the sill of the window, I held the ship close to the wall of the tower and as best I could I held the cloak of invisibility like a canopy to shield the girls from sight as they boarded the Jhama.

It was difficult and risky business. I wished that I might have had grappling hooks, but I had none and so I must do the best I could, holding the cloak with one hand and assisting Tavia to the sill with the other.

"There is no ship!" she said in a slightly frightened tone.

"There is a ship, Tavia," I said. "Think only of your confidence in me and do as I bid." I grasped her firmly by the harness where the straps crossed upon her back. "Have no fear," I said, and then I swung her out over the hatch and lowered her gently into the interior of the Jhama.

PHAO was behind her, and I must give her credit for being as courageous as Tavia. It must have been a terrifying experience to those two girls to feel that they were being lowered into thin air a hundred feet above the ground, for they could see no ship—only the darkness of the night.

As soon as they were both aboard, I followed them, closing the hatch after me.

They were huddled in the darkness on the floor of the cabin, weak and exhausted

from the brief ordeal through which they had just passed; but I could not take the time then to answer the questions with which I knew their heads must be filled.

If we passed the watchers on the roofs and the patrol-boats above, there would be plenty of time for questions and answers. . . . If we did not, there would be no need of either.

CHAPTER XVI

TUL AXSTAR'S WOMEN

WITH propellers moving only enough to give us headway, we moved slowly and silently from the tower. I did not dare rise to the altitude of the circling flyers for fear of almost inevitable collision, owing to the limited range of visibility permitted by the periscope, and so I held to a course that carried me only above the roof of the lower part of the palace until I reached a broad avenue that led in an easterly direction to the outer wall of the city. I kept well down below the roofs of the buildings, where there was little likelihood of encountering other craft. Our only danger of detection now, and that was slight indeed, was that our propeller might be overheard by some of the watchers on the roofs; but the hum and drone of the propellers of the ships above the city must have drowned out whatever slight sound our slowly revolving blades gave forth, and at last we came to the gate at the end of the avenue,

and rising to top its battlements, we passed out of Tjanath into the night beyond. The lights of the city and of the circling patrol-boats above grew fainter and fainter.

We had maintained absolute silence during our escape from the city, but as soon as our escape appeared assured, Tavia unlocked the floodgates of her curiosity. Phao's first question related to Nur An. Her sigh of relief held as great assurance of her love for him as could words have done. The two listened in breathless attention to the story of our miraculous escape from the Death. Then they wanted to know all about the Jhama, the compound of invisibility and the disintegrating-ray with which I had dissolved the bars from their prison window. Nor was it until their curiosity had been appeased that we were able to discuss our plans for the future.

"I feel that I should go at once to Jahar," I said.

"Yes," said Tavia in a low voice. "It is your duty. You must go there first and rescue Sanoma Tora."

"If there were only some place where I might leave you and Phao in safety, I should feel that I could carry on this mission with far greater peace of mind, but I know of no other place than Jhama and I hesitate to return there and let Phor Tak know that I failed to go immediately to Jahar as I had intended. The man is quite insane. There is no telling what he might do if he learns the truth; nor am I certain that you two would be safe there in his power. He trusts only his slaves and he might easily become obsessed with an hallucination that you are spies."

"You need not think of me at all," said Tavia, "for no matter where you might find a place to leave us, I should not remain—the place of the slave is with her master."

"Do not say that, Tavia. You are not my slave."

"I am a slave girl," she replied. "I must be some one's slave. I prefer to be yours."

I WAS touched by her loyalty, but I did not like to think of Tavia as a slave; yet however much I might loathe the idea, the fact remained that she was one.

"I give you your freedom, Tavia," I said.

She smiled. "I do not want it; and now that it is decided that I am to remain with you" (she had done all the deciding), "I wish to learn all that I can about navigating the Jhama, for it may be that in that way I may help you."

Tavia's knowledge of aerial navigation made the task of instructing her simple indeed; in fact, she had no trouble whatsoever in handling the craft.

Phao also manifested an interest, and it was not long before she too took her turn at the controls, while Tavia insisted upon being inducted into all the mysteries of the disintegrating-ray rifle.

Long before we saw the towers of Tul Axtar's capital, we sighted a one-man scout flyer painted the ghastly blue of Jahar, and then far to the right and to the left we saw others. They were circling slowly at a great altitude. I judged that they were scouts watching for the coming of an expected enemy fleet. We passed below them, and a little later encountered the second line of enemy ships. These were all scout cruisers, carrying from ten to fifteen men. Approaching one of them quite closely, I saw that it carried four disintegrating-ray rifles, two mounted forward and two aft. As far as I could see in either direction, these ships were visible; and if, as I presumed, they formed a circle entirely about Jahar, they must have been numerous indeed.

Passing on beyond them, we presently encountered the third line of Jaharian ships. Here were stationed huge battleships, carrying crews of a thousand men and more, and fairly bristling with big guns.

While none of these ships was as large as the major ships of Helium, they constituted a most formidable force, and it was obvious that they had been built in great numbers.

WHAT I had already seen impressed me with the fact that Tul Axtar was entertaining no idle dream in his contemplated subjection of all Barsoom. With but a fraction of the ships I had already seen I would guarantee to lay waste all of Barsoom, provided my ships were armed with disintegrating-ray rifles, and I felt sure that I had seen but a pitiful fraction of Tul Axtar's vast armament.

The sight of all these ships filled me with the direst forebodings of calamity. If the fleet of Helium had not already arrived and been destroyed, it certainly must be destroyed when it did arrive. No power on earth could save it. The best that I could hope, had the fleet already arrived, was that an encounter with the disintegrating-ray rifles of the first line might have proved sufficient warning to turn the balance of the fleet back.

Far behind the line of battleships I could see the towers of Jahar rising in the distance, and as we reached the vicinity of the city, I descried a fleet of the largest ships I have ever seen, resting upon the ground just outside the city wall. These ships, which completely encircled the city wall that was visible to us, must have been capable of accommodating at least ten thousand men each and from their construction and their light armaments, I assumed them to be transports. These, doubtless, were to carry the hordes of hungry Jaharian warriors upon the campaign of loot and pillage that it was planned should destroy a world.

Contemplation of this vast armada prompted me to abandon all other plans and hasten at once to Helium, that the alarm might be spread and plans be made to thwart the mad ambition of Tul Axtar. My mind was a seething caldron of conflicting urges. Both duty and honor presented conflicting demands upon me. Countless times had I risked my life to reach Jahar for but a single purpose, and now that I had arrived I was called upon to turn back for the fulfillment of another purpose—a larger, a more important one, perhaps. But I am only human; I turned first to the rescue of the woman I loved, but I was determined immediately thereafter to throw myself whole-heartedly into the prosecution of the other enterprise that duty and inclination demanded of me. I argued that the slight delay that would result would in no way jeopardize the greater cause, while should I abandon Sanoma Tora now, there was little likelihood that I would ever be able to return to Jahar to her succor.

With the great ghastly blue fleet of Jahar behind us, we topped the city's walls and moved in the direction of the palace of the jeddak, Tul Axtar.

MY plans were well formulated. I had discussed them again and again with Tavia, who had grown up in the palace of Tul Axtar.

At her suggestion we were to maneuver the Jhama to a point directly over the summit of a slender tower, upon which there was not room to land the flyer, but through which I could gain ingress to the palace at a point close to the quarters of the women.

As we had passed through the three lines of Jaharian ships, protected by our coating of the compound of invisibility, so we passed the sentries on the city wall and the

warriors upon watch in the towers and upon the ramparts of the palace of the jeddak; and without incident worthy of note, I stopped the Jhama just above the summit of the tower that Tavia indicated.

"Within about ten xats" (approximately thirty minutes) "it will be dark," I said to Tavia. "If you find it impractical to remain here constantly, try and return when dark has fallen; for whether or not I am successful in finding Sanoma Tora, I shall not attempt to return to the Jhama until night has fallen."

TAVIA had told me there was a possibility that the women's quarters might be locked at sunset, and for this reason I was entering the palace by daylight, though I should have much preferred not to risk it until after nightfall. Tavia had also assured me that if I once entered the women's quarters I would have no difficulty in leaving even after they were locked, as the doors could be opened from the inside, the precaution of locking being taken not for fear that the inmates would leave the quarters, but to protect them against the dangers of assassins and others with evil intent.

Adjusting the robe of invisibility about me, I raised the forward keel hatch, which was directly over the summit of the tower, which had once been used as a lookout in some distant age before newer and loftier portions of the palace had rendered it useless for this purpose.

"Good-by and good luck," whispered Tavia. "When you return, I hope that you will bring your Sanoma Tora with you. While you are gone, I shall pray to my ancestors for your success."

Thanking her, I lowered myself through the hatch to the summit of the tower, in which was set a small trapdoor.

As I raised this door, I saw below me the top of the ancient ladder that long-dead warriors had used and which evidently was seldom, if ever, used now—as was attested by the dust upon its rungs. The ladder led me down to a large room in the upper level of this portion of the palace—a room that had doubtless originally been a guard-room, but which was now the receptacle for odds and ends of discarded furniture, hangings and ornaments. Filled as it was with specimens of the craftsmanship of ancient Jahar, together with articles of more modern fabrication, it would have been a most interesting room to explore; yet I passed through it with nothing more

A Fighting Man of Mars

than a single searching glance for living enemies. Closely following Tavia's instructions, I descended two spiral ramps, where I found myself in a most ornately decorated corridor, opening upon which were the apartments of the women of Tul Axtar. The corridor was long, stretching away fully a thousand sofads to a great arched window at the far end, through which I could see the waving foliage of trees.

Many of the countless doors that lined the corridor on either side were open or ajar, for the corridor itself was forbidden to all but the women and their slaves, with the exception of Tul Axtar. The foot of the single ramp leading to it from the level below was watched over by a guard of picked men, composed exclusively of eunuchs, and Tavia had assured me that short shrift was made of any adventurous spirit who sought to investigate the precincts above; yet here was I, a man and an enemy, safely within the forbidden territory.

As I looked about me in an attempt to determine where to commence my investigation, several women emerged from one of the apartments and approached me along the corridor. They were beautiful women, young and richly garbed, and from their light conversation and their laughter I judged that they were not unhappy. My conscience pricked me as I realized the mean advantage that I was taking of them, but it could not be avoided, and so I waited and listened, hoping that I might overhear some snatch of conversation that would aid me in my quest for Sanoma Tora; but I learned nothing from them other than that they referred to Tul Axtar contemptuously as the old zitidar. Some of their references to him were extremely personal and none was complimentary.

They passed me and entered a large room at the end of the corridor. Almost immediately thereafter other women emerged from other apartments and followed the first party into the same apartment.

It soon became evident to me that they were congregating there, and I thought that perhaps this might be the best way in which to start my search for Sanoma Tora—perhaps she too might be among the company.

Accordingly I fell in behind one of the groups and followed it through the large doorway and a short corridor, which opened into a great hall that was so gorgeously appointed and decorated as to suggest the throne-room of a jeddak, and in fact such appeared to have been a part of its pur-



pose; for at one end rose an enormous, richly carved throne.

The floor was of highly polished wood, in the center of which was a large pool of water. Along the sides of the room were commodious benches piled with pillows and soft silks and furs. Here it was that Tul Axtar occasionally held unique court, surrounded solely by his women. Here they danced for him; here they disported themselves in the limpid waters of the pool for his diversion; here banquets were spread, and to the strains of music high revelry persisted long into the night.

AS I looked about me at those who had already assembled, I saw that Sanoma Tora was not among them and so I took my place close to the entrance where I might scrutinize the face of each who entered.

They were coming in droves now. I believe that I have never seen so many women alone together before. As I watched for Sanoma Tora I tried to count them, but I soon gave it up as hopeless, though I estimated that fully fifteen hundred women were congregated in the great hall when at last they ceased to enter.

They seated themselves upon the benches about the room, which was filled with a babel of feminine voices. There were women of all ages and of every type, but



My point touched him in warning. "Who are you?" he demanded. "Silence!" I hissed.

there was none that was not beautiful. The secret agents of Tul Axtar must have combed the world for such an aggregation of loveliness as this.

A door at one side of the throne opened and a file of warriors entered. At first I was surprised, because Tavia had told me that no men other than Tul Axtar ever were permitted upon this level, but presently I saw that the warriors were women dressed in the harness of men, their hair cut and their faces painted, after the fashion of the fighting men of Barsoom. After they had taken their places on either side of the throne, a courtier entered by the same door—another woman masquerading as a man.

"Give thanks!" she cried. "Give thanks! The Jeddak comes!"

Instantly the women arose and a moment later Tul Axtar, Jeddak of Jahar, entered the hall, followed by a group of women disguised as courtiers.

As Tul Axtar lowered his great bulk into the throne, he signaled for the women in the room to be seated. Then he spoke in a low voice to a woman courtier at his side.

The woman stepped to the edge of the dais. "The great Jeddak deigns to honor you individually with his royal observation," she announced in stilted tones. "From my left you will pass before him, one by one. In the name of the Jeddak, I have spoken."

IMMEDIATELY the first woman at the left arose and walked slowly past the throne, pausing in front of Tul Axtar long enough to turn completely about, and then walked slowly on around the apartment and out through the doorway beside which I stood. One by one in rapid succession the others followed her. The whole procedure seemed meaningless to me. I could not understand it—then.

Perhaps a hundred women had passed before the Jeddak and come down the long hall toward me when something in the carriage of one of them attracted my attention as she neared me, and an instant later I recognized Sanoma Tora. She was changed, but not greatly, and I could not understand why it was that I had not discovered her in the room previously. I had found her! After all these long months, I had found her—the woman I loved. Why did my heart not thrill?

As she passed through the doorway leading from the great hall, I followed her, and along the corridor to an apartment near the far end; and when she entered, I entered behind her. I had to move quickly too, for she turned immediately and closed the door after her.

We were alone in a small room, Sanoma Tora and I. In one corner were her sleeping silks and furs; between two windows was a carved bench upon which stood those

toilet articles that are essential to a woman of Barsoom.

It was not the apartment of a Jeddara; it was little better than the cell of a slave.

As Sanoma Tora crossed the room listlessly toward a stool which stood before the toilet bench, her back was toward me, and I dropped the robe of invisibility from about me.

"Sanoma Tora!" I said in a low voice.

Startled, she turned toward me. "Hadron of Hastor!" she exclaimed. "Or am I dreaming?"

"You are not dreaming, Sanoma Tora. It is Hadron of Hastor."

"Why are you here? How did you get here? It is impossible. No men but Tul Axtar are permitted upon this level."

"Here I am, Sanoma Tora, and I have come to take you back to Helium—if you wish to return."

"Oh, name of my first ancestor, if I could but hope!" she cried.

"You may hope, Sanoma," I assured her. "I am here, and I can take you back."

"I cannot believe it," she said. "I cannot imagine how you gained entrance here. It is madness to think that two of us could leave without being detected."

I THREW the cloak about me. "Where are you, Tan Hadron? What has become of you? What has happened?" cried Sanoma Tora.

"This is how I gained entrance," I explained. "This is how we shall escape." I removed the cloak from about me.

"What forbidden magic is this?" she demanded; and as best I might in few words, I explained to her the compound of invisibility and how I had come by it.

"How have you fared here, Sanoma Tora?" I asked her. "How have they treated you?"

"I have not been ill treated," she replied; "no one has paid any attention to me." I could scent the wounded vanity in her tone. "Until tonight I had not seen Tul Axtar; I have just come from the hall where he holds court among his women."

"Yes," I said, "I know. I was there. It was from there that I followed you here."

"When can you take me away?" she asked.

"Very quickly now," I replied.

"I am afraid that it will have to be quickly," she said.

"Why?" I asked.

"When I passed Tul Axtar, he stopped

me for a moment, and I heard him speak to one of the courtiers at his side. He told her to ascertain my name and where I was quartered. The women have told me what happens after Tul Axtar has noticed one of us, and I am afraid; but what difference does it make? I am only a slave."

WHAT a change had come over the haughty Sanoma Tora! Was this the same arrogant beauty who had refused my hand? Was this the Sanoma Tora who had aspired to be a jeddara? She was humbled now—I read it in the droop of her shoulders, in the trembling of her lips, in the fear-haunted light that shone in her eyes.

My heart was filled with compassion for her, but I was astonished and dismayed to discover that no other emotion overwhelmed me. The last time that I had seen Sanoma Tora I would have given my soul to have been able to take her into my arms. Had the hardships that I had undergone so changed me? Was Sanoma Tora a slave less desirable to me than Sanoma Tora, daughter of the rich Tor Hatan? No; I knew that could not be true. I had changed, but doubtless it was only a temporary metamorphosis induced by the nervous strain which I was undergoing consequent upon the responsibility imposed on me by the necessity for carrying word to Helium in time to save her from destruction at the hands of Tul Axtar—to save not only Helium, but a world. It was a grave responsibility. How might one thus burdened have time for thoughts of love? No, I was not myself; yet I knew that I still loved Sanoma Tora.

Realizing the necessity for haste, I made a speedy examination of the room and discovered that I could easily effect Sanoma Tora's rescue by taking her through the window, just as I had taken Tavia and Phao from the east tower at Tjanath.

Briefly but carefully I explained my plan to her and bade her prepare herself while I was gone, that there might be no delay when I was ready to take her aboard the Jhama.

"And now, Sanoma Tora," I said, "for a few moments, good-by! The next that you will hear will be a voice at your window; but you will see no one nor any ship. Extinguish the light in your room and step to the sill. I will take your hand. Put your trust in me then, and do as I bid."

"Good-by, Hadron!" she said. "I cannot express now in adequate words the

gratitude that I feel; but when we are returned to Helium, there is nothing that you can demand of me that I shall not grant you, not only willingly but gladly."

I raised her fingers to my lips, and had turned toward the door when Sanoma Tora laid a detaining hand upon my arm. "Wait!" she said. "Some one is coming."

Hastily I resumed my cloak of invisibility and stepped to one side of the room as the door leading into the corridor was thrown open, revealing one of the female courtiers of Tul Axtar in gorgeous harness. The woman entered the room and stepped to one side of the open doorway.

"The Jeddak! Tul Axtar, Jeddak of Jahar!" she announced.

A MOMENT later Tul Axtar entered the room, followed by half a dozen of his female courtiers. He was a gross man with repulsive features, which reflected a combination of strength and weakness, of haughty arrogance, of pride and of doubt—an innate questioning of his own ability.

As he faced Sanoma Tora, his courtiers formed behind him. They were masculine-looking women, who had evidently been selected because of this very characteristic. They were good-looking in a masculine way, and their physiques suggested that they might prove a very effective body-guard for the Jeddak.

For several minutes Tul Axtar examined Sanoma Tora with appraising eyes. He came closer to her; there was that in his attitude which I did not like; and when he laid a hand upon her shoulder, I could scarce restrain myself.

"I was not wrong," he said. "You are gorgeous. How long have you been here?" She shuddered, but did not reply.

"You are from Helium?"

No answer.

"The ships of Helium are on their way to Jahar." He laughed. "My scouts bring word that they will soon be here. They will meet with a warm welcome from the great fleet of Tul Axtar." He turned to his courtiers. "Go!" he said. "And let none return until I summon her."

They bowed and retired, closing the door after them, and then Tul Axtar laid his hand again upon the bare flesh of Sanoma Tora's shoulder.

"Come!" he said. "I shall not war with *all* of Helium—with you I shall love! By my first ancestor, but you are worthy the love of a jeddak!"

He drew her toward him. My blood boiled—so hot was my anger that it boiled over, and without thought of the consequences I let the cloak fall from me.

EVEN as I dropped the cloak of invisibility aside, I drew my long sword; and as it slithered from its sheath, Tul Axtar heard and faced me. His craven blood rushed to his heart and left his face pale at the sight of me. A scream was in his throat when my point touched him in warning.

"Silence!" I hissed.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

"Silence!"

Even in the instant my plans were formed. I made him turn with his back toward me, and then I disarmed him, after which I bound him securely and gagged him.

"Where can I hide him, Sanoma Tora?" I asked.

"There is a little closet here," she said, pointing toward a small door in one side of the room; then she crossed to it and opened it, while I dragged Tul Axtar behind her and cast him into the closet—none too gently, I can assure you.

As I closed the closet door, I turned—to find Sanoma Tora white and trembling. "I am afraid," she said. "If they come back and find him thus, they will kill me."

"His courtiers will not return until he summons them," I reminded her. "You heard him tell them that such were his wishes—his command."

She nodded.

"Here is his dagger," I told her. "If worse comes to worst, you can hold them off by threatening to kill Tul Axtar." But the girl seemed terrified—she trembled in every limb, and I feared that she might fail if put to the test. How I wished that Tavia were here! I knew that she would not fail, and in the name of my first ancestor, how much depended upon success!

"I shall return soon," I said, as I groped about the floor for the robe of invisibility. "Leave that large window open; and when I return, be ready."

As I replaced the cloak about me, I saw that she was trembling so that she could not reply; in fact, she was even having difficulty in holding the dagger, which I expected momentarily to see drop from her nerveless fingers; but there was naught that I could do but hasten to the Jhama and try to return before it was too late.

I gained the summit of the tower without

incident. Above me twinkled the brilliant stars of a Barsoomian night.

THE Jhama, of course, was invisible; but so great was my confidence in Tavia that when I stretched a hand upward, I knew that I should feel the keel of the craft; and sure enough, I did. Three times I rapped gently upon the forward hatch, which was the signal that we had determined upon before I had entered the palace. Instantly the hatch was raised, and a moment later I had clambered aboard.

"Where is Sanoma Tora?" asked Tavia.

"No questions now," I replied. "We must work quickly. Be ready to take over the controls the moment I leave them."

In silence she took her place at my side, her soft shoulder touching my arm, and in silence I dropped the Jhama to the level of the window in the women's quarters. In a general way I knew the location of Sanoma Tora's apartment, and as I moved slowly along I kept the periscope pointed toward the windows, and presently I saw the figure of Sanoma Tora upon the ground-glass before me. I brought the Jhama close to the sill, the upper deck just below it.

"Hold it here, Tavia," I said. Then I raised the upper hatch a few inches and called to the girl within the room.

At the sound of my voice she trembled so that she almost dropped the dagger, although she must have known that I was coming and had been awaiting me.

"Darken your room," I whispered to her. I saw her stagger across to a button that was set in the wall, and an instant later the room was enveloped in darkness. Then I raised the hatch and stepped to the sill. I did not wish to be bothered with the enveloping folds of the mantle of invisibility, and so I had folded it up and tucked it into my harness, where I could have it instantly ready for use in the event of an emergency. I found Sanoma Tora in the darkness; and so weak with terror was she that I had to lift her in my arms and carry her to the window, where with Phao's help I managed to draw her through the open hatch into the interior. Then I returned to the closet where Tul Axtar lay bound and gagged. I stooped and cut the bonds which held his ankles.

"Do precisely as I tell you, Tul Axtar," I said, "or my steel will have its way yet and find your heart. It thirsts for your blood, Tul Axtar, and I have difficulty in restraining it; but if you do not fail me, perhaps I

shall be able to save you yet. I can use you, Tul Axtar; and upon your usefulness to me depends your life, for dead you are of no value to me."

I made him rise and walk to the window, and there I assisted him to the sill. He was terror-stricken when I tried to make him step out into space, as he thought, but when I stepped to the deck of the Jhama ahead of him, and he saw me apparently floating there in the air, he took heart, and I finally succeeded in getting him aboard.

Following him, I closed the hatch and lighted a single dim light within the hull. Tavia turned and looked at me for orders.

"Hold it where it is, Tavia," I said.

There was a tiny desk in the cabin of the Jhama where the officer of the ship was supposed to keep his log and attend to any other records or reports that it might be necessary to make. Here were writing materials, and as I got them out of the drawer I called Phao to my side.

"You are of Jahar," I said. "You can write in the language of your country?"

"Of course," she said.

"Then write what I dictate," I directed.

She prepared to do my bidding.

"If a single ship of Helium is destroyed," I dictated, "'Tul Axtar dies.' Now sign it '*Hadron of Hastor, Padwar of Helium.*'"

Tavia and Phao looked at me and then at the prisoner, their eyes wide in astonishment; in the dim light of the ship's interior they had not recognized the prisoner.

"Tul Axtar of Jahar!" breathed Tavia incredulously. "Tan Hadron of Hastor, you have saved Helium and Barsoom tonight."

I could not but note how quickly her mind functioned, with what celerity she had seen the possibilities that lay in the possession of the person of Tul Axtar, Jeddak of Jahar.

I took the note that Phao had written and returning quickly to Sanoma Tora's room, I laid it upon her dressing-table. A moment later I was again in the cabin of the Jhama, and we were rising swiftly above the roofs of Jahar.

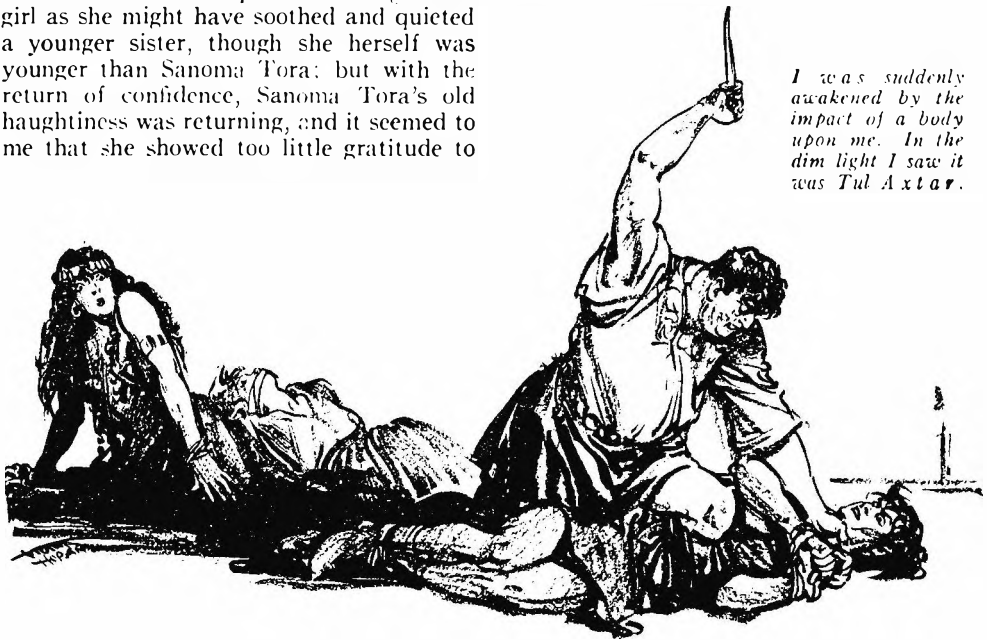
MORNING found us beyond the uttermost line of Jaharian ships, beneath which we had passed, guided by their lights—evidence to me that the fleet was poorly officered, for no trained man, expecting an enemy in force, would show lights aboard his ships at night.

We were speeding now in the direction of far Helium, following the course that I hoped would permit us to intercept the fleet of the War Lord in the event that it was already bound for Jahar as Tul Axtar had announced.

Sanoma Tora had slightly recovered her poise and self-control. Tavia's sweet solicitude for her welfare touched me deeply; she had soothed and quieted the frightened girl as she might have soothed and quieted a younger sister, though she herself was younger than Sanoma Tora: but with the return of confidence, Sanoma Tora's old haughtiness was returning, and it seemed to me that she showed too little gratitude to

ports looking out into the night, while Tul Axtar lay down in the stern of the ship. I had long since removed the gag from his mouth, but he seemed too utterly cowed even to address us, and lay there in morose silence: or perhaps he was asleep—I do not know.

I was thoroughly fatigued and must have slept like a log from the moment that I lay



I was suddenly awakened by the impact of a body upon me. In the dim light I saw it was Tul Axtar.

Tavia for her kindness. But I realized that that was Sanoma Tora's way, that it was born in her, and that doubtless deep in her heart she was fully appreciative and grateful. However that may be, I cannot but admit that I wished at the time that she would show it by some slight word or deed. We were flying smoothly, slightly above the normal altitude of battleships. The destination-control compass was holding the Jhama to her course, and after all that I had passed through, I felt the need of sleep. Phao, at my suggestion, had rested earlier in the night, and as all that we needed was a lookout to keep a careful watch for ships, I entrusted this duty to Phao, and Tavia and I rolled up in our sleeping silks and furs and were soon asleep.

TAVIA and I were about mid-ship: Phao was forward at the controls, constantly swinging the periscope to and fro searching the sky for ships. When I retired, Sanoma Tora was standing at one of the starboard

down until I was suddenly awakened by the impact of a body upon me. As I struggled to free myself, I discovered to my chagrin that my hands had been deftly bound while I slept, a feat that had been rendered simple by the fact that it is my habit to sleep with my hands together in front of my face.

A man's knee was upon my chest, pressing me heavily against the deck, and one of his hands clutched me by the throat. In the dim light of the cabin I saw that it was Tul Axtar; his other hand held a dagger.

"Silence!" he whispered. "If you would live, make no sound." And then to make assurance doubly sure, he gagged me and bound my ankles. Then he crossed quickly to Tavia and bound her; and as he did so, my eyes moved quickly about the interior of the cabin in search of aid. On the floor, near the controls, I saw Phao lying bound and gagged as was I. Sanoma Tora crouched against the wall, apparently overcome by terror. She was neither bound nor gagged. Why had she not warned me?

Why had she not come to my help? If it had been Tavia who remained unbound instead of Sanoma Tora, how different would have been the outcome of Tul Axtar's bid for liberty and revenge!

How had it all happened? I was sure that I had bound Tul Axtar so securely that he could not possibly have freed himself; and yet I must have been mistaken, and I cursed myself for the carelessness that had upset all my plans and that might easily eventually spell the doom of Helium.

HAVING disposed of Phao, Tavia and me, Tul Axtar moved quickly to the controls, ignoring Sanoma Tora as he passed by her. In view of the marked terror she displayed, I could readily understand why he did not consider her any menace in his plans—she was as harmless free as bound.

Putting the ship about, he turned back toward Jahar; and though he did not understand the mechanism of the destination-control compass and could not cut it out, this made no difference as long as he remained at the controls—the only effect that the compass might have was to return the ship to its former course should the controls be again abandoned while the ship was in motion.

Presently he turned toward me. "I should destroy you, Hadron of Hastor," he said, "had I not given the word of a jeddak that I would not."

Vaguely I had wondered to whom he had given his word that he would not kill me; but other and more important thoughts were racing through my mind, crowding all else into the background. Uppermost among them, of course, were plans for regaining control of the Jhama, and secondarily, apprehension as to the fate of Tavia, Sanoma Tora and Phao.

"Give thanks for the magnanimity of Tul Axtar," he continued, "who exacts no penalty for the affront you have put upon him. Instead you are to be set free. I shall land you." He laughed. "Free! I shall land you in the province of U-Gor!"

There was something ugly in the tone of his voice which made his promise sound more like a threat. I had never heard of U-Gor, but I assumed that it was some remote province from which it would be difficult or impossible for me to make my way either to Jahar or Helium. Of one thing I was confident—that Tul Axtar would not set me free in any place where I might become a menace to him.

FOR hours the Jhama moved on in silence. Tul Axtar had not had the decency or the humanity to remove our gags. He was engrossed with the business of the controls; and Sanoma Tora, crouching against the side of the cabin, never spoke; nor once in all that time did her eyes turn toward me. What thoughts were passing in that beautiful head? Was she trying to find some plan by which she might turn the tables upon Tul Axtar, or was she merely crushed by the hopeless outlook—the prospect of being returned to the slavery of Jahar? I did not know; I could not guess; she was an enigma to me.

How far we traveled, or in what direction, I did not know. The night had long since passed and the sun was high when I became aware that Tul Axtar was bringing the ship down. Presently the purring of the motor ceased, and the ship came to a stop. Leaving the controls, he walked back to where I lay.

"We have arrived in U-Gor," he said. "Here I shall set you at liberty, but first give me the strange thing that rendered you invisible in my palace."

THE cloak of invisibility! How had he learned of that? Who could have told him? There seemed but one explanation; but every fiber of my being shrank even from considering it. I had rolled it up into a small ball and tucked it into the bottom of my pocket pouch, its sheer silk permitting it to be compressed into a very small space.

"When you return to your palace at Jahar," I said, "look upon the floor beneath the window in the apartment that was occupied by Sanoma Tora. If you find it there, you are welcome to it. As far as I am concerned, it has served its purpose well."

"Why did you leave it there?" he demanded.

"I was in a great hurry when I quit the palace, and accidents will happen." I will admit that my lie may not have been very clever; but neither was Tul Axtar, and he was deceived by it.

Grumbling, he opened one of the keel hatches and very unceremoniously dropped me through it. Fortunately the ship lay close to the ground, and I was not injured. Next he lowered Tavia to my side; and then he himself descended to the ground. Stooping, he cut the bonds that secured Tavia's wrists.

"I shall keep the other," he said. "She



"Tavia," I cried, "promise that you will never desert me!" She clung to me. "Never, this side of death!" she whispered.

pleases." And somehow I knew that he meant Phao. "This one looks like a man, and I swear that she would be as easy to subdue as a she banth. I know the type. I shall leave her with you." It was evident that he had not recognized Tavia as one of the former occupants of the women's quarters in his palace, and I was glad that he had not.

He reentered the Jhama, but before he closed the hatch, he spoke to us again. "I shall drop your weapons when we are where you cannot use them against me; and you may thank the future Jeddara of Jahar for the clemency I have shown you!"

SLOWLY the Jhama rose. Tavia was removing the cords from her ankles, and when she was free, she came and snatched the gag from my mouth and fell to work upon the bonds that secured me. But I was too dazed, too crushed by the blow that had been struck me to realize any fact other than that Sanoma Tora, the woman I loved, had betrayed me; for I fully realized now what anyone but a fool would have guessed before—that Tul Axtar had bribed her to set him free by the promise that he would make her Jeddara of Jahar.

Well, her ambition would be fulfilled, but

at what a hideous cost! Never if she lived for a thousand years could she look upon herself or her act with aught but contempt and loathing, unless she was far more degraded than I could possibly believe. No; she would suffer, of that I was sure; but that thought gave me no pleasure. I loved her, and I could not even now wish her unhappiness.

As I sat there on the ground, my head bowed in misery, I felt a soft arm steal about my shoulders, and a tender voice spoke close to my ear. "My poor Hadron!"

That was all; but those few words embodied such a wealth of sympathy and understanding that, like some miraculous balm, they soothed the agony of my tortured heart.

No one but Tavia could have spoken them. I turned; and taking one of her little hands in mine, I pressed it to my lips. "Loved friend," I said, "thanks be to all my ancestors that it was not you."

I do not know what made me say that. The words seemed to speak themselves without my volition, and yet when they were spoken, there came to me a sudden realization of the horror that I would have felt had it been Tavia who had betrayed me. I could not even contemplate it with-

out an agony of pain. Impulsively I took her in my arms.

"Tavia," I cried, "promise me that you will never desert me! I could not live without you."

She put her strong young arms about my neck and clung to me. "Never, this side of death," she whispered. Then she drew herself from me, and I saw she was weeping.

What a friend! I knew that I could never again love a woman, but what cared I for that if I could have Tavia's friendship for life?

"We shall never part again, Tavia," I said. "If our ancestors are kind and we are permitted to return to Helium, you shall find a home in the house of my father and a mother in my mother."

SHE dried her eyes and looked at me with a strange wistful expression that I could not fathom; and then, through her tears, she smiled—that odd, quizzical little smile that I had seen before, and that I did not understand any more than I understood a dozen of her moods and expressions, which made her so different from other girls and which, I think, helped to attract me toward her. Her characteristics lay not all upon the surface—there were depths and under-currents which one might not easily fathom. Sometimes when I expected her to cry, she laughed; and when I thought that she should be happy, she wept; but she never wept as I have seen other women weep—never hysterically, for Tavia never lost control of herself—but quietly, as though from a full heart rather than from overwrought nerves; and through her tears there might burst a smile at the end.

I think that Tavia was quite the most wonderful girl that I have ever known, and as I had come to know her better and see more of her, I had grown to realize that despite her attempt at mannish disguise to which she still clung, she was quite the most beautiful girl that I had ever seen. Her beauty was not like that of Sanoma Tora, but as she looked up into my face now, the realization came to me quite suddenly, and for what reason I do not know, that the beauty of Tavia far transcended that of Sanoma Tora because of the beauty of the soul that, shining through her eyes, transfigured her whole countenance. . . .

Tul Axtar, true to his promise, had now dropped our weapons through a lower hatch of the Jhama, and as we buckled them on, we listened to the rapidly dimin-

ishing sound of the propellers of the departing craft. We were alone and on foot in a strange and, doubtless, an inhospitable country.

"U-Gor!" I said. "I have never heard of it. Have you, Tavia?"

"Yes," she said. "This is one of the outlying provinces of Jahar. Once it was a rich and thriving agricultural country, but as it fell beneath the curse of Tul Axtar's mad ambition for man-power, the population grew to such enormous proportions that U-Gor could not support its people. Then cannibalism started. It began justly with the eating of the officials that Tul Axtar had sent to enforce his cruel decrees. An army was dispatched to subdue the province, but the people were so numerous that they conquered the army and ate the warriors. By this time their farms were ruined. They had no seed, and they had developed a taste for human flesh. Those who wished to till the ground were set upon by bands of roving men and devoured. For many years they have been feeding upon one another until now it is no longer a populace province, but a waste-land inhabited by roving bands, searching for one another that they may eat."

I shuddered at her recital. It was obvious that we must escape this accursed place as rapidly as possible. I asked Tavia if she knew the location of U-Gor, and she told me that it lay southeast of Jahar about a thousand haads, and about two thousand haads southwest of Xanator.

I saw that it would be useless to attempt to reach Helium from here. Such a journey on foot, if it could be accomplished at all, would require years. The nearest friendly city toward which we could turn was Gathol, which I estimated lay some seven thousand haads almost due north. The possibility of reaching Gathol seemed remote in the extreme, but it was our only hope, and so we turned our faces toward the north and set out upon our long and seemingly hopeless journey toward the city of my mother's birth.

CHAPTER XVII

THE CANNIBALS OF U-GOR

THE country about us was rolling, with here and there a range of low hills, while far to the north I could see the outlines of higher hills against the horizon. The land was entirely denuded of all but noxious

weeds, attesting the grim battle for survival waged by its unhappy people. There were no reptiles, no insects, no birds—all had been devoured during the century of misery that had lain upon the land.

As we plodded onward through this desolate and depressing waste, we tried to keep up one another's spirits as best we could, and a hundred times I had reason to give thanks that it was Tavia who was my companion and no other.

What could I have done under like circumstances, burdened with Sanoma Tora? I doubt that she could have walked a dozen haads, while Tavia swung along at my side with the lithe grace of perfect health and strength. It takes a good man to keep up with me on a march, but Tavia never lagged; nor did she show signs of fatigue more quickly than I.

"We are well matched, Tavia," I said.

"I had thought of that—a long time ago," she said quietly.

WE continued on until almost dusk without seeing a sign of any living thing, and were congratulating ourselves upon our good fortune when Tavia glanced back, as one of us often did.

She touched my arm and nodded toward the rear.

"They come!" she said simply.

I looked back and saw three figures upon our trail. They were too far away for me to be able to do more than identify them as human beings. It was evident that they had seen us and they were closing the distance between us at a steady trot.

"What shall we do," asked Tavia, "—stand and fight, or try to elude them until night falls?"

"We shall do neither," I said. "We shall elude them now without exerting ourselves in the least."

"How?" she asked.

"Through the inventive genius of Phor Tak, and the compound of invisibility that I filched from him."

"Splendid!" exclaimed Tavia. "I had forgotten your cloak. With it we should have no difficulty in eluding all dangers between here and Gathol."

I opened my pocket pouch and reached in to withdraw the cloak. It was gone! And so was the vial containing the remainder of the compound! I looked at Tavia, and she must have read the truth in my expression.

"You have lost it?" she asked.

"No, it has been stolen from me," I replied.

She came again and laid her hand upon my arm in sympathy, and I knew that she was thinking what I was thinking, that it could have been none other than Sanoma Tora who had stolen it.

I hung my head. "And to think that I jeopardized your safety, Tavia, to save such as she!"

"Do not judge her hastily," she said. "We cannot know how sorely she may have been tempted, or what threats were used to turn her from the path of honor. Perhaps she is not as strong as we."

"Let us not speak of her," I said. "It is a hideous sensation, Tavia, to feel love turned to hatred."

She pressed my arm. "Time heals all hurts," she said; "and some day you will find a woman worthy of you, if such a one exists."

I looked down at her. "If such a one exists," I mused—but she interrupted my meditation with a question.

"Shall we fight or run, Hadron of Hastor?" she demanded.

"I should prefer to fight and die," I replied, "but I must think of you, Tavia."

"Then we shall remain and fight," she said; "but Hadron, you must not die."

IN her tone there was a note of reproach that did not escape me, and I was ashamed of myself for having seemed to forget the great debt that I owed her for her friendship.

"I am sorry," I said. "Tavia, I could not wish to die while you live."

"That is better," she said. "How shall we fight? Shall I stand upon your right or upon your left?"

"You shall stand behind me, Tavia," I told her. "While my hand can hold a sword, you will need no other defense."

"A long time ago, after we first met," she said, "you told me that we should be comrades in arms. That means that we fight together, shoulder to shoulder, or back to back. I hold you to your word, Tan Hadron of Hastor."

I smiled, and though I felt that I could fight better alone than with a woman at my side, I admired her courage. "Very well," I said: "fight at my right, for thus you will be between two swords."

The three upon our trail had approached us so closely by this time that I could discern what manner of creatures they were,

and I saw before me naked savages with tangled unkempt hair, filthy bodies and degraded faces. The wild light in their eyes, their snarling lips exposing yellow fangs, their stealthy slinking carriage, gave them more the appearance of wild beasts than men.

They were armed with swords which they carried in their hands, having neither har-

stood facing us, and realizing that the unexpectedness of our act would greatly enhance the chances of success, I gave the word.

"Now, Tavia!" I whispered; and together we leaped forward at a run straight for the naked savage facing us.

It was evident that he had not expected this, and it was also evident that he was a



I knew that the savage's life lay in the hollow of Tavia's little hand—and I turned my attention to my own antagonist.

ness nor scabbard. They halted a short distance from us, eyeing us hungrily; and doubtless they were hungry, for their flabby bellies suggested that they went often empty and were then gorged when meat fell to their lot in sufficient quantities. Tonight these three had hoped to gorge themselves; I could see it in their eyes. They whispered together in low tones for a few minutes, and then they separated and circled us. It was evident that they intended to rush us from different points simultaneously.

"We'll carry the battle to them, Tavia," I whispered. "When they have taken their positions around us, I shall give the word, and then I shall rush the one in front of me and try to dispatch him before the others can set upon us. Keep close beside me so that they cannot cut you off."

"Shoulder to shoulder until the end," she agreed sturdily.

GLANCING across my shoulder, I saw that the two circling to our rear were already farther away from us than he who

slow-witted beast, for as he saw us coming, his lower jaw dropped, and he just stood there, waiting to receive us; whereas if he had had any intelligence, he would have fallen back to give his fellows time to attack us from the rear.

As our swords crossed, I heard a savage growl from behind, such a growl as might issue from the throat of a wild beast. From the corner of my eye I saw Tavia glance back, and then before I could realize what she intended, she sprang forward and ran her sword through the body of the man in front of me as he lunged at me with his own weapon; and now, wheeling together, we faced the other two, who were running rapidly toward us; and I can assure you that it was with a feeling of infinite relief that I realized that the odds were no longer so greatly against us.

As the two engaged us, I was handicapped at first by the necessity of constantly keeping an eye upon Tavia, but not for long.

In an instant I realized that a master hand was wielding that blade. Its point

wove in and out past the clumsy guard of the savage; and I knew, and I guessed he must have sensed, that his life lay in the hollow of the little hand that gripped the hilt. Then I turned my attention to my own antagonist.

These were not the best swordsmen that I have ever met, but they were far from being poor swordsmen. Their defense, however, far excelled their offense; and this, I think, was due to two things—natural cowardice, and the fact that they usually hunted in packs, which far outnumbered the quarry. Thus a good defense only was required of them in a fight, since the death-blow might always be struck from behind by a companion of the one who engaged the quarry from in front.

NEVER before had I seen a woman fight, and I should have thought that I would have been chagrined to have one fighting at my side, but instead I felt a strange thrill, partly pride and partly something else that I could not analyze.

At first, I think, the fellow facing Tavia did not realize that she was a woman, but he must have soon, as the scant harness of Barsoom hides little, and certainly did not hide the rounded contours of Tavia's girlish body. Perhaps, therefore, it was surprise that was his undoing, or possibly when he discovered her sex he became overconfident; but at any rate Tavia slipped her point into his heart just an instant before I finished my man.

I cannot say that we were greatly elated over our victory. Each of us felt compassion for the poor creatures who had been reduced to their horrid state by the tyranny of cruel Tul Axtar—but it had been their lives or ours, and we were glad that it had not been ours.

As a matter of precaution, I took a quick look about us as the last of our antagonists fell, and I was glad that I had, for I immediately discerned three other creatures crouching at the top of a low hill not far distant.

"We are not done yet, Tavia," I said. "Look!" And I pointed in the direction of the three.

"Perhaps they do not care to share the fate of their fellows," she said. "They are not approaching."

"They can have peace if they want it, as far as I am concerned," I said. "Come, let us go on. If they follow us, then will be time enough to consider them."

As we walked on toward the north, we glanced back occasionally; and presently we saw the three rise and come down the hill toward the bodies of their slain fellows, and as they did so, we saw that they were women and that they were unarmed.

When they realized that we were departing and had no intention of attacking them, they broke into a run, and uttering loud, uncanny shrieks, raced madly toward the corpses.

"How pathetic!" said Tavia sadly. "Even these poor degraded creatures possess human emotions. They too can feel sorrow at the loss of loved ones."

"Yes," I said. "Poor things, I am sorry for them."

Fearing that in the frenzy of their grief they might attempt to avenge their fallen mates, we kept a close eye upon them, or we might not have witnessed the horrid sequel of the fray.

I wished that we had not!

When the three women reached the corpses they fell upon them, but not with weeping and lamentation—they fell upon them to devour them!

Sickened, we turned away and walked rapidly toward the north until long after darkness had descended.

WE felt that there was little danger of attack at night, since there were no savage beasts in a country where there was nothing to support them, and also that it was reasonable to assume that the hunting men would be abroad by day rather than by night, since at night they would be far less able to find quarry or follow it.

I suggested to Tavia that we rest for a short time and then push on for the balance of the night, find a place of concealment early in the day and remain there until night had fallen again, as I was sure that if we followed this plan we would make better time and suffer less exhaustion by traveling through the cool hours of darkness, and at the same time would greatly minimize the danger of discovery and attack by whatever hostile people lay between us and Gathol.

Tavia agreed with me, and so we rested for a short time, taking turns at sleeping and watching.

Later we pushed on, and I am sure that we covered a great distance before dawn, though the high hills to the north of us still looked as far away as they had upon the previous day.

We now set about searching for some

comfortable place of concealment where we might spend the daylight hours. Neither of us was suffering to any extent from either hunger or thirst, as the ancients would have done under like circumstances, for with the gradual diminution of water and vegetable matter upon Mars during countless ages, all her creatures have by a slow process of evolution been enabled to go for long periods without either food or drink, and we have also learned so to control our minds that we do not think of food or drink until we are able to procure it, which doubtless greatly assists us in controlling the cravings of our appetite.

After considerable search we found a deep and narrow ravine which seemed a most favorable place in which to hide; but scarcely had we entered it when I chanced to see two eyes looking down upon us from the summit of one of the ridges that flanked it. As I looked, the head in which the eyes were set was withdrawn below the summit.

"That puts an end to this place," I said to Tavia, telling her what I had seen. "We must look for a new sanctuary."

AS we emerged from the ravine at its upper end, I glanced back, and again I saw the creature looking at us, and once again he tried to hide himself from us. As we moved on, I kept glancing back, and occasionally I would see him—one of the hunting men of U-Gor. He was stalking us as the wild beast stalks its prey. The very thought of it filled me with disgust. Had he been a fighting man stalking us merely to kill, I should not have felt as I did, but the thought that he was stealthily trailing us because he desired to devour us was repellent—it was horrifying.

Hour after hour the thing kept upon our trail; doubtless he feared to attack because we outnumbered him, or perhaps he thought we might become separated, or lie down to sleep or do one of the number of things travelers might do which would give him the opportunity he sought; but after a while he must have given up hope. He no longer sought to conceal himself from us; and once, as he mounted a low hill, he stood there silhouetted against the sky, and throwing his head back, he gave voice to a shrill, uncanny cry that made the short hairs upon my neck stand erect. It was the hunting cry of the wild beast calling the pack to the kill.

I could feel Tavia shudder and press more closely to me, and I put my arm about her in a gesture of protection, and thus we walked on in silence for a long time.

TWICE again the creature voiced his uncanny cry until at last it was answered ahead of us and to the right.

Again we were forced to fight, but this time only two, and when we pushed on again, it was with a feeling of depression that I could not shake off—depression for the utter hopelessness of our situation.

At the summit of a higher hill than we had before crossed, I halted. Some tall weeds grew there. "Let us lie down here, Tavia," I said. "From here we can watch; let us be the watchers for a while. Sleep, and when night comes, we will move on."

She looked tired, and that worried me; but I think she was suffering more from the nervous strain of the eternal stalking than from physical fatigue. I know that it affected me, and how much more might it affect a young girl than a trained fighting man! She lay very close to me, as though she felt safer thus, and was soon asleep, while I watched.

From this high vantage-point I could see a considerable area of country about us, and it was not long before I detected figures of men prowling about like hunting banths, and often it was apparent that one was stalking another. There were at least a half dozen such visible to me at one time. I saw one overtake his prey and leap upon it from behind. They were at too great a distance from me for me to discern accurately the details of the encounter, but I judged that the stalker ran his sword through the back of his quarry and then, like a hunting banth, he fell upon his kill and devoured it. I do not know that he finished it, but he was still eating when darkness fell.

Tavia had had a long sleep and when she awoke she reproached me for having permitted her to sleep so long and insisted that I must sleep.

From necessity I have learned to do with little sleep when conditions are such that I cannot spare the time, though I always make up for it later; and I have also learned to limit my sleep to any length of time that I choose; so now I awoke promptly when my allotted time had elapsed, and again we set out toward far Gathol.

The great climax in this extraordinary adventure upon another planet occurs in the next installment—in our forthcoming September issue.



The author of "The White Conqueror" knows wild animals well and has here given us an even more vivid story of life and strife in the forest

By
**ALEXANDER
SPRUNT**

Illustrated by
Lee Townsend

War in the Wilderness

IT was very still on the outer beach. There was no breeze, and the broad fan-like leaves of the palmettos stood stiffly out above the latticed trunks as though carved in bronze. The sea-oats on the dunes drooped gracefully, their heavily seeded heads bending over as though tired of the inactivity which had characterized the day; the heat waves shimmered in a hazy dance above the sands, while a pallid sand crab, scurrying around a dune, seemed twice its normal size amid the ripply curtain of silently agitated air. It was late September in the low country and it was hot.

The surf made the only sound to be heard, and it was more of a murmur than a roar, for the breakers themselves seemed spiritless. Only the long ground-swell which heaved in from the limitless waters beyond the beach stirred them to action and they broke upon the sands in barely yard-high combers which reached lazily toward the semi-tropical jungle in a soothing undertone, intermittent, yet unceasing.

It seemed as though the whole low coastline was undergoing a process of petrification, when a startling interruption occurred. A speck appeared in the sky high over the surf, grew rapidly larger and took shape in another moment as a huge, dark-bodied,

white-headed bird. A high shrill whistling rush of air rose above the drone of the surf and the descending feathered meteor struck the water with a resounding splash while the spray leaped up about it in a snowy fountain of foam. An instant's commotion followed, then dark wings beat heavily and the white-headed diver rose slowly with a flashing silvery shape clutched tightly in black-taloned, yellow feet. Up it mounted, hovered a moment and with a heavy shake, threw the clinging drops from its feathers in a glittering shower, then wheeled around and flapped deliberately toward the beach. Silence fell again over the dunes; the palmettos stood rock-like and statuesque; the sea-oats drooped and the surf took up its interrupted murmur.

BESIDE a piece of driftwood near high-water mark, a sunburned, gray-eyed man lay back upon the sand and pulled a cap down over his face. Lying there, he watched from under the brim as the eagle carried his prey to a distant pine and as the big bird alighted there, spoke in an unhurried, musing tone.

"Whoever it was first called your kind the 'King o' Birds' was jest about correc', I guess," he murmured. "I've watched ye do that a many a time, an' can't yet see

how ye manage it. But ye're sure fitted for it, with that yaller beak and grippin' legs; what a fighter ye'd make, an' what wouldn't I give to see ye mix it up with some varmint o' this here low country! I'll bet a hat it would be some scrap an' I'm blamed if I know but what ye'd come out on top with mighty nigh any o' them."

Unconscious of this lauding of his powers, the old eagle proceeded to make short work of the bass he had taken in so masterly a manner. Holding it firmly under one armored foot, he bent over it to tear out large portions of the clear white flesh and swallow them unhurriedly, as befitted his royal station.

His appearance was regal beyond question. Large and powerful, he presented a contrast in darkest brown and snowy white which might well strike admiration from any observer. His body plumage was quite dark while his head and tail shone with a glistening purity which was the more intense by comparison. His eyes, under a jut of snowy brow, were piercing and intelligent, holding an expression of latent force of character in their depths which bespoke an indomitable spirit and inherent rulership.

He finished the fish and made an elaborate toilet, sitting back comfortably after doing so, to stare seaward with an inscrutable distance-piercing gaze. If he saw a far-away figure rise from the beach and walk off toward the inlet, he gave no sign, but sat gazing at the ocean as if fascinated by the sparkling waters.

THE winter which descended upon the low country was startling in its severity. After the sultry heat of September which, however, passed without a hurricane, October was pleasant enough, but November was ushered in by frigid blasts and icy rains which caused the negro marshmen to huddle about their cabin fires in numbed apathy and which bit into more substantial plantation homes than their rude dwellings. It had its effect too, upon the wild kindred of beach and woods—many of them saw snow for the first time in their lives.

To the old bald eagle of the barrier island, the cold mattered little. He was but slightly inconvenienced by it physically and rather welcomed the unusual conditions for it provided him with the most fruitful hunting he had ever known. The cold brought down the ducks in hundreds of thousands; always abundant during the winter months,

their numbers now were astounding and the eagle feasted in a manner which well became his rulership of marsh and beach. His attack was all but infallible; his tactics were inspiring and meteoric; his muscles, inured to heavy exercise, were like steel bands and his beak and talons razor-edged. He was in splendid condition, full-blooded, vigorous and ready for anything.

Late one December afternoon during a lull in the severe cold, he was swinging in magnificent circles over the marshes at a stupendous height. His patrol of the upper air above the island and mainland was one of the delights of his existence; he gloried in the rush of the cold about his swinging form; he rejoiced in the utter silence of the vast, empty void about him where not a whisper came to his ears. It was his, this blue infinity of sky—he knew it, and he reveled in the knowing.

HE was hungry now, however, for he had not eaten since early morning. The ducks had been quiet all day and he was watching. His snowy head bent downward, his eyes searching the vast panorama beneath with a gaze which missed nothing, he saw little flocks of sandpipers whirl above the oyster banks, a rail sneak through the marshes and a wandering mink slip among the reeds on murder bent; but he gave them not a moment's heed. He was looking for something else, and soon he saw it.

From the ocean side of the island, flying over the beach and headed toward the marshes, was the speeding form of a coal-black, heavy-bodied scoter, or surf duck. It was an evil genius which had prompted the drake to leave the sea and wing over toward the sounds of the back beach, for no sooner had it cleared the treeline than the watcher in the sky caught sight of the sable form against the drab background of the marsh.

A quick glow shot into the eagle's wonderful eyes; his head bent lower and his wings closed. Down he shot, a thousand feet or more, then checked himself and with hurried thrusts of his big wings, drove forward in a line parallel to the drake but still high above. Forging slowly ahead of the unsuspecting scoter, he gave one rapid calculating glance ahead and downward, and began his stoop. Throwing his body slightly forward, he drew his head in, hardened his plumage, half closed the mighty wings and pitched downward at a long angle. His speed, which had been consid-

erable at the outset, grew more pronounced each second. The rushing air about him rose to a thin strident wail; the marshes hurtled upward to meet him as with breath-taking velocity, he plunged with every ounce of his energy toward his prey. It was magnificent, that dive through space!

The angle between him and the drake grew sharper; the gap which separated them closed with inconceivable rapidity; and the unfortunate victim never saw the doom which smote it like a thunderbolt. The shrill whistling of its own wings muffled the song of the eagle's descent, and in full career, with the waters of the sound just ahead now, the surf duck was suddenly



*As the wildcat shot outward,
the eagle whirled, and saw that
gray doom in the air.*

blotted out by that hurtling death above him. Huge feet, knobbed and clutching, struck into his back and sides; a crashing impact dashed out his life before the brain reacted to the sensory impulses. His head snapped back, his short wings dropping limply, like a suddenly arrested fan.

Still shooting downward under the impetus of his speed, the eagle spread his wings and checked the descent, leveling off his course. Finding himself near the wooded edge of the mainland, he swung along the shoreline and headed into a wide bay reaching back into the trees and fringed by a strip of muddy sand. A fallen pine tree, its limbs making a tangled mass of debris upon this open stretch, attracted him, and he veered toward it, alighting on the sand some yards aside. He stood there for a moment, his head high, his fierce gaze roaming along the strand; then he stooped toward the limp body in his talons.

TWO men pushed through the screen of myrtles along the shoreline where the woods of the mainland met the marshes.

One was tall and gray-eyed, dressed in plain corduroy; the other wore a modish outfit of khaki, leather hunting-boots and carried a fine shotgun beneath his arm. He was the first to speak.

"Well, I'm tired," he announced. "We'll just sit down a while and take it easy. I'll get no turkey this afternoon—it's too late and the light is failing in the woods."

"All right," returned the other. "Step back to that old log in the grass and we'll set a spell. Can't see where the turkeys hev gone to; I'd ha' sworn that they were here this mornin'."

They turned toward the half-concealed log and sank down upon it heavily, the sportsman leaning his gun aside with a sigh. Perhaps a quarter of an hour passed in silence; then the gray-eyed man, evidently a guide, touched the other's arm.

"Ssh-h!" he whispered. "Don't move, but look out there on the trunk o' that windfall on the shore, near the end! That's why we've seen no turkeys!"

Looking as he was bidden, the other saw, and his eyes widened. There, on the old

pine trunk, stretched at full length and staring through the bare branches out over the marsh, was a long-bodied, gray-furred animal, its sides marked with blackish spots, its short stub tail twitching jerkily.

"Wildcat," breathed the hunter. "A fine one, too; he'll make up for what he's lost us."

He reached silently for his gun and brought it to the front cautiously. The guide, who had been following the line of the cat's vision, suddenly put out his hand, shook his head, and nodded toward the marsh.

"Out there," he murmured. "Never mind the gun, an' we'll see somethin' that I've waited on for a long time. There'll be time to pot the cat later."

Wonderingly, his companion laid aside the gun and peered outward. Low down over the reeds, headed straight for the windfall, came a huge white-headed bird; dangling loosely from its clenched feet was the body of a duck, head and wings trailing limply in the air.

The men watched silently, their muscles tensing, as the eagle swung into the bay and alighted close to the fallen pine. They saw him stand with motionless head for a moment, and then bend downward toward its prey. Instantly their eyes shifted to the windfall. Crouched against the trunk, all but invisible now against the bleached and furrowed surface, was the wildcat, its eyes flaming green with the lust of desire and anticipation. Almost as they looked, it left the pine like a gray streak, arched into the air, forepaws extended and mouth open.

Perhaps its claws had scratched the trunk too loudly as it sprang; perhaps a shadow fell across the ground, although the sun was low; perhaps some inner prompting warned him—but, as the cat shot outward, the eagle whirled with jerking head, and saw that gray doom in the air.

THERE was no time for flight, if indeed he thought of it at all. He was attacked in his lawful occupation, his life was in immediate danger, and a consuming rage lit his veins in a flooding surge at this startling interruption. Its suddenness, however, gave him no time for plan of action and his first move was purely automatic. As the cat crashed downward, the eagle sidestepped neatly and threw open his left wing. It smote the animal fairly in the face; an amazed snarl burst from it as it struck the empty ground, while its eyes

smarted painfully where the stiff tips of the feathers had brushed across them. While it hesitated momentarily, a strong hooked beak gashed its hindquarters.

Enraged at the failure of its initial leap, this effrontery drove all caution from the gray marauder's brain. It screeched, a high discordant note, whirled like a flash and darted at the eagle in a rush. The latter met the onslaught all standing, again bringing his wing into action. Holding it half closed, he brought it swiftly around in a sweeping, short-arm movement and the bend of it, hard and angular, caught the cat full in the face again. It stumbled heavily, and in falling reached out an armored paw in a vicious swing which tore through the breast feathers of the eagle, but barely scratched the skin beneath. Again it had failed.

That a mere bird could treat him thus was past all comprehension. True, it was such a bird as he had never encountered before but it did not appear to be much larger than the big bronzed turkeys which were such easy prey. A turkey was no fighter, but as for this bird—he was learning something. Rage overcame wonderment, however, and regaining his feet, he screeched again, a mingled protest of anger and amazement.

The eagle did not follow up his blow but stood waiting and ready. For a moment the cat crouched, its eyes glaring madly, then in a short straight rush, charged headlong. Just as it all but reached the bird, the cat swerved slightly, ducked like a streak and turned toward the eagle's flank. The move was a distinct success, for the bird was upset in an instant, flapping and struggling. Quick to seize the advantage, the wildcat pounced and closed his jaws about the body of the eagle just behind his head. Then, on that muddy beach, a titanic struggle raged. Over and over, with now the cat on top, now the eagle, they fought, smote and tore with beak and talon until the very air was dotted with swirling feathers and bits of grayish fur. In their mad gyrations they brought up full against the windfall and the shock of the impact loosened their holds.

Rolling apart, they struggled to their feet, panting and disheveled. Both bore bloody streaks and gashes; both were muddy and bedraggled, but in each pair of eyes the undiminished light of battle gleamed. For perhaps half a minute there was utter silence, then creeping forward,

belly to ground, the wildcat leaped once more. As it left the ground, the eagle suddenly threw himself upon his back and elevated his spread feet. Down upon those steel-like talons crashed the attacker and upon its unprotected belly they closed in a viselike grip. Perfect pandemonium reigned; in mortal pain the wildcat snarled and spit convulsively, all but drowning out the high-pitched yelping of the eagle.

With hurried frenzied grabbings the cat reached for the eagle's throat, but it twisted and looped away from him with incredible quickness. Disengaging one clutching foot, the eagle began raking and slashing at the weight above him with his razor claws while crimson flow from his adversary's wounds poured over him in a cataract. In such a position the fight could not last long. Despite the frantic doublings of his head the eagle could not ward off that burrowing search of the cat's jaws, and the latter was being rapidly disemboweled. Suddenly, the white head of the bird sank backward, his thrashing wings collapsed and his tense body relaxed limply. Still snarling hoarsely, the wildcat had found its mark, and tore savagely at the now unresisting form beneath him. In a moment or two his movements lessened and silence came.

Slowly, deliberately, they rolled apart. The cat struggled to his feet, with streaming flanks, his belly cut to ribbons. Suddenly he too collapsed, only to rise and stagger toward the trees. Ten feet away he stopped again, stood swaying on his feet, then, with a sagging motion, rolled over and lay still. A long shudder rippled the gray fur, the big padded feet stretched out convulsively, quivered a moment and sank softly downward.

The two fascinated watchers on the log turned toward each other speechless. Then they rose and walked outward; the sportsman was the first to speak.

"I'd never have believed it if I hadn't seen it," he said in an awed voice. "I can hardly believe it yet."

The guide stood staring at the body of the eagle, a strange light in his eyes. Then he too spoke.

"Ye did it, by gum," he said intensely. "Ye did it, an' though ye lost your own life, I'm takin' off my hat to ye."

The other went over to the body of the cat, marveling at the work of the eagle's claws; they had done their work well. Suddenly he turned toward the guide once more.

"I've had something settled by this thing," he said decisively. "For a long time I've been wondering what to give to the zoölogical park of my home city. Others, my friends, have made donations but I waited to be sure of what mine would be. Now I know; I want an eagle, and I want one from the low country. You are the man to get it for me; it means something fat in your pocket. Are you on?"

The guide looked at him silently for a moment.

"Yes," he said finally, "I'm on. I can get ye a young one, just ready to fly. Ol' Baldy here was a bachelor, but there's other eagles hereabouts, and I guess I can suit you; but"—he turned again toward the still form on the bloody sand—"I'll bet there never was, and never will be a bigger scrapper in feathers than he was!"

ON a beautiful morning six months later, Tom Murrell rowed slowly down the winding creek with the ebbing tide.

Often that spring and frequently during the latter part of the winter he had thought of that epic struggle on the shoreline by the windfall, and his promise to the sportsman patron of his was never far from his mind. Tom was a low-country product; he made his living by trapping, guiding hunters from the north, and planting a little in the summer. Some would have thought his life a lonely one, but it never occurred to Tom that such was his lot. He lived in a little cabin amid a rustling grove of palmettos, happy with his dog and a pet raccoon, and was only lonely when he made infrequent trips to the city, some forty miles away.

He had concluded that the time had come when he must be about his commission and packing his rod and reel into the skiff, he was dropping down to the barrier island with the double purpose of catching a couple of channel bass, and doing a bit of survey work for a larger order. The marsh life was much in evidence and Tom, thoroughly familiar with all forms of it, rowed slowly, dipping the oars deliberately as he reveled in the sights and sounds of a low-country spring morning on the coast.

He reached the inlet all too soon—for he had enjoyed the trip more than ever—and beaching the boat, he walked up the sands around the point, and in a few moments was standing in the wash of the breakers, ready and waiting for a strike. His success was fair, though not spectacular. Two



The eaglet, in terrified retreat, all but fell from the nest in frantic efforts to back farther away.

six-pound bass took the hook, and he stopped after landing them. They were enough for his use, and depositing his rod upon a drift log, he wandered on down the beach and lay down under a stunted cedar, pulling his hat over his eyes. Falling into a doze, he slept for nearly an hour. It was a high, shrill whistle overhead which awoke him, and shifting his hat, not moving otherwise, he gazed upward, alert and watchful. Beyond the surf line, and perhaps fifty feet above the water, was an osprey, hovering on heavily flapping wings.

HOPEFUL of the outcome of that preliminary survey, for such it was, Tom waited expectantly. The fishing tactics of the wide-winged bird always interested him, and it was a source of never-ceasing wonder how such a large bird could remain absolutely stationary in the air while the wings beat so vigorously. For perhaps ten seconds the osprey hung suspended; then the wings closed suddenly, it pitched forward, and shot downward with increasing velocity toward the sea. It was inspiring, that descent from the air, it was masterly, and it was successful. The big bird crashed

into the water amid a leaping fountain of spray which all but obscured it for a moment, then rose again with a gleaming, silvery shape clutched in its talons. Some ten feet up, the fish hawk shook himself, the whirling drops scattering in all directions, and shifting the grip upon the fish, brought in a line parallel with his body, and flapped away.

Before the osprey had flown a hundred yards, Tom sat upright with a sharp exclamation of satisfaction. Descending from far above, with lightning speed, a feathered projectile was shooting downward toward the unsuspecting fisher-bird. Cleanly through the sun-drenched atmosphere came that living spearhead. The gap between the two closed so quickly that Tom hardly realized that it had been there a moment before. He saw that hurtling form spread huge dark wings, saw the sun gleam like silver upon an outstretched, snowy head and extended tail.

A high, faint yelp drifted thinly downward to the beach; those mighty wings buffeted the air in swirling cross-currents; there was a flashing turn, and the eagle zoomed by the frightened osprey in a sweeping half circle, crying shrilly. The latter, in startled amazement at the hurricane suddenness of the onslaught, veered aside, dropped straight downward like a stone, and swung away at a wide tangent. The eagle followed as closely, however, as

filings do a magnet. On top, at the sides, underneath, the white-headed attacker swirled, darted at and buffeted the now terrified fish hawk unmercifully, and threw it into absolute panic. Not knowing at what moment the knife-edged talons might strike into its side, it did the one thing possible at once. Disengaging its claws from the fish, the osprey dodged once more, whistled loudly in mingled fear and anger, and flapped away with empty talons.

DOWN, down, down went that silver shape, turning over and over in its fall, but it did not reach the water. Closing his mighty wings, the eagle dropped like a plummet, his great talons spread like grasping fingers, there was a quick thrust, and the dark pinions opened widely, catching the air in a vibrant hum of stiffened feathers. And as he zoomed upward, the fish was carried aloft once more, twice a victim now, while the latest captor, heading toward the beach, passed over the watching man with royal, deliberate flight.

Tom gazed after the big bird with satisfaction written large upon his face. He knew that the eagle was on his way to the nest in the big pine back in the jungle.

It was the man's purpose to examine this nest tree carefully—this was why he had come to the beach that day. He had known of it for years, and though he had passed it on several occasions in his trapping, had never made a particularly critical survey of it.

Almost as soon as the eagle had disappeared over the trees, Tom rose from the sand, and entering the jungle, made his way toward the nest. Pushing through the thick growth, and making occasional use of the paths trodden by semi-wild hogs and goats which roamed the island, he finally came out upon the shores of a small, still lagoon, closely rimmed about by the luxuriant vegetation. The huge pine which held the nest towered overhead, and having some trouble in viewing it from where he stood, he walked around the edge, and gazed at it from another angle. After a short survey, he decided on his only means of approach, and took mental stock of what he would need. The pine was a living tree, fully one hundred feet high, and the nest reposed in a crotch no less than seventy feet from the ground. For sixty feet, or more, the straight, soaring trunk was devoid of limbs, a rearing majestic column coated with furrowed plates of bark.

Clumps of myrtle and buck-thorn clothed the base of the giant tree, and at one side, nearly touching it, grew a stout sapling.

Gazing upward, the man could see one of the parent birds upon the nest, staring out over the jungle, and occasional glimpses of the two young proved that it was high time for him to act, for they looked fully capable of leaving the nest at any day.

Tom decided to make the climb the next morning.

Turning about, he retraced his steps toward the beach, coming out on the glaring sands and heading toward the boat. He did not know, as he strode unconcernedly down the beach, that, for a quarter of an hour, he had stood within a foot of death. For, as he was confidently examining the tree and making his plans, he had not noticed a low stump, half buried in the grasses at his right knee. Much less had he noticed that which crowned the top of that ancient stump, for if he had, his exit from the spot would have been precipitate, and not unmixed with fearful risk. As it was, he had stood quietly, making no sudden movement, while a huge rattlesnake had stared at him with coldly blazing eyes, no more than fourteen inches from his legs.

THE serpent had heard the man's approach, and was ready. Tom stopped, however, in the position described, and the snake, full fed and aware of the fact that his presence was unknown to the man, had remained absolutely motionless. One hostile gesture, however, any sudden movement on the part of the preoccupied man, would have set that lightning head in motion, and that distance, nothing could have resulted but stark tragedy. And then Tom had moved away, the bushes ceased to tremble from his passing and the mighty coils had slowly relaxed, the eyes grew less intent and blazing, as the momentous crisis passed.



The tide was slack, and Tom rowed slowly back up the creek, the breeze from the ocean aiding him. Making fast to his landing, he stepped ashore, receiving a vociferous welcome from the dog, and a less audible one from the coon. He prepared his noonday meal, sharing generously with his pets, each of whom retired to a selected corner. After cleaning up, Tom delved into a closet on the back porch of the house, making a pile of certain tools and implements, and taking a saw, proceeded to cut up numerous lengths of some stout planks. These preparations took some time, and it was late when he had finished. Taking his cast net, he went down-creek a short way, and procured a plate of shrimp together with a few silvery mullet.

SUPPER over, he sat on a bench by the creek, and loading his pipe, propped his back against a palmetto trunk, while he watched the sunset over the marshes. It was a time of day which Tom liked well, and with good reason. It was delightfully cool, the softly changing play of color in the western sky glowed and pulsed with varying hues of pink and gold. The drowsy notes of birds, settling for the night, came faintly to his ears, the whistle of a plover or a sandpiper echoed sweetly in the gathering dust. Just before the glow in the west died out, a file of curlews passed, their outstretched necks and flickering wings etched in living silhouette against the palely radiant clouds. As a chuck-wills-widow began its clear-cut chant from a near-by live-oak, Tom rose and went slowly toward the house. Shortly afterward, he stepped over to a cabin in the neighborhood, and enlisted the aid of a negro who often helped him in his trapping, telling him to be on hand at dawn the next morning. . . .

It was early when Tom breakfasted, and upon Henry's appearance, they set out at once. A crocus sack held the tools; it made as convenient a receptacle as the nature of the implements admitted, and constituted an important item in itself, as it was to be used in bringing back the eagle. Another beautiful day favored the effort, but no time was lost in gaining the beach. The trip to the nest tree was a warm one. The jungle was hot and steamy; before the lagoon was reached, both men were aware that the sack was very heavy and very awkward, but they struggled doggedly on, and arrived at the pine drenched with perspiration. Throwing down the sack,

they lay for a few moments regaining their wind, then emptied the contents on the ground and set to work.

Bidding Henry clear away some of the underbrush at the base of the tree, Tom arranged the short pieces of plank, and taking a hatchet, drove into each piece, at the center, three stout nails in a triangle, just far enough that their points protruded from the under side. He then cut down the sapling by the pine, and leaned it against the massive trunk. Taking off his shoes, he clambered up the sloping incline, and held out an arm to receive the short length of rope which Henry tossed upward. Clinging with one hand, he threw an end of the rope around the pine, and, after several failures, seized it as it flicked by him, and drew it around his waist. Tying it securely, he now had a loop around himself and the tree, allowing him to lean backward, and work with both hands free.

Unrolling a stout line from a ball carried in his pocket, he lowered the end to Henry who attached to it one of the lengths of plank, looping the line about the nails. Tom drew it up, and reaching as high above his head as possible, held the plank against the trunk, taking his hatchet from his belt with the other hand, and driving the nails into the pine trunk. Thus a stout cross-piece was affixed, and testing it carefully, he drew himself upward by pulling on the plank, eased the rope loop over either end, and threw one leg, then the other over it. Crossing his feet on the other side of the trunk, he sat securely on the plank, the rope loop holding him in the manner of a lineman at work on a pole. At least four feet higher now, he again lowered the line to Henry, who made fast another cleat, and the performance was repeated. He had only to climb to the one just fixed, lower the line and go through it again.

THE method was slow and tedious, but perfectly safe. It was really the only secure way of climbing the tall straight-trunked pines and cypresses, and Tom had often made use of it. The regular spiked climbing irons, as affected by linemen, he could never use successfully. They bothered him more than they helped, and he had long since ceased to try them, and clung to the cleating process. Henry, as his helper, was perfectly aware of his duties on the ground, and though consistently and steadfastly refusing to climb himself, was always willing to be of aid below. His aid

was indispensable, as Tom could not hope to achieve success alone.

He went upward slowly; haste would only be risky, and he had the day before him. It took him a long while to reach the first limb, but once there, the rest was easy. Here he had to discontinue the use of his rope loop, as the limbs made it useless, and he loosened it from the tree. Somewhat tired, and very warm, he straddled the limb, and viewed the panorama below with admiring eyes. The whole of the curving beach, the leafy roof of the jungle and the limitless ocean lay before him, and the breeze, which had hitherto not been felt to any extent, was cool and refreshing.

OF the eagles he had seen but little. Both had been at the nest when he commenced the climb, but the male had betaken himself away almost at the outset, while the larger, and braver female had done little more than circle about with protesting cries. Thoroughly rested, Tom climbed the remaining distance with no trouble, and swung himself on one of the limbs which supported the nest. Huge it was, measuring fully eight feet across the top, and six feet high. It was composed mainly of heavy sticks, clods, and grasses, lined with a liberal quantity of gray moss, and downy feathers. Fishbones and heads lay about the rim.

The two occupants backed away as far as they could, and stood in perturbed attitude, wings drooping, and heads thrust forward. Their fiercely glowing eyes, under beetling brows, stared at the strange intruder with a truculent, questioning gaze, and Tom saw that he had come just in time, for they looked perfectly capable of both flight and fight. He again lowered the line to the waiting negro, and promptly hauled up the sack. Crawling onto the nest, which supported his weight without a tremor, he made a sudden swoop at the nearest eaglet, and enveloped the astonished bird in the coarse folds. The other, in terrified retreat, all but fell from the nest in frantic efforts to back farther away, clinging with tightly clutching talons to the edge. Reaching carefully, Tom secured the feet of his captive with one hand, and with considerable difficulty, drew the sack over its head and body, the big wings causing him much trouble.

The exertion made him hot once more, and tying the mouth of the bag, he sat back panting. After a few moments, he

called to Henry to stand by, and lifting his wriggling burden over the nest rim, lowered away carefully. It was with marked relief that he saw it near the ground, and finally come to rest safely at the base of the tree. Releasing the line, he sat back once more, as a shout from below reached him.

"Oh-ho, Mas' Tom!" came thinly. "Ah done forgit de lunch, suh. Ef you wanta eat h'yuh, Ah mus' go to de boat fuh 'um."

Now, Tom's morning work had rendered him ready for food, and he had intended refreshing himself immediately upon descending the tree, so he called to Henry in emphatic tones to make the trip back to the boat at once, and return with the lunch with as small delay as possible. He remained aloft until he saw his faithful retainer emerge from the jungle, and proceed down the beach. Giving one last look around, he lowered himself to the first cross-piece, and went down one after the other, in far less time than he came up. It was when he reached the leaning sapling, only about nine feet from the ground, when it happened: He could not account for it himself—either his foot slipped, the sapling shifted its position, or he released the cross-piece too soon. At any rate, he suddenly felt himself going, and a quick grab at the cleat failing, he bumped heavily against the trunk, swung around, and fell to the ground with a mighty thud.

As the soil was soft, fortunately, the greater part of the force was broken, but he lay for a moment or two, absolutely motionless, the breath all but knocked out of him. He wondered vaguely whether he could move if he tried, and no sooner had the thought struck him, then he put it into operation. Slowly flexing his knees, he drew his feet toward his body. At that instant, he heard something—a sharp, dry sound; a high-pitched, whirring, insistent vibration. He turned his head aside with a jerk, a sharp inhalation whistling between his teeth, and his eyes grew wide with horror at what he saw. Not three feet away, tensed in compact, lustrous coils, was a huge rattlesnake.

AS sunrise broke over the island that morning, the old rattlesnake who lived by the lagoon was resting atop his stump. He had foraged most of the night, and his hunting had been but indifferently successful. He was still hungry, and rather short-tempered as a result. His appetite at last driving him to continue his search, he left

the stump just about the time that Tom and Henry landed on the island. Gliding into the jungle, he made his way through the bushes on the alert for whatever might chance his way and as he went, he ran into the nest of a brooding yellow-throat.

The little olive-green bird dashed off the nest just as the snake's head appeared over the rim, and the sudden movement irritated him instantly. Coiling at once, he vibrated his rattle noisily, but nothing happening, he slid toward the grassy home and saw that it contained four partly fledged young birds. This put him in a better humor, and though they were but a taste, he devoured them on the spot. The rest of the morning proved a complete blank, and it was some hours later when he neared the vicinity of the pine which held the eagle's nest. As he cruised through the underbrush, an opening in the bushes allowed him a clear view of the ground at the base of the pine, and there he saw something which riveted his interest.

In clumsy, spasmodic jumps, a shapeless bulky object was moving about near the trunk of the big tree. Proceeding toward it, he stopped at the edge of the undergrowth and examined it carefully. He gained nothing by this scrutiny—the object continued its intermittent antics, and thoroughly intrigued, he moved closer, then stopped again. A scraping, bumping sound came suddenly from above; he drew back in quick readiness just as a falling shape thudded to the ground between him and the queer bundle. Coiled and waiting, he tensed himself for attack, watching the motionless form intently, with his glittering eyes. Not until Tom Murrell drew his knees upward did the snake move, but at that instant he sprung his rattle, making known his deadly presence. Tom, turning his head instantly at that ominous sound, looked full into the rattlesnake's eyes.

THE man was frozen with an overwhelming, tremendous import of disaster. Utterly incapable of movement because of the stark suddenness of the frightful reptile's warning, and the sight of it literally in his face, he realized, even in that awful moment, that any movement would but bring that envenomed head toward him like a flash of light. He lived an age in the next fleeting second. Every detail of that sight was etched upon his brain by the acid of impotent futility, waiting for those darting fangs. His eyes seemed riveted to those of

the snake, the rest of the body and that vibrating rattle being as nothing. Rock-like in its immobility, huge, flattened, that mighty head seemed a fit setting for those infinitely malignant and implacable eyes which stared piercingly into his.

A creeping thrill, an inward, shrinking convulsion seemed to flow over him like a wave. How long would it be? Why did not the snake strike and be done with it? He wanted to shout, to scream; an insane impulse seized him to reach forth, and grasp that scaly neck, to choke, shake and rend it with his hands. Perhaps ten seconds passed, no more, though he would never have believed that so much agony could be endured in so short a length of time. Just as he felt himself slipping into a yawning pit of blackness, he saw those terrible eyes waver, glance aside, and that nightmarish head dart outward, only to spring back, as a lithe black and white shape flashed between the man and the rattling demon on the leaves.

Forgetting his fall, Tom seized the opportunity to escape. With a mighty effort, he rolled away, turned over and over, and scrambled to his knees some six or eight feet distant, then climbed to his feet to stare in unutterable amazement at what was taking place before him. Whirling about, thrashing, writhing and twisting, his recent nemesis was locked in deadly conflict with another serpent.

WHEN the snake had sprung his fateful rattle at the first movement of the prostrate man, it had been heard by other ears than Tom's. Several yards away, in a thick clump of myrtles, a trim narrow head protruded through an opening in the leaves, and after remaining quite motionless for a moment, came softly outward, as a long, graceful body slid into the open. Of a lustrous black, the stranger was beautifully marked with a regular pattern of white, chain-like cross bands, which stood out vividly against the dark background of his body. With no hesitation in his going, the king-snake proceeded straight toward the sound of that whirring rattle.

Of all the dwellers of the coast, his kind alone feared nothing in the sight and sound of the rattler. That fateful warning meant nothing to him except a possible indulgence of his appetite, and while he did not go out of his way to attack venomous serpents, the king-snake was very hungry now, and he meant to satisfy himself.

Gliding rapidly through the bushes, he peered through the screen to see the rattlesnake in his tense attitude of readiness. Not seeing, or at least not noticing, the figure of the man, the big black-and-white watcher drew back slightly, made a nearer approach, and emerged from the thicket in a quick dash, straight at the unsuspecting rattler. The latter, on the very verge of launching his attack on Tom, saw that slim shape coming, shifted his intended mark, and darted at the king-snake instead.

BUT, expecting such an action, the other dodged—dodged so quickly that the eye could scarce follow the movement, and though it was slight, it was enough. The rattlesnake missed his target by an inch, and the blow lost itself in space, while in the interval of regaining himself, the king-snake was upon him. Knowing that a strong hold was necessary, the attacker struck hard, and struck true. With open jaws, that slim black head flashed outward, and closed with a clamping grip about the upper neck of the rattlesnake, just behind the head.

In a series of writhing plunges, he whipped and thrashed about in a tempest of rage at this unprecedented action. With all the power of his whipcord muscles he strove to break that clinging hold upon his neck, and in violent contortions sent dirt and leaves into the air in swirling clouds. The king-snake was a large one, fully six feet in length, and immediately sought to bring his powers of constriction into play by throwing coils about the rattlesnake. This, however, he found very difficult to do, as his antagonist fought with such spirited force as to all but break the hold on his neck, and so the king-snake hung on doggedly, awaiting a cessation of activity.

At length, in a supreme effort to break away, the rattlesnake momentarily ceased the loopings of his body, and instantly a coil whipped about him near the tail. Again wild confusion reigned, and by main strength, the rattler succeeded in shaking loose that tight clutch. Not only did he free his tail, but the violent jerk tore his neck from the king-snake's jaws, and like a flash of lightning, the rattler struck his terrible fangs into the other's body. Again and again, darted that venomous head, and each time found its mark. And to what purpose? None at all, for the silent, chain-marked fighter was entirely immune to snake poison.

During those futile lungings, and injection of the venom, the effort of the rattlesnake in delivering the blows left an opening which the king-snake seized at once. Just above, and around the middle of the body, which for the time being was not moving, he wound his sinuous grip, and contracting the muscles strongly, pulled backward with a rapid motion, straightening out the rattlesnake so quickly that he was enveloped before he realized it.

A fresh outburst of struggling followed this drastic maneuver, but the rattler was sorely hampered now, and in his spasmodic twitchings managed to entangle the lower half of his body in the looping coils of the king-snake. They closed instantly, inexorably, and tightened convulsively. With all the considerable power at his command, the king-snake closed his coils, the shining skin rippling and sliding with the effort. The rattler was hopelessly in the toils, and his movements became weaker and weaker as that terrible pressure continued.

Smaller and smaller grew the height of his loopings, the pressure increased, the bodies became as rigid as though carved in marble; then suddenly everything was still. Tom watched with staring eyes as the bodies ceased to writhe, saw the tense muscular contractions of his black-and-white deliverer slowly ease, tighten again, then finally fall away. Limp and inert lay that diamond-patterned shape, and just as the victor disengaged his coils from about the tail of *Crotalus*, he flicked the end of it, which, striking against a tree root, sounded one last echo of that dreaded rattle.

SOMETHING like a sigh broke from the watching man. He straightened and stepped toward the sack which held the eagle. The king-snake, seeing the movement, raised his head, stared fixedly at the man, and drew quickly back into the myrtles. Tom lifted the sack, gazed for a long moment at the still shape on the ground before him, shivered slightly and turned toward the lagoon. Walking a few steps, he stopped again and laying down the sack, opened his knife. Returning to the body of the rattlesnake, he bent over it for a moment, then rose and dropped something into his pocket.

Picking up the sack once more he turned toward the beach, and as he walked, the bushes, catching at his clothes, caused an occasional muffled "*chick-chick-chick*," to sound about him as he went.

Ducktooth Says It With Shotguns

By ARTHUR K. AKERS

WILLIE FREEMAN'S big trouble was a wife—"Ducktooth" Carnes' wife. Emma Carnes, newly come to Baptist Hill as a bride, was the color of a chocolate cake, and thought Willie the cat's shower-bath. Willie operated under Home Rule and didn't think anything. But instinct told him his own wife Beulah would convert him into the main ingredient for a funeral if she knew of Emma's feelings toward him or suspected they were reciprocated—while he didn't need telling what the recently arrived Emma didn't know yet: that the jealously disposed Ducktooth was champion shot of Demopolis when it came to firing at a moving object with a shotgun. Willie didn't crave to be the moving object. . . .

Willie sidled into his clothes-pressing parlor on Strawberry Street to resume the day's labors with a hot goose and cold feet. It was January, and the escaping steam from Willie's ironing-board helped his stove to make the establishment popular with the unemployed of his race.

"How de lodge gittin' on, Latham?" one full-time loafer raised a fruitful topic with another as Willie closed his door and threw more coal into his stove. One hundred and ten degrees was Willie's idea of the right indoor temperature in winter.

He paused to hear Latham Hooper's answer. Mr. Hooper was treasurer of his lodge, a fact which kept the other lodge brethren worried.

"Gwine do fine," retorted Latham easily. "Us fixin' git up a ben'fit fo' de treas'ry."

"Ol' treas'ry need somep'n to offset dat crap-game you put on fo' hit las' week," his interrogator became unpleasant. "Treas'rer dat other lodge done won all ouah lodge's money."

"Dat aint gwine make no diff'ence," Latham hastened to shift the subject. "Gwine git all dat back an' mo' wid dis

heah ben'fit whut us gwine put on right away fo' de lodge."

"Ben'fitin' who?"

"Shootin'-match," Latham ignored this thrust. "Gittin' up big one fo' prizes. Charges admission an' take in a wagon-load."

Willie winced. Talking about shooting reminded him of Ducktooth.

"Shootin' at whut?" he inquired as he tested his iron with a moistened fingertip.

"Target. Boy whut hits de bull's-eye gits free 'stiffkit in de buryin' society, good fo' one fun'ral."

Willie shuddered some more. The sequence was too life-like: first talking about shooting, and then about a funeral!

"Dey shoots wid rifles, at hund'ed yahds," elaborated Latham.

Willie breathed a lot easier. Ducktooth hospitalized his victims at a hundred feet with a muzzle-loading shotgun that fired anything up to and including broken glass and small gravel.

THE door opened, and Willie's mouth emulated it. For standing in it was the lady whose unrequited admiration of himself kept him in hot water.

"Mawnin', Miz Carnes!" he greeted her gallantly nevertheless. "Whut can I do fo' good-lookin'est lady in town dis mawnin'?"

"I done fotch over Ducktooth's pants to git press'," she responded coyly.

Willie inspected the proffered garment in some perplexity.

"Dese heah britches aint been wo' none since I press 'em yesdiddy," he voiced his findings.

Emma leaned over the counter. "Dat's de onliest way I gits to see you," she breathed; "carryin' clo'es in heah to git press'!"

"Aint got no bullet-proof vest," Willie explained his absence from the Carnes



Wherein a dark William Tell is scheduled to shoot an apple from the head of his dearest enemy—and thereupon many exciting events ensue.

Illustrated
by Everett Lowry

"Whut 'bout Willie Freeman?" Ducktooth demanded, "cuz I to see him round dis alley. I enlarges he pores wid dis trench-mortar!"

alley. "Dat Ducktooth shoots first an' int'duces he-se'f aftwa'd."

"Aw, big man like you aint skeered of no Ducktooth!" his caller giggled.

"Naw, I aint skeered—I's jes' thin-skinned," returned Willie. "Aint got no time pick all dat glass an' rusty nails out hit when I gits home, is all. Boy whut's got good-lookin' wife like Ducktooth is, is jes' natu'ally 'blegged to be a good shot!"

"Well, keep de stove fires bu'nin', Willie," Latham interrupted them here. "I's got git out an' write up de signs fo' de big shootin'-match now."

"Whut dat boy mean, shootin'-match?" questioned Emma when he was gone.

Willie told her.

"Wid rifles, you says?"

"Dat whut Latham say."

"Dat let somebody else have chance to win, den," Emma reflected aloud. "I aint know whut kind shot he is, but Ducktooth aint use nothin' but dat po'table cannon of his'n when he do shoot."

LATHAM HOOPER ordinarily dashed off a sign with no more effort than another man would employ in mining a ton of coal with a dull pick. Nothing could

have been more attractive to him, therefore, than the apparently harmless proposal which developed from a conversation with Frisco Johnson, whom he encountered on the sidewalk a short distance from Willie's place. Frisco, just returned from Birmingham, was full of a movie he had seen.

"White gent'man in shawt pants wid rooster feather in he cap," Frisco sketched what had impressed him, "git hisse'f a bow an' arrer. Some mo' white folks whut look like dey mad at him git he li'l boy an' stick one dem winesap apples on de boy's haid. Den de daddy wid de shawt pants got to shoot de apple off de boy's haid widout hittin' him. Sho is swell picture! Ev'ybody clap an' holler when de daddy hit de winesap 'stead of de boy."

"Dat de boy's worries," Latham brushed the movie review aside. "I's got whole passel trouble gittin' up signs fo' de big lodge shootin'-match heah."

"Huccome shootin'-match?"

Latham's elucidation seemed to hit Frisco just right and in a brand-new place.

"Let *me* make dem signs fo' you, big boy. I uses de whole alph'bet when I spells!" Frisco proposed.

Latham smelled a rat. Frisco never helped a boy out for nothing.

"Huccome *you* git so ambitious wid yo' letters?" he would know.

But Frisco's frankness was disarming, his explanation convincing. A *William Tell* act such as he had witnessed on the screen, he pointed out, would add immeasurably to the drawing-powers of the shooting-match—and to the gate receipts.

"All right," agreed Latham when the scheme had fully soaked in. "Suits me, is hit git de crowd. Ol' treas'ry aint p'tic'lar—an' hit's r'arin' fo' money."

"You know hit'll git de crowd," Frisco reassured him. "Wouldn't be no action to a' old target like dey gwine be to dis heah apple act! Is you aint b'lieve me, jes' ax Mist' Tell."

"An' you gits ten percents of de take-in fo' thinkin' up de ideas," further agreed Latham in confirmation of the final important detail in Frisco's proposition.

"Wouldn't tetch hit fo' less. You aint got no notion how much talkin' I got to do to git hit over. Heap times you has to talk to a nigger fo' a houah befo' you c'n git him to be Mist' Tell's li'l boy."

FRISCO stuck his head inside Willie Freeman's place thirty minutes later and, encouraged by the momentary absence of eyewitnesses, let the rest of himself in immediately thereafter.

"Sho' is nice business you got yo'se'f heah, Willie," he sounded the surrounding waters. "Wawm stove an' nothin' to do in de winter but push a hot i'on about."

Willie sighed.

"*Business* all right," he admitted. His accent indicated that business was not all. Frisco sensed an opening.

"Whut else pester you?" he asked.

"Woman. All time runnin' after me."

"Dat jes' save you trouble."

"*Make* me trouble, you means. Her husban' aint miss nothin' whut he shot at in more'n a year."

"Yeah? Who dat?"

"Ducktooth. He new wife Emma all time hangin' round heah makin' talk wid me. Is Ducktooth hear 'bout it, hit'll take nine pallbearers to handle me, he fill me so full scrap-i'on wid dat muzzle-loader of his'n."

"Dat all botherin' you, boy?"

"*All?* Boy, hit's plenty. Tells you, Ducktooth aint *never* miss."

"Knows dat. But I's thunk up a sho way to cure yo' mis'ry."

"You mean you thunk up a way to keep Emma 'way from me?"

"Dawggone right. Why, dat woman aint

even think 'bout you no mo' after she git a eyeful of whut I's fixin' to he'p Latham put on fo' you! Whut's keepin' her round you is whut she aint seen *yit*."

Willie liked the headlines. And anything that kept Emma away from him would do him further incalculable service in keeping Beulah off him. What Beulah didn't know about him was what kept Willie healthy as it was.

"How you gwine do all dat?" he pressed Frisco for the details.

"Cain't tell you *yit*—see you tomorrer," returned that man of many schemes. "Cain't spill nothin' twel I finishes fixin'. Got to do some mo' talkin' first. Me an' Latham pow'ful busy. You lay low."

"Don't you do none dat talkin' round whar at Beulah can heah you," cautioned Willie disappointedly. "An' layin' so low now a' ant can step over me."

Frisco fired up a half-smoked cigar on his way out. He didn't care who smoked the first half of a cigar, just so he lit the last half. Two more people to see, and his business was as good as attended to.

Willie was committed to something he didn't half understand, and Ducktooth was the next stop!

MR. CARNES was engaged in lovingly cleaning his muzzle-loader when Frisco knocked. In the back room of his house the returned Emma was doing savory-smelling things to a pair of pork chops.

"Is you mind shettin' de do' into dat back room?" suggested Frisco.

"Whut de matter—cain't you stand smellin' widout eatin'?" rejoined Ducktooth sourly.

"Cain't stand talkin' when I's li'ble git overheahd. Last thing a woman ought to heah is how her boy frien'—"

"Whut you mean?" Ducktooth snapped.

"Mean fo' you to keep yo' mouth shet an' listen if you wants ev'ybody be talkin' 'bout whut a big man you is."

Ducktooth's eyes indicated that he was all ears.

"Seed a movie up in Bumin'ham," explained Frisco. "Man shootin' wid bow an' arrer at he li'l boy wid apple on he haid. Big crowd standin' round payin' fo' bits apiece to see de shootin'. All de women lookin' at him an' clappin'. Aint no way tell whether he gwine hit de boy or de wine-sap—dat whut make ev'ybody so ambitious to be dar. You weahs shawt pants—"

"*I* weahs shawt pants?" interjected the

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pudgy Ducktooth. "Whut all dat got do wid me?"

"Me an' Latham gittin' up shootin'-match fo' ben'fit de lodge treas'ry. Puts on a prelim'nary act shootin' at apple on a boy's haid to git de crowd comin'. 'Count you bein' sich a good shot, an' de



"Li'l bit late findin' my shells, but heah I is!" announced Mr. Carnes with a mixture of grinness and complacence.

ladies all wantin' hit, us craves you be de man whut do de shootin' at de apple."

Ducktooth swelled and looked at his gun indecisively. "Aint no trouble hit de apple, wid dis shotgun," he ruminated aloud. "Trouble is keep hit from hittin' ev'ything else fo' fo' feet round. Hit scatters like a hail-stawm. Once I shoots at a bird in one tree an' fotch down a squir'l out of season out of another at de same time."

"Rifle wouldn't do dat."

"Aint got no rifle."

"Us git you one, is you consent to do de act. Sho is bring good crowd, to heah dat Mist' Ducktooth Carnes, de world-renounded shooter, gwine shoot in de prelim'naries in de match."

Mr. Carnes reacted to flattery like a cat to catnip. But he fired only shotguns, he reiterated.

Frisco saw his ten percent of the gate dwindling if Mr. Carnes continued stub-

born regarding his choice of weapons. Which indicated that it was time for Frisco to play another card.

"Dat Miss Emma whut you marry, sho is good-lookin' gal, Ducktooth," he de-toured.

The jealous Ducktooth shot a sidelong glance uncertainly at him.

"Huccome you staht talkin' 'bout dat all of a sudden?" he would know.

"W-e-l-l—" Frisco was seemingly all reluctance. "One thing I aint b'lieve in is gwine 'bout talkin'. Women does dat. An' dey been doin' right smaht of hit lately. In co'se I aint take no paht in hit. Aint nothin' but hahd feelin's an' fun'erals comes of gittin' a husband s'picious of he wife. Dat's de reason I aint never say nothin' 'bout Willie Freeman round you."

Ducktooth sighted ominously along the barrels of his blunderbuss.

"Whut 'bout Willie Freeman?" he de-

manded sharply. "I aint never see him round dis alley none, even. Wuz I to, I enlarges lot of he pores wid dis heah trench-mortar."

"Willie too wise to come round. An', co'se I aint *know* nothin'—I jes' heahs lots of talk whut I aint b'lieve, like I say."

Mr. Carnes arose and moved threateningly toward the door behind which Emma bent over the chops.

"Hold on!" Frisco detained him. "Don't say nothin' to *her* twel you knows whut's you's talkin' 'bout. Git out an' circ'late, first, big boy: bein' sho befo' dey shoots is kept a heap of husbands out de jail-house."

Ducktooth found philosophy had the same effect on him as four-wheel brakes. It stopped him in his tracks.

"Is you so anxious to shoot," Frisco followed up his line of thought, "how 'bout takin' up me an' Latham on dis heah shootin'-act while you's findin' out 'bout dis other business fo' sho?"

"Whose haid dat apple gwine be on?" Ducktooth thought of a loose end.

"Willie's."

"Done took you up last week!" snapped Ducktooth avidly.

"You und'stands you's got to shoot wid rifle, though?"

"I'd take *dat* job wid a cannon!" rumbled the now-aroused Ducktooth, a canny look suddenly appearing in his eye.

"**SHO** wuz haid to git Ducktooth int'r-ested!" complained Frisco to himself as he reversed his feet and pointed them toward Willie's place once more.

But affairs of state and free lunch delayed him, until it was late in the afternoon when the doorway of Willie's pressing-parlor again framed him. Emma Carnes had just passed outward through the same door with her lord and master's trousers of the morning hung over her arm.

"Dat gal aint do nothin' but fotch clothes in an' out of heah!" Willie was quarreling. "An' when a gal as good-lookin' as dat gits to hangin' round all time like she do, dey's two people li'ble git peeved wid a plank 'bout hit!"

"Meanin' who?" Frisco sought to make conversation.

"Meanin' her husband an' my wife, dat's who."

Frisco couldn't ask for a better opening.

"Like I tells you," he followed up his advantage, "I done fix up a way wharby you can git rid of dat Emma gal. An'

you needs do dat, too, boy. I aint tellin' you no lie. Is Ducktooth ever find out you been seein' so much dat gal, you gwine go round heah all tied up wid strings to keep you from comin' apaht. Dey's talk a'ready; an' you sho aint want Ducktooth heah hit. Nor Beulah, neither."

"Sho aint!" agreed Willie fervently.

"Well, you r'member dat movin'-picture I's tellin' you 'bout? 'Bout how dat Mist' Willie Tell shoot at de apple on he li'l boy's haid?"

"Whut dat got do wid me?"

"*Dat's* de way you gwine show Emma somep'n dat skeer her off you. You's in dat act whut me an' Latham is puttin' on befo' de shootin'-match to draw de crowd an' build up de gate receipts."

Willie's eyelids fluttered foolishly. Frisco talked a lot, but he didn't say anything, so far as Willie was concerned.

"You means," Mr. Freeman struggled to understand, "dat *I* gwine stand up out dar wid apple on *my* haid an' let some boy shoot hit off?"

"Boy, yo' haid's plumb knotty wid brains! *Dat's* 'xactly whut you gwine do!" enthused Frisco. "An' all de gals lookin' at you, too, an' sayin' 'Aint he brave?'"

"Yeah—an' right after dat whole passel of 'em li'ble be sayin' 'Aint he look natu'al?' too!" demurred Willie firmly. "S'pose dat man miss?"

"Dis aint no missin' shooter."

Something about the description struck Willie as undesirable, in a fresh place.

"*Who* gwine shoot dat apple off my haid?" he wanted to know, suspiciously.

"Ducktooth."

Willie grew gray between collar and ears.

"Y-y-you mean *Emma's* husband gwine do de shootin' at whut's on *my* haid?" he quavered.

"*Dat's* de scheme—"

"An' dat's de scheme whut's off!" returned Willie decisively.

"Hol' on now, hol' on now, Willie! Think 'bout de 'fect on Emma—"

"All I c'n think of's de 'ffect on me. . . . Dat Ducktooth's got too much reason to miss de apple an' hit *me* now! 'Specially if he done heah somep'n."

"Ducktooth aint heah nothin'—yit. An', like I tell you, dey aint no better way to git shet of Emma. She aint know yit how good Ducktooth c'n shoot: let her see jes' once, an' she git skeered an' watch her step from now on. She stay 'way from you den like you wuz p'izen."

"Yeah, specially if he mix me up wid de apple," mumbled Willie stubbornly.

But for all his hesitation, the leaven was at work in him. Anything that would keep Emma away from him would help his health: Beulah was sniffing around too much now. And Frisco did sound plausible as to the effect on Emma of realizing how good a shot Ducktooth was. It would give her pause about exposing her admirers to such sharpshooting—not to speak of a glittering opportunity for a side-bet that Willie suddenly perceived in the offing.

"All right, den," he suddenly weakened. "I be Mist' Tell's li'l boy, but Ducktooth got use rifle. I aint gwine stand up in front dat shotgun of his'n."

"Co'se you aint!" Frisco accepted his capitulation. "I sees myse'f to his usin' rif—"

But here Frisco was interrupted. He even judged that it was time for him to retire by whatever exit first came to hand. As a married man himself, he could see that this was one of those occasions when a wife wanted to talk over purely domestic matters with her husband.

Hence Frisco reached the exit first, blocking it for Willie, who was twice as anxious to use it but only half as fast.

"Tryin' run, is you?" a familiar voice confirmed the report of Willie's eyesight that it was his wife Beulah, who had all this on her mind.

Willie hunched his shoulders and got ready to listen.

Beulah gave him plenty to listen to, starting with the rumors springing from Ducktooth's already-begun inquiries as to where Emma was going and whom she was seeing along Strawberry Street. In the light of which information, Willie began to care less than ever about being Mr. Tell's little boy. But he was too busy with Beulah just now to bother about that. Right now he had his business with her to fix up. So:

"Me an' Mist' Ducktooth git on fine!" he protested in rebuttal some fifteen vociferous moments later. "Couldn't do dat wuz I makin' lot of talk wid he wife, could I?"

"How I know you git on so fine wid him?" countered Beulah.

"Why, me an' him gwine be in a shoot-in'-match together. Us puts on one dem father-an'-son acts!"

Beulah followed her intellect instead of her instincts, to Willie's temporary profit.

"Well, you lemme heah no mo' talk 'bout

you an' Emma," she gave him a suspended sentence, "an' you stahts takin' harp lessons an' flyin' lessons, both—dat's all!"

TO draw a crowd, start a scandal—that was Frisco's system. And as a creator of violent interest in the participants in his William Tell act, he proceeded to give Hollywood press-agents lessons in how to dish the dirt. Baptist Hill buzzed with it. Willie couldn't think of a publicity stunt more dangerous to himself. Neither could he deny its desirable effect on the gate-receipts. And Willie was beginning to take an interest in the gate.

Rumors thickened. Each time Ducktooth appeared, fresh whisperings sprang up behind him, but none in his personal hearing. Posters announcing the impending shooting-match, with its William Tell preliminary, drew knots of curious darkies. Report grew that something worth watching might startle the assembled populace. Only Ducktooth seemed left in the dark as to what was brewing. And how long he would remain so began to come under the head of vital statistics with Willie.

Willie used back alleys and craved the Bethlehem Steel Company as his tailor. Emma kept on bringing him Ducktooth's clothes to be pressed, and remaining to visit. Never was business more unwellcome. It gave him the sensation of being steadily nailed up in a box. A lot of things that he couldn't help were closing in on him. But what could a boy do when a good-looking woman was both crazy about him and married to a good shot? For the hundredth time he began to wonder if Frisco's scheme was so good, after all.

Which but gave him all the more reason for a heated but triumphant interview with Frisco and Latham. And from it Willie emerged in a dual capacity of startling and promising nature.

The triumphant feeling so engendered, however, didn't last. For it was about here that his wife Beulah started on a still hunt of her own. And when Beulah quit talking, it was time for husbands to look before they limped.

And it was also at about this time and stage that Emma, investigating something new in phenomena, overheard something that gave her plenty to think about. . . .

The day of the shooting-match dawned. Early in it the treasurer of the rival lodge stood interestedly—perhaps enviously—before the carefully painted wooden



"Dat's de onliest way I gits to see you," Emma breathed; "carryin' clo'es in heah to get press'!"

target that Latham had propped against the brick wall of an abandoned blacksmith shop adjoining several vacant lots. It was in front of this wall, in the rôle of the junior Tell, that Willie would shortly stand beneath his winesap.

As the fatal hour of the contests neared, the dual nature of Willie's duties became manifest. He was not only the star in the theatricals, but doubling as box-office man as well.

"Dat Willie crazy fo' work," observed Frisco. "Tryin' do ev'ything on de lot, aint he?"

"Yeah, he crazy—like a fox," returned Latham. "I got my eye on him."

For all of which Willie looked wan and felt wanner. Beulah didn't know that he knew that she had been going back and forth between her alley and Emma's neighborhood for the past twenty-four hours, with her mouth shut. Under which circumstances a boy never could tell what his wife was liable to pick up!

The crowd kept growing. Willie sold tickets and didn't like the looks of that ambulance parked over on the opposite side of the field.

"Who send fo' Gladstone's amb' lance, nohow?" he demanded shakily of his assistant at the seat of custom.

"Say Ducktooth awdered hit," responded that official disturbingly.

Willie sold tickets, and Latham watched him uneasily. Something else made Latham restless, too. He always fidgeted when he saw the treasurer of that other lodge hang-

ing about—the one that had won all of Latham's lodge's money.

At last three o'clock came, the zero hour. But no Ducktooth. Emma was present, but Beulah was missing. Both of which disquieted Willie afresh. A wife's place was with her husband, not messing around somewhere finding out things about him.

Willie left the gate to secure the official winesap from the property-man of the act. The rival lodge's treasurer followed close behind. The lot was becoming jammed with impatient customers. Murmurings arose, demands for action that suddenly broke off into sharp exclamations of:

"Heah he come! Heah come Ducktooth! Whar at Willie? Dar he go, wid de apple on he had now!"

And parting of the customers revealed the approach of the rotund Ducktooth—a Ducktooth who had striven more manfully than well, it appeared, to reproduce the costume of William Tell the elder as outlined by Frisco.

Glistening tan shoes distinguished the scow-sized feet of Ducktooth. Plus fours approximated the "short pants" of Frisco's sketching; while one of his white folks' cast-off Hamburg hats, adorned with a wing feather from a turkey, completed the ensemble.

Yet there was a jarring note. Because of it a puzzled look appeared upon the collective faces of the spectators that deepened swiftly into consternation. Something in Ducktooth's accouterments was not according to Hoyle. Frisco, stepping importantly forward to welcome and direct, saw it too. And his jaw sagged sharply beneath eyes suddenly starting from his head.

"Li'l bit late findin' my shells, but heah I is!" announced Mr. Carnes with a mixture of grimness and complacency.

Then, more loudly and in Willie's hearing: "Is de amb' lance come yit?"

FRISCO couldn't answer at first, because of the fatal fascination for him of that jarring note in Ducktooth's get-up—something he bore ominously in his right hand.

"Dis heah act wuz to be shot wid a rifle, Ducktooth," he emphasized as he pointed to the familiar muzzle-loading shotgun with which Mr. Carnes had arrived to play the part of the senior Mr. Tell!

"Yeah, wuz to," agreed Ducktooth grimly. "But,"—casting a glower in the direction of the now highly nervous Willie beneath his apple,—*"I changes my mind—*

an' my guns—when I heahs de rest jes' now 'bout dis heah Willie an' my wife. So dis heah act gwine be shot right now—wid shotguns!"

The act might be—but Willie wasn't, not if his legs could help it!

Gladstone Smith perhaps precipitated what came next when he stepped in a timely way upon the starter of his ambulance. But after that things happened so fast they were practically simultaneous.

Tell, target and apple were forgotten. There was a spurt of gravel behind the terrified Willie's heels, as he shot across the cleared space before him. Stupefied spectators fell over each other in the sudden rush to take sides of the field as the plus-four-ed Ducktooth threw his muzzle-loader to his shoulder and drew a swift bead on the whizzing Willie. Two of the cash customers were run over as Gladstone's ambulance hurtled forward on a course paralleling Willie's flight.

Bang! roared the muzzle-loader, and Willie leaped into the air.

Bang! again, with the second barrel; and Willie fell, squalling wildly, rolling over and over.

Whoo-ooo-ooooorrrh! screamed the siren on Gladstone's ambulance as it lurched and swayed over the ground toward the unfortunate Willie.

THERE followed a run by that ancient vehicle to the hospital with him that was destined to be spoken of upon the Hill for weeks. With the prospect of a free ride and lots of excitement, the wounded Willie within it developed more relatives than a fly. Aunts clung to the step in the rear, and cousins and uncles cluttered its sides and fenders. Frisco and Latham rode upon the seat beside Gladstone, who hadn't been so important since he fell out of a tree as



Bang! roared the muzzle-loader, and Willie leaped into the air.

a boy. And sympathetically—fraternally—inside with Willie rode the treasurer of the rival lodge!

About the hospital entrance there shortly clustered a grateful group—grateful to Willie for furnishing them more thrills than they had known in years. With plenty yet to come. For everybody knew that when Ducktooth fired, undertakers prospered and burial societies paraded. Ducktooth never missed. Under the circumstances just past, no better guarantee was needed, then, of

a big funeral, with bands and lots of mourning.

Dreams destined, however, to be rudely shattered! For Willie, who had so recently entered the hospital on a stretcher through the ambulance entrance, was suddenly seen leaving it in a sheet under his own power and without pausing to close the front door—just as the rival lodge's treasurer was leaving it unobtrusively by the back.

"Oh, my Lawd! Willie's daid! Dar go he ghost now!" squawked an aunt as she fell in an all-day faint.

But admiring and cooler heads watching Willie in his sheet accumulate distance between himself and the hospital formed a different opinion. "Willie aint daid—he jes' overworked below de knees," opined they. A judgment based upon observation of the way Frisco and Latham, twin impresarios of the match, were busily engaged in an attempt to overtake Willie—with drawn razors!

"Willie sho aint shot in de laigs!" was the verdict of the spectators—a verdict which was overheard by a newly emerging close relative.

"Shot in de laigs?" echoed the relative disappointedly. "Doctus jes' finish lookin' dat nigger over wid a telescope—an' say he aint shot a' tall!"

Mourner looked at baffled mourner. Mystery mounted. Ducktooth, who never missed, had fired both barrels of his reliable piece of ordnance into the vanishing Willie at less than one hundred feet—which simply made the relative's statement impossible. And brought on far more talk, to the effect:

"If Willie aint shot, whut ail him, den? Wharfo' Frisco an' Latham runnin' him ragged wid dem razahs? Whut dat other lodge treas'rer-boy doin' mix' up in hit?"

IN the cool of the evening, while one Ducktooth publicly strutted Strawberry Street with his ancient fowling-piece flung proudly over his shoulder, two leg-weary colored gentlemen were approaching Baptist Hill in silence and insolvency.

"Might's well put dat razah back in yo' shoe, big boy—you aint got nothin' but whiskers to cut wid hit now," advised Frisco of his companion.

"Not wid Willie dat fast in de feet," agreed the limping Latham soberly. "Huccome, nohow?"

"Fixin' ax Emma dat right now while hit's safe: Ducktooth aint be home long

as dey's nobody on Strawberry Street to see him p'rade."

"Whut Emma know?"

"De rest of hit, boy—de rest of hit! Beulah jes' let out 'nough to make hit int'restin'."

Emma proved busy. "Make hit snappy," was her response to her two gentlemen callers' desire for speech with her. "After whut I heahs an' sees, I aint in'sted in *no* men folks no mo'. *Specialy* dat triflin' Willie. 'Sides, I got cook dis heah apple fo' Ducktooth's supper."

"Huccome apple?"

"Winesap apple whut fall off Willie's haid when he staht. *Hit* aint hurt none."

Frisco couldn't overlook one point. "My scheme sho work fo' Willie, like I say," he salvaged from the wreckage. "Emma done off him now."

"Yeah, but not *jes' like* you say. Whut I wants know: Ducktooth aint never miss—an' he shoot p'int-blank at Willie, close up, wid both barr'ls of he shotgun. Yit Willie aint got a mark on him, de doctus says. Den huccome he fall an' squall, like ol' tawm-cat wid a fit?"

EMMMA stepped in with important data. "Willie done got ganged," she stated briefly. "He wife, Beulah, keep on comin' round heah; an' I heahs her an' Ducktooth gittin' together 'bout Willie. Dey frames up to gang him by not havin' nothin' but blank loads in Ducktooth's gun when he shoot at Willie. Jes' a lot of powder to make a monkey out of him. So Willie aint shot—he jes' skeered to death when he drap an' holler!"

Frisco looked at Latham—Latham at Frisco. Much was explained, but not all. The worst was yet with them. Emma elicited it with a question of her own:

"Huccome," she would know, as she stirred the sizzling slices of the fatal winesap in Ducktooth's skillet, "you an' Latham chase dat boy out de hawsptial an' nigh to Selma wid razahs, like dey tells me?"

"Well, now," hesitated Frisco, "*dat* stahted when us goes 'long in amb'lace wid Willie to git de gate-receipts money away from him when he come to—an' finds Willie done lost 'em all to de treas'rer de other lodge—hedgin' fo' he fun'ral 'spenses if he git kill' by bettin' *ouah* money wid him dat Ducktooth'd hit Willie 'stead of de apple when he shoot! Dat treas'rer wuz *in* de amb'lace collectin' dat bet off Willie while us wuz still ridin' to de hawsptial!"



Desert Gesture

*Wherein a prospector
turns up in Denver town
and renews old acquaint-
ance in startling fashion.*

By ANTHONY RUD

Illustrated by William Molt

MOJAVE paid no seeming heed to the curious glances and half smiles vouchsafed him on his eastward train journey to Denver. His desert-seared countenance could not unbuckle a blush, no matter how hard the inside of him tried to produce that symptom of embarrassment. Yet when he left the train, he dragged a neat pack—his only luggage—back of him down the aisle of the Pullman, instead of strapping it across his capable shoulders.

Out in the steamy air of the train-shed, cool as yet with early morning, he looked about him calmly before going ahead. His eyes, which some Denverites would have called the color of London smoke—or others likened to a break in the steel of a prospector's drill—took in the scene without a hint of fluster. He never before had glimpsed a red-cap, but now he saw them busy with the luggage of the

other passengers. He watched a coin change hands. He understood. He spoke to one, holding up a silver dollar as if to flip it into the air from his thumb knuckle.

"Show me where to cache this for a while, an' then the way to a hotel," he commanded. "Can you catch?"

"I sho' *can*, boss!" exclaimed the surprised negro; and did. Then he lifted the pack, revising mightily his first-look opinion of the desert man.

Mojave Corlaes had passed through Denver once before, as a youth of fourteen—eighteen years before. That time he had sported cut-down and patched bib overalls, and had been barefooted, for the time had been summer. Now he wore a scuffed buckskin vest, a faded pink shirt which originally had been red, scuffed brown corduroys, run-over brogans which once had been tan, and a carefully brushed black felt, greenish around the band.

But there were other differences. These began to appear when the desk clerk at the outdated Rexford Hotel regarded this baggageless customer with a dubious air. "Cash in advance?" he questioned.

"All right, son," said Mojave, nodding. He brought out a roll of bills—a concession to portability he had made, on advice of the shrewd lawyer he had left back in Arizona—and dropped a sizeable one on the counter, then signed his name in a big, firm hand, on the register, while he waited for change. "No, I aint goin' up. Mebbe there'll be some packages come: send 'em up, will you?"

"Of course. Certainly, sir! Anything more I can do to help out? The management always—"

"Knows its onions plumb from seeds to sets," the prospector finished for him. "Yeah, I reckon." The hint of a smile crept into the fine network of wrinkles about the smoky eyes. "It's all right, sonny. I know I look tough. This aint my town, though. I got some business that wont keep. First off an' right now I got to go to the Miners' and Traders' National Bank. Whereabouts might I find it?"

The clerk's eyes swept upward to the yellowed face of an eight-day clock. "It doesn't open until nine—nearly two hours yet. But it's—" He came out from behind the counter and led the way to a big bay window overlooking the sidewalk, giving minute directions. "If you want to deposit valuables in the meantime, however, the management provides—"

"That?" queried Mojave, jerking a thumb toward a small black-lacquered safe which reposed in the back wall above the level of the counter. He grinned, lifting the bottom flaps of his vest. Exposed then was the black wood butt of a special .38 revolver—with drop and balance gauged by some unknown genius, to the .45 frame—"the best shootin'-iron the world ever saw!"

FROM the hotel-man then, after a brief grin for a safe any miner could drill out of a wall and walk away with in ten minutes. Mojave secured two other addresses, and the directions for getting to both places. He went first to the restaurant address. And there he found a big place in the very heart of the business district of Denver. But it was dark, locked. Outside, at a window fronting the

street, there was a tempting display of pastry and other delectables. Also a menu card, "*Flapjacks à la Mojave—40c.*" Above the two-page printed item was a placard:

THE BLUE HERON
Luncheon, Tea and Dinner
Stella Burdett
Proprietor

"Doesn't open till about eleven-thirty," vouchsafed a Denver policeman who had halted to look at this strange person—a desert rat trying to get into a tea-room at quarter after seven in the morning!

"Thanks!" grinned Mojave. "I get up too early for this town—jest got in on the train from Arizona. They tell me guns is barred here, unless you get a permit. Now, I got a gun on me, but I shore need a permit. I'm carryin' a certified check—mebbe it's good, too—for a whole lot of money. D'you s'pose I could get a permit right quick?" He fished down in his pocket and brought forth the two ten-dollar gold-pieces, which with some smaller currency had been given him in change by the hotel clerk. Mojave passed them over to the officer, who took them deftly, and grinned.

"You look honest, feller," he said, suppressing part of a chuckle. "Tell the truth, we aint lookin' for guns—much. I'll fix you up. You aint gunnin' for nobody?"

"Not me," smiled Mojave. "I'm just aimin' to perfect something I'm carryin'—ontil yore blamed Miners' and Traders' National opens!"

"Well, I'll get you a three-day permit. Is that long enough?"

"Officer," said Mojave, "if I'm in this man's town three whole days, it'll be because I'm a corpse, havin' shot myself from plumb disgust!"

He winked as he said it. And as the policeman was nearing fifty, he knew Mojave's kind. With a clear conscience a few minutes later, he went back to the station-house, slipped a new ten-dollar gold-piece to the sergeant, and then mailed the permit to the hotel address the prospector gave.

Mojave, his steps slowing, started for the bank where he would find out the first of his troubles—find out if he had been bilked. The lawyer had said no.

But it was not yet time, he remembered. He plunged into a white-front restaurant, and there consumed a large

orange, then another, then three orders of buckwheat cakes with syrup. And coffee. For breakfast dessert he had a third whole orange, not peeled. He ate that orange in his hands, scraping it in sugar. He had not even guessed how starved he had been for fruit like this. Nine years on the arid Mojave!

culty about writing that name; but did so finally, in spite of a hard ring which seemed to have formed in his throat for the purpose of choking him. Then he reached down, brought up his rawhided roll of bills, and slowly peeled off ten of the largest.

"That's for the savings," he said.



"What's the finest single piece of jewelry you got in the shop?" Mojave asked abruptly.

"I AIM to open a checkin' account, an' a savin's account, too." The prospector stood in the marble-walled, vaultlike room of the big bank. He was up before the polished brass grille of the receiving teller's window, inwardly a little awed at the magnificence, but showing none of that awe in his rough-hewn countenance.

"Certainly, sir. Step this way." The teller came out of his cage, and opened a door leading to a booth in which stood chairs and a glass-topped desk.

The prospector found himself writing on little cards. He inscribed his own name thrice, then looked up. "This checking account is for me," he said. "But the other aint. It's all right if I write another name?"

"Certainly. The other person will have to drop in some time and leave specimen signatures—or send them in a letter, if he isn't in town."

Mojave nodded. He had a little diffi-

Behind his glasses the teller's eyes twitched ever so little at sight of the bills—and then widened as he read the name of the person who was to get this money.

But he was not a talkative sort. When the prospector drew from a wallet a folded yellow slip of paper and endorsed it, placing it atop the cards bearing his own signature, the teller looked at it closely, examining the certification.

"If that's all right—they told me it was—" began Mojave after a moment. To him checks were a new departure; and what differentiated a certified check from one of the ordinary sort was a mystery still.

When he walked out of the bank fifteen minutes later, however, Mojave Corlaes had a thorough working knowledge of a checking account. The bank teller had exerted himself in behalf of a new, and what looked like a startlingly profitable account.

MORE than two hours to kill. The striped pole of a barber-shop caught Mojave's eyes. He descended to the basement shop. There keen steel, liquid soap, and perfumed lotions were applied lavishly. Mojave grinned at the dude who grinned back at him from the looking-glass when he got up; and then frowned when he attempted to put on his battered felt hat—with this new style of haircut it came down over his ears.

Half an hour till twelve. The hat bothered him. He saw a sign: "Bensen and Williams, Outfitters to Men." He went in rather hesitantly, intending to buy a new hat—cream color preferred. He succeeded in making that purchase; but when he emerged from the store at ten minutes of one o'clock, that broad-brimmed hat was the only article of apparel which hinted that he was not of the city, quite conversant with its newest modes.

But though he felt queer—rather light and floppy—in his new attire, a brisk walk of three blocks brought back some of his assurance. No one paid him any attention now; he observed that. He stopped and bought a cigar; it was ten cents now instead of five, he noted. Prices had gone up to beat the band during the past nine years!

EVEN now he did not head straight for the tea-room. The show-window of a jewelry store drew his eye. He stopped in front of it, gazing fascinatedly at the gems and silver spread upon the purple velvet. "Gosh!" he breathed softly. "What would a woman like, d'you s'pose?"

Finding no answer to his question, he obeyed a sudden impulse, and entered. The store was almost deserted at this hour; an urbane clerk appeared before him on the instant.

"What's the finest single piece of jewelry you got in the shop?" Mojave asked abruptly.

"The finest—eh?" The clerk paused, tapping his finger ends slowly together. His eyes searched the features and dress of this strange customer. The glance noted little details—the coppery tan of skin, the awkwardly tied bow tie, the slight discrepancy in the fit of a Norfolk jacket across a pair of shoulders widened by years of pick, drill and single-jack. "Just what sort of jewel were you seeking? A diamond, perhaps?"

"Nemmind the kind just now. I'm jest askin' one question. What is the best yuh got—an' how much is it?"

"W-why, I—I suppose you mean the Whitehall pearls. They are perfectly matched—sixty-four of them—" A slight stutter had attacked the salesman. His right foot moved an inch nearer the burglar alarm below the counter.

"How much?"

"Why—er—thirty-five thousand dollars is the price."

"And will you take a certified check on that there bank across the street?" Mojave jerked a thumb toward the granite pillars of the Miners' and Traders' National.

"Why, certainly. Surely—"

"All right. I'll be back, *pronto*."

With that, Mojave turned on his heel and crossed the street between the taxicabs. Twelve minutes later he re-entered the store, found his man, and shoved across the counter a blue stamped and mystically initialed check for thirty-five thousand dollars. "Jest give a paper statin' I got that much account here," he requested.

"But—don't you want to see the pearls? To take them—or have them delivered somewhere? I thought—"

"Mister," said Mojave quietly, "thinkin' aint yore long suit today, I reckon. It aint any trouble to you if I don't take yore goods for two-three days, is it?" A flash from the deep, smoky eyes put an edge to the demand. "I jest want a receipt for a sorta deposit, so's I or somebody else with the paper kin come in an' buy—up to thirty-five thousand."

The matter was adjusted then. Mojave would have to send a written order, if some one beside himself came in to make the purchase. Otherwise it was all splendid, lovely, perfectly delightful; they were duly grateful for his patronage. The clerk had regained his *savoir faire* to a certain degree. Nevertheless he mopped tiny beads of perspiration from his forehead with a monogrammed silk handkerchief, when the plate-glass door swung closed behind the customer. There had been a large and suspicious bulge over the right hip of that desperate-looking visitor!

NEARING the Blue Heron, Mojave slowed. Somehow his knees felt weak, and the palms of his calloused hands had grown clammy. "Mebbe she don't want to see me—" he muttered thickly below

his breath. This man, whose lean one hundred and ninety pounds of bone and muscle showed three bullet scars and a puckered knife slash received in separate, deadly combats, found his eyes focusing vaguely, his steps faltering, at the thought of entering—a tea-room!

But there was a fierce ache deep within him, and that drove him on. He entered, ascended eight steps, gave his hat to a blonde-haired girl in a bright blue uniform—good Lord, *pants*, she wore!—and walked slowly into a rather dim room, lighted only by small rose lamps on what seemed a thousand tiny tables. Men and women. A subdued hum of conversation. Up there somewhere out of sight, the weird nasal whine of an oboe, accompanied by strings and muted brass.

A waitress took charge of him. She wore a blue *dress*, thank goodness! She led him to one side, where a deep seat ran all the way around the wall. Deftly she lifted away the small table, then replaced it as he sat down. A menu card was handed to him. A bus boy presented him with ice water, a basket of bread, two thin and icy pieces of butter, and an array of silver utensils sufficient for many complete courses.

Mojave's misery increased. For the moment he was tongue-tied, and he could not read the menu for a swimming of his vision. After a few moments, during which time he stole furtive glances the length and breadth of the restaurant—no, Stella wasn't there; of course she wouldn't be—the smiling waitress returned.

"And yours, sir?" she questioned, pencil on pad.

Mojave looked up, and was reassured. "Sister," he said, for he suddenly trusted the look of pert decency about her. "I'm jest off the desert, where I been nine years. I reckon I'll start in slow. Jest bring me somep'n light—an' a lot of coffee. I leave it to you."

She laughed, dimples appearing in her cheeks. "I'll treat you right, pardner!" she responded. "Are you real hungry?"

"Not for food. I can eat—but I came here for another reason. Is Stella—Miss Burdett—anywheres about? I—I'm aim-in' to see her."

"I don't know; I'll see." She tripped away.

Five minutes later a somewhat older, rather stern-faced woman came from the offices in back, and was guided to Mojave's

table. She looked at him with a piercing scrutiny. "Miss Burdett does not come here usually until five or six of an afternoon. Is there anything I can do for you?" she questioned. "I am the manager of the Blue Heron."

"Why—no—ma'am—that is, unless you kin tell me where I'll find Ste—Miss Burdett. I—"

"That really is hard to say," the woman responded with distant courtesy. "Miss Burdett owns four restaurants—the Pink Poodle, the Cock and Bull, the Spotted Fawn, and this one. She may be at any one—or at her city office in the Wallack Building. She—"

Of a sudden Greta Myers, the manager, broke off. She suddenly had connected up—or thought she had—a vague familiarity in the features of this stranger, with something else. She looked again, more intently. She leaned forward over the table.

"Tell me, do you know Miss Burdett well?" she demanded.

"I—used to," fumbled Mojave. He did not like those black eyes which bored into him. What was the matter with the woman, anyway?

"Then wait here a minute." Miss Myers strode away, threading the maze of tables, patrons and servitors with an ease and grace not seemingly compatible with her curveless figure.

DACK in the office—the office Stella Burdett had used as headquarters when she first launched into large-scale restaurant operation—the angular, stern-looking Miss Myers stared up at a framed picture just above the glass-topped desk. The picture did not belong to Miss Myers; a duplicate of this photograph—a glossy print copyrighted by a large photo agency—hung above the office-desk five places in the city of Denver. The photo showed a desert prospector cinching a pack on a patient burro—or so the caption on the picture alleged. Actually that burro, once the property of Mojave Corlaes, had been well termed "sweated dynamite done up in orneriness."

Miss Myers stared. She shook her head, and her thin lips dragged downward. It was the same man, no doubt of it! With a grimace of acknowledged neglect, she looked at the withered tip of Spanish dagger blossoms which slanted behind. She was supposed to renew this every day

Desert Gesture

or two, but it just had slipped her mind. Miss Myers was unromantic—on the surface at least.

One finger touched a buzzer. "Send out for a tip of Spanish dagger right away. Go to Halleck's. If they haven't got it, bring six of their best American beauties. Hurry!" she directed. Then she lifted the receiver of her telephone, calling her employer.

Four minutes later, as Mojave was chewing disconsolately at the fragment of a bread-stick, the forbidding-looking Miss Myers came down the aisle and stopped. She leaned over. "Miss Burdett will be here to see you in fifteen minutes—or less!" she snapped, looking quite as though she would bite off the head of poor Mojave for far less than the price of a bread-stick.

Then she left. She had been fully determined to tell him about the photograph in the office. But at the last minute habit had been too strong. Miss Myers stalked away, a flush coming up to burn the sallow of her cheeks. Damn men! Damn herself! Stella Burdett had known what she was doing, after all. *What* a man he looked to be!

Food was nothing. It had stuck in his throat for fifteen minutes, twenty. The tall man could not sit still. He carved deep and savage dents in the tablecloth with a dull silver knife. He choked over *canapes Lucullus*, which tasted faintly of fish—though he liked fish, ordinarily.

There had been a drink served. It was yellow-greenish, in a small glass. And it had some funny-looking thing sunk to the bottom. Mojave knew it was liquor, by the smell; but he was sizing up a dry Martini cocktail for the first time in his life. And this, too, was the first olive in his narrow gustatory career.

Now he reached out, nearly crushing the fragile glass, raised it to his lips, and gulped. Tingly and queer—not bad. The small green prune—ugh! He pretended to cough—leaned over, spat it out.

"Damn such stuff!" he muttered, wiping his mouth with the tiny napkin. He looked up—and there was Stella. She was holding out a hand to him, silently.

NINE years! It does much to the soul of a man who is alone in the desert—and likewise to a woman who waits for him. Mojave was a fool in some city ways, and some woman's ways. Slowly,



an inch at a time, his own two hands came up. But he no more than clasped her hand the briefest of instants.

He saw now that she was not the girl with a pick, old Burdett's daughter, whom he then had loved—that half-wild, snappy-tongued young girl in rags whom he had loved. . . .

Here was a more slender, more perfectly formed woman, impeccably groomed. Where had been a scrawny neck, a flat chest like that of a boy—oh, God! She wore a droopy hat that became her; a light gray, filmy summer dress, V-necked. Mojave, with the last of his supposed courage oozing out through his heels into the floor like a vagrant electric current, knew that across the table from him now stood one of the most beautiful women in the world. Her features had become more fine. Her eyes were dreamy—had lost their antagonism, somehow. She had rounded out—and



Stella looked at him. "Do you mean," she asked, "that you want to give me whatever I want—in this whole store?"

"Oh, Lord, yes! Stella—"

"Please don't tell me you have forgotten it! I—well, Mr. Prospector, have you got the stake you promised—the ten thousand dollars? You always were a stubborn cuss."

at the same time had seemed to grow more tall and slender.

Stella said not a word. Her hand, and the message in her eyes, she thought enough. As most women do, she undervalued the love of the man, and overvalued his knowledge of women. Tears had sprung to the eyes of Mojave—and he was as hard-boiled a specimen as the desert had produced for many a year.

"I reckon I'm sayin' hello—an'—good-by," he stated painfully. With clearness he saw now how utterly idiotic his notion had been—thinking Stella would still be the bright, alive, but well-nigh uncultured girl she had been nine years before.

"Oh, no, you're not, my friend," denied Stella, a smiling mask coming up quickly before her eyes. "After nine years—well, I demand at least three or four days! Isn't that my due, even if you don't care about me much any more?"

Stella spoke lightly, yet she waited. If the man had come back to her like a coyote with his tail between his legs, she believed she would send him packing—even though she had waited for him nine long years. Not that she needed capital. Her restaurants could be sold any day for big money. But the man had left her when she first loved him, swearing that he would wring ten thousand out of old Mojave. He had been stubborn as a mule. She had derided his belief. Now he was back—after saying he never would look at her again until he had made this stake. Stubborn. She had written him ten or a dozen letters, telling him she had more than the stake he named—once or twice actually pleading with him to come back. . . .

Silence. Some of the letters had come back, after weary months.

Mojave never had received a single one of those missives. He had possessed no headquarters, no postal address, until quite recently.

"I—made it," he answered, fingers searching for the brown-covered bankbook, then coming away in haste. He could see for himself that this was no present for a woman like Stella had become.

"Oh, I'm so glad!" There was no doubt of her sincerity and delight. She came and sat beside him on the bench. "You really *did* find another Yellow Aster? Tell me about it!"

"No, not gold. Tungsten. A lot of it. You know, since the war—it's gone up. Twelve dollars a pound, now, and still going up—"

Mojave's lips moved. Haltingly, dryly he told a fractional part of that magic romance of the desert. Out there in the arid wastes he had come upon a mountain of heavy ore—ore which assayed tungstic acid sixty per cent to the unit. They were piping water out forty miles—because tungsten somehow tempered steel, and steel now was needed in vast quantities.

Stella knew nothing of tungsten. Twelve dollars a pound did not sound to her like treasure, daughter of a gold prospector as she was. Inwardly she supposed that Mojave's search had netted him little more than that determined stake—a sum so pitifully small now in these days of rapidly advancing prices.

BUT she smiled, cajoled him, played the part of brilliant hostess—little suspecting that through each succeeding minute the man's heart sank lower in his boots. In turn she told how a few thousand dollars, inherited from an uncle of hers, had established her in business. She did not say how enormous that business had become almost overnight; how the name of Stella Burdett, with her new and enormously popular style of restaurant, had come to be a front-page newspaper commonplace in this city of quick action.

For Mojave, however, the money meant nothing. He was glad for her—and sorry for himself that he had not found her on the verge of starvation! It was the woman herself. At thirty, and almost without a vestige of formal education, she had made herself, outwardly at least, a thorough aristocrat. If there were signs pointing otherwise, Mojave could not see them.

The man ate no more. He finally drew out the little bankbook, keeping a broad thumb over the name on the page, and exhibited the entry—\$10,000. "Jest so's yuh wouldn't think I was lyin', Stella," he said huskily. He was conscious that his hand—his peerless gun-hand!—was trembling like that of an old man afflicted with the palsy.

"You don't imagine I wouldn't take your word, Bill?" she asked softly. He had never been Mojave to her. "But your luncheon—don't let me—"

"I couldn't eat bacon an' beans! Not even them any more!" he said positively. "I—"

"That's your superlative, still?" she laughed, noting from the corner of her eye the untouched breast of "Stubbeduck" (Chinese pheasant) *au Chardclaine*, on his plate.

"Stella, I—well—you see—hell, I want to do something. I made more'n that stake I showed you. I want to—I want to give yuh a present—jest somep'n to remember me by. You know—"

He was floundering desperately now, and his eyes avoided hers. Inwardly sensitive for all his poker face and steel-corded muscles, he was in abject misery; only a determination as hard as his own mountain of tungsten drove him on. Stella was as high above him as the bright blue star of evening; yet—

Somehow he made her understand. Her hazel eyes had clouded a little with a look of pain, delight, amazement. She was used to reading men. His trouble was *not* that he had ceased to love her, but that he loved her too greatly! Too greatly that is, for even a modicum of common sense; it is doubtful that any woman ever has thought herself loved too much.

And suddenly her vivacity, every shred of her pose of hostess—nearly real with her now—departed. She was not even smiling. Oddly quiet, she went along the aisle, seeing none of the men, hearing none of the greetings from her customers—

WITH Mojave she descended to the street. He seemed to have a definite goal farther up the street. He had. It was the jewelry store with the purple velvet draped show-windows. They entered. And with almost suspicious celerity a clerk separated himself from an undecided customer back at the wrist-watch counter, and made for them. It was the same clerk.

He came—and made a sign with his right hand. The store detective sauntered out, and down toward the entrance.

Mojave noticed none of this. He nodded abruptly to the salesman, tossing him a small, wadded paper, the receipt. "Stella," he said. "I'd 'a' got yuh somep'n, only I know yuh'd rather pick it out. Anything this shop's got. Mister, among other things, show her those pearls." The last was addressed to the man behind the counter, on whose countenance had appeared the slightest trace of a knowing smile.

Stella looked at him. "Do you mean," she asked in a queer tone, "that you want to give me whatever—I—I want *in this whole store?*"

"Yeah. It's already paid for. All yuh got to do is pick it out." Mojave was staring out at the cold, gray majesty of the bank pillars across the street. He could not bear to look at her any more.

The woman's eyes flicked at the salesperson inquiringly. "I shall bring the Whitehall pearls immediately," he said.

"Don't bother," said Stella. She drew Mojave a little away. "Bill," she said with a queer rush of breath, "instead of *one* big present, would—would you let me pick *three* smaller, but not so expensive ones?"

"A hundred, if yuh want 'em," said Mojave. "Honey—" Only that last word was not articulated. Somehow his throat was strangled.

Stella had turned back. She went swiftly along the counter, *tap-tapping* a little finger signet on the glass. Before the superb display of ring sets she stopped. "Size seven and a quarter. *That one!*" she whispered, pointing to a one-carat square-cut diamond solitaire deep set in platinum, resting beside a chased platinum band ring.

She looked back; Mojave had not moved. Head erect and shoulders squared, he was faced away—a million miles away. Though Stella could not guess, the man was gazing through the blue-black veil of desert darkness toward a sinking evening star—the blue planet Venus. Not to touch a star—

So Stella fitted the ring, and found the size perfect. She took the box with it and its fellow. She went to Mojave. "We're all fixed," she said, touching his arm. "I have two of my three presents—and you have some change coming, big man!"

"Leave it there, till you want somep'n else. It's yores," answered Mojave quietly. "I've owed you more'n you ever will know.

Stella. Life from now on aint wuth a damn; but it *has* been—out under the desert stars! I've—" But there speech deserted him.

"Come on out," bade Stella Burdett. She distinctly did not like this; and she would put an end to it if she could. God, what dumb creatures men were!

"You didn't even ask me what I selected for my two-out-of-three presents," she reminded him, when they were on the sidewalk.

"It don't matter, Stella," he said. "I hope you'll be wearin' 'em, to remember me by. I—I jest aint good enough for you, girl. I know it."

"Bill," she said softly, a smile—and years of longing—in her eyes, "if I ever wear *these* to 'remember you by,' I surely wont have a chance to forget—will I?" And she snapped open the box, holding up to his gaze a diamond engagement solitaire—and a thin chased band of platinum.

Mojave's lips moved, though no sound came from them at first. "They's a God in heaven. They's a God—" were the words he framed soundlessly.

"You haven't asked me what was the third present I wanted," she said, pretending to pout, though the rejoicing in her eyes would not be quelled.

"Oh, Lord, my sweet, tell me *quick!* I—"

She smiled at him. And in her eyes was the delight and understanding that for her had been kept the best of all men. "It's something I've had—*but never given*, Bill. *A kiss!* With you here, all the rest of this—" she gestured at the busy street and the people who looked at them inquisitively—"is the last mountain range in the Mojave!" She came a step closer and lifted her arms, to place them about his neck.

With a cry that was no word, Mojave flung his arms about her and pressed his lips on hers.

THAT afternoon late, Elbert Pettingill, of the branch jewelry store of Dayson, Moore, Incorporated, brought a paper to the store manager. "*That* was our crazy man!" he said.

In a preferred position was a tale of how one William (Mojave) Corlaes, the desert rat, had sold his group of claims on a tungsten mountain, to a British-American syndicate, for the sum of six hundred and forty thousand dollars.



The Widewater Affair

With a quaint humor reminiscent of Mark Twain himself, the author of "The Mountain Sheriff" here tells a curious story of modern life on the Mississippi.

By **RAYMOND S. SPEARS**

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

WHAT actually happened. Palura put up the job and old Mississipp' aided and abetted, all according. No matter what anybody says, all I done was look in on it, minding my own business the way I'd been told to. Personally, I don't meddle. Dog-gone them that bothers when 'taint necessary! 'Bout all the troubles in this world is either darn-fooling or bothering the other feller.

The first thing was when two ladies drapped out the Ohio, which was up some, but not roily, being pretty green. Understand, they were soft-paws on the River, but they knew water and handled their big cabin-boat just as good as anyone you ever saw, using big outboard motors for control.

These ladies sure appreciated the scenery. They wa'n't any bum-boat outfit, being perfectly genuine respectables, able to look after themselves like regular River women, and I don't suppose any more particular and circumspect-acting females ever tripped Old Mississipp'. Being such good lookers, course it was real dangerous; and from the first it seemed too bad for them to chance it all alone, that-away, like they were doing.

For one thing, they had a forty-foot by ten-foot scow, which is pretty big for handling and convenience, but being used to Atlantic liners and yachts two hundred feet long, probably, this seemed close quarters, only room enough to turn around in. A real River woman'd kinda felt she was in a floating mansion, having all that room just for housekeeping.

Course, being strangers, soft-pawing down the first time, they were sniffy and snooty, both. Just because us river rats didn't behave the same as Up-the-Bankers, they thought us right funny. Course, people act according to environment, same as muskrats in marshes or jackrabbits in sage and alkali, one swimming, t'other jumping.

These two had notions they'd picked up about house-boats in Florida, over on one of them English rivers, and I don't know but in China and to Hades and gone. Their decks were short, say five-foot, and the cabin was about thirty-foot. Two heavy-duty outboards were under the stern. Swinging on davits was a skiff with another six-horse motor lock-bolted fast for a tender. A big drum of gasoline supplied fuel for the motors and kitchen cook-range

in a regular filling-station hose connection. In the sitting-room, though, they had a nice coal-and-wood burner.

Two alcoves gave them separate beds, and the kitchen was partitioned off, with a spare servant's bunk under a locker lid, and they had water filter, power pump, built-ins and all kinds of conveniences, all specified in the architect plans which one of the Point Pleasant shipyards had followed right through.

THEY just gave men the go-by, complete, but they familiarized with the River women, making some mad along at first, being surprised at some things. As Kid Russon, frinistance, who had married Joe Bings in a hurry up to Grand Tower, and they wrote his name on a wall weddin' stificatē till they could pick up a good clean new one down b'low somewhere. Those women acted real funny about that, as if right smart of marriages, divorces or funerals was any worse down the River than Up-the-Banks.

Below Tiptonville a yellow girl, Nancy Clews, caught their fancy. Nancy has one bright blue eye and one bright brown eye, kind of a ridiculous combination for a pretty face; but she cooked hot-bread, cornpone, catfish, 'coon, squirrel potpies, roast geese or pork, ham and eggs, wild grape jelly, cocoanut cake besides all the plain frying and boiling. The two ladies called themselves Mollie and Deana, exclusively, and hired Nancy for help.

Real sociable with river females, they learned to be polite fast. They didn't more'n tolerate the women's menfolks, and they could get away with their exclusiveness as regards unattached men, for they had the fancifulest line of shootin' irons, short and long, bullets and scatter, ever any ladies brought down shanty-boating. What's worse, they practiced every day, right- and left-handed, close up and fast, distance and careful, floating, on the wing and rest marks. When they stepped off in their skirts, the boys noticed they wore garter-holsters. Course, with such a discouraging outlook, nobody even thought of meddling with them. . . .

Two old-time sportsmen, Ripley Snash from the Upper River, and Jay B. Wignore from over on Lake Michigan, came down in a light cruiser. Just above Caruthersville, they gave Mrs. Mahna two fine ganders, and she had an invitation party on the two ladies' boat, Mrs. Mahna's

being too little. Course, the sportsmen was invited, and introduced, real regular. All four was about the same kind of society people, and they had a lot of fun inquiring about river superstitions, ghosts, gift of prophecy, River Spirit, haunted eddies and all those folklore things. Mrs. Mahna talked right up to them, saying they'd sure get their come-uppance, one way or another, for ridiculing the River.

Nice weather set in, and the autumn trippers scattered off down the River in the sunshine—too fair for good hunting, but those old hunters sure knew the birds. Ever since they were boys, they'd traveled together, hunting, fishing, camping and running around. Working hard at business, they didn't spare no pains nor ask any odds, when it come to playing.

Just to show how particular those two women were, even Nancy didn't get to know the actual names of Mollie and Deana. The reason they nomdeplumed it, was they were supposed to be going around the world together, but instead they gave their tickets, outfits and trips to their maids, with instructions for them to behave themselves real dignified, like two such women ought to; and then the two headed under aliases for genuine experiences of adventure down the River. Imagine their high-toned folks at home learning what those two were doing! No matter how respectable they acted, some would have thought something, and well they might!

Snash and Wignore, landing in behind Yankee Bar, hunted in the Plum Point brakes for squirrels, but as luck would have it, a flock of Canadians flew over in the sunshine at the tree-tops. Letting go, they dropped seven young birds about eight months old, fat as butter and the nicest eating there is. Course, two men couldn't waste all those birds, so they looked around for somebody with appetites.

Only one boat was in sight. Snash went around to it, and gave Nancy two fine birds. The two ladies had gone down to Fort Pillow creek in their skiff tender, sight-seeing and climbing Chickasaw bluffs.

Nancy plucked both the geese, singed them, and stuffed one with onion and t'other with sage dressing. She turned on the gasoline-stove oven full blast, and all extravagant, put in both birds. Wa'n't that like one of them yellow girls! When the two women came home, they could smell their galley kitchen a mile down the wind, it was so full of roast and fixings.

"Nancy!" they gasped. "Where on earth'd you get those birds—shoot them?"

"No'm." Nancy shook her head. "Them white friends of Mrs. Mahna brung'm!"

With all the feastings, big pans of white bread smoking, a gallon of browned goose gravy, white mashed potatoes, sugared yams, wild-grape jelly, coffee percolating, and two ladies of limited capacity, and also the limited large-eyed yellow girl cook, it was a shame with so much to eat!

Seems like women are always aggravated having a big meal going to waste that-away, so they looked and saw only just the motor cruiser of those two old fellows in Yankee Bar harbor.

"Go ask those hunters if they don't want to have some of these wild geese they gave us," Deana told Nancy, and so she went after them in the motor-skiff.

The men came aboard, hats in hands, bowing, smiling, just absolutely surprised and grateful, like a couple of boys, embarrassed and modest, but tickled to death. The four-square table was spread scrumptious and complete; they even had individual butcher knives, stylish and convenient. The way they behaved, anybody could have learned swell manners, I expect, even the nicest kind of society people.

When they was full-fed, the four sat around chinning and chatting about this and that; but along late in the evening, at the time for the sun to go down, the two women took the hunters in their skiff over to the cruiser, instead of letting them walk across in the loose yellow sand.

Friendly, sociable, honorable, and no nonsense—that's all.

The outside bar was exposed to southwest winds, and election day was a weather-breeder, same as usual. A gale blew up that night, and the first the lady trippers knew, they were blowing in on the sand. The hunters, being old-timers, realized they'd be needed, so they came around in their cruiser in the heft of the gale, dropped an anchor out in the eddy and paid out so they could put a line aboard the shanty-boat to straighten her up to where the big outboards both took hold in good water.

While it lasted, the blasting wind made a grand skedaddle, the two women running around in the rain and pajamas, keeping their nerve in their predicament. Towed around into the safe backwaters, anchors were dropped out, and they quieted down again, all snug, knowing everything was all

right. So the four all knew they could trust one another without any reservations to speak of. They began to visit back and forth, hunting together, and as they were bright and educated, they argued or agreed on economic independence, Prohibition, and progress of civilization, and figured about evolution, modernism and politics.

It stood to reason they were on the level. They were that kind, just the looks of them showed. But it was plain enough none of those four had any idea what old Mississip' was coming over them, pickling for such careful, circumspect, intelligent folks. Being honorable, they never said a word that wasn't elevated and intelligent.

These old boys had families, businesses, reputations, positions and influence in their home country. The women were well-fixed socially and financially, I understand—eminent husbands and personal fortunes, and no children to bother them. Fear hadn't made them come incognito, but just they 'lowed to get the dead-to-rights on the Lower Mississippi, which their pasts would have checked, they being so conspicuous they'd been shadowed and bothered by folks knowing who they were. Even to those old boys, they were Miss Deana and Miss Mollie.

WHEN they floated into Mendova about two hours apart, it was pretty plain all four had begun to have their doubts about appearances, however innocent and reputable the facts were. They didn't know it, but everyone was guessing; and Palura had opened a pool, taking bets on which way the break would come. The sky was the limit, a dollar a throw, any way one wanted to figure it out, winner take all. The four met uptown, acted polite and then went to Hungry Man's Row for supper. They went to a show, and between the acts Snash telephoned to Palura for a reservation, necessary account of the Saturday night jinks being on.

Palura had been hearing the names, the gossip, about these peculiar nice-acting people. Course, the name Snash was familiar, and he recognized the voice, without the name. When Palura was scouting out regarding a killing when he was a brash, careless youngster, a hangman's noose cast its shadow on him. Snash had given him a square deal, getting him off, just being a good fellow. Palura never forgot, and he would never pass up a chance to square back an account like that.

When those four came in, it shook Palura. What he knew, what he felt, he covered up; but here were four people who couldn't afford no such nonsense as they were mixing in.

"Snash, do you know where you're heading in?" Palura asked, having been obliged to introduce himself, for the man forgot his kind works.

whether they did or didn't amount to shucks. Palura told me he never'd felt so simple-minded and complicated as about them four bedeviled, benighted trippers.

Worst of it was, careful as they'd been first along, now they were slipping and they knew it, but didn't care. The hunters had been so dog-gone polite, too, that perhaps they'd seemed to sorta overlook how hand-



M-s. Mahna said they'd sure get their come-uppance for ridiculing the River.

"Suppose you mind your own business," Snash answered.

Palura nodded, no more. Some men would have quit right there, but Palura had only just begun. He looked the women up, through a post-office friend, telephoning confidential, the way he does. The answers sure woke his ideas. However important they were, the worse off Snash and Wignore were getting. For one thing, these trips together were already stewing the men in hot water back home in their families. Having caught trout in Maine, small-mouth black bass in Michigan, killed grizzlies in the Rockies, moose in Canada, antelope in Wyoming, their wives and children bristled to think their fathers had corrupted each other into blood-thirsting, enduring unnecessary hardships, risking life scrambling on slide rock and in deep black-water pools. If anything ever happened to one of them, the other sure would be in bad for life with the other family as well as his own.

Palura trying to protect Snash and Wignore was sure puzzled. That old Mississipp' whispered and chuckled in the nights, singing by, taking advantage of humans

some the ladies really were. That Saturday night the women were dressed as if to make a killing.

Even out on the Mud Bar, when they left their deck, their outlines showed, sparkling with jewels in the gloom, perhaps a double handful of gewgaws in plain view. For the first time the two men peeled their rolls, careless.

"You oughtn't to wear diamonds and pearls, or tote them down the River," Palura said to them. "They'll sure make trouble for you, account of pirates."

"Palural!" Mollie turned on him, and then dressed him down proper, currying and polishing him off as nobody ever heard him done before.

Some of these proud, high-spirited, real regular people, if they have a notion kind-a low-down, ornery folks are telling them what they ought-a do, sure aint going to stand for it! The idea of Palura, a dance-hall keeper, buttin' into their affairs!

In one way, it was funny. Them four at it must have been queer courting. Nancy said they knew lots of poetry, using it frequent. They read each other perfectly grand language of the books. Nancy,

a real bright yellow girl, couldn't even get started in some of them books, they was so high-flying and scienterific. And they read plays, all four together, the he places and the she ones, circling around.

By the time they reached Mendova, Snash had stood on the stern deck, holding Mollie's hand absently, and Wignore had kissed Deana's knuckles, kind-a meditatively. Nancy figured if they didn't look out and hustle up, they'd be in N'Orleans, still on the preliminaries.

Nancy had worked for pretty good people, but she wa'n't no judge of the symptoms of away bang-up quality folks. The cabin-boat dropped out toward noon on Monday, and the hunters headed down about two hours later, driving on power. Palura went to the Mud Bar, making sure on the touch and go, anxious if the figures had been put down right.

In Palura's business, he divided people into five or six levels: Crooks, Shadies, So-sos, Ordinary, Pretty Fair, All Rights and Quality Top Notchers, all the way from no 'counts to those who can't be spared. Having the notion, he just had to do Snash a good turn, willy-nilly, because the old boy had saved him from hanging, or anyhow a life stretch. No matter what Snash didn't want, Palura just couldn't see him going dead wrong.

Out on the Mud Bar Palura heard a fast launch going past all dark. He had arranged for that, so he could take this much satisfaction. But at the same time, he had to wonder if all was going according, down below? Slip-ups are mighty easy on Old Miss'ippi. He needn't have worried. The four traveled down by maps, and they had their rendezvous all picked.

Plumb hornswaggled, the women ran down the Chutes and pulled out in the Widewater, where they anchored in the deeps. They had stocked in a barrel of Louisiana shell oysters, crate of oranges, ices, candy, with fancy makings for a gosh-awful dinner. So far as anyone knew, they hadn't any liquor, except just some wild-grape juice and such soft drinks.

In fact, if asked about applejack, corn, or honeydew, they always said they wa'n't interested, account of if there was trouble, they'd be suspected. Going ahead that-away, cold sober, deliberate, it was plain Palura had to figure close. If they'd been ornery, course none of us would have paid any particular attention, not caring a whoop.

Us shiftless poor-shacks don't amount to nothing. We're borned, grow up, raise Hades, waste away and pass out—and who cares? We just drift along, fading in and fading out, never no comfort nor excitement to much of anybody. I married Mamie Holmes, Grace Coulson, Jennie—Jennie, now what was her name? Don't matter, for she ran away with that Wabash River trapper. . . .

Same way with the run of us all; but these nice people were so elegant, intelligent and genuine, somehow we expected something dif'rent from them.

The big cabin boat had a dynamo and twenty storage batteries. They had globes wired all along the eaves, on the roof, bow, stern, inside and out, and they switched on everything. My, but she was pretty shining in the Widewater like a bouquet of colored flowers of light, a dome of brightness on a shimmering serving-tray visible for miles. Catfish came rolling up breaking water all around, drawn by the gleams. The air was just thick enough to make it show up that-away, and mysterious.

Them old boys put on their formal fixings, just plumb dignified, walking aboard from their cruiser alongside. And the two ladies stepped out into the bow-deck light, the blonde one all pink, the brunette all green; and honest, I could see the sparkles on their left fists, their knucks covered completely with hardware, the most careless exhibition ever below the Jumping-off Place, all lugs and manners, too.

Nancy looked like a fairy herself. Not since steamboat days had so gorgeous a meal been served afloat, and probably never such a one on a shanty-boat. 'Taint no use trying to describe it.

THEY made a ceremony, grand and stately, and still those women made it a game, too, laughing because the men took it all so solemn. The women had been provoked, being treated just like their brains was all there was to them. The men had been plumb honorable, and now were helpless. To them it meant a heap, this cutting loose, breaking the habits of years, finding being bad harder'n being good.

"I thought I was important," Mollie said, her smile light, "but on this vast River, we are so tiny on the wide surface of the deep flood, I couldn't very well be so proud and put so high an importance on my value or acts. What do I amount to here?"

Nancy cleared everything, cleaned and put the dishes away. She slipped overside on board the motor cruiser, a sure valuable witness in a civil case, if needed. She went to bed in an extra bunk, snapping on a reading light to finish a yarn she had begun. The outside cabin lights were switched off, curtains pulled down, and the radio played on, a musical tragedy coming through on a national hook-up broadcast. The melodies were full of human longings and can't-be-helped's, life going wrong.

Palura had sent me down so I could be handy in case anything serious happened, heading off what he had schemed, or following it up. I lay over against the bar, all ready to go. The wild shrills of repeating melody gave me the shivers. Having no character myself, I heard ideals dying.

Palura haint no religion, never prayed, but he worked. Long as I live, I'll neveh forget his fight to save a friend, family, fortune, fame; Snash, caught in the Dark Corner of his lonely hunger, Old Mississipp' was tricking him; Wignore, same as Snash, was breaking.

And coming were mean and merciless, scheming rats, driving down the current in a fast motor-launch with a wooden cabin hood. They darted into the Widewater all gloomy and silent. Trust the Stacker Island Roosters to travel sneaking and noiseless, a shadow in the River shadow, the deadliest and darkest shades of all! Swinging far, coming slow, they swung in across the hull stern and with their reaching hands caught hold and steadied their boat. Two men rested their palms on the bumper, vaulting aboard, landing barefoot on the deck. They ran bow and stern lines to the cleats, making them fast, but with slip noose ties.

Raiding pirates, all set, eight of them stood for a pause each to feel his pistol, revolver, knife, making sure of edges, loads, locks, extra shells. To save his friends, Palura had let these scoundrels know that those women carried genuine precious stones in fancy platinum and gold mountings. Wouldn't anybody sensible know better'n that?

Course, in a way, Palura'd fixed all this to happen. He'd even sent me down there, not to mix in but so as Palura'd have a reliable witness if one was needed, and besides if anybody was shot up, I'd be useful. Naturally, this was a ticklish job, but I don't pass up no chance to do Palura a favor.

The four trippers were so used to the feel of the scow hull that the minute those river-rats come aboard, all noticed it. Knowing boarders had come along, the women partly knowed what it meant.

"They're after the jewels!" Mollie whispered.

"Where are your guns?" one of the men asked, and the next minute they had forty-five automatics in their right hands and old reliable thirty-eight-forties in their lefts, ready in case the self-workers jammed or their 7-shots wa'n't quite enough. Now, wa'n't that a reg'lar Yankee trick, having two kinds of guns that-away?

The tip of the boat showed the raid was aft. The two men slithered into the kitchen galley at the stern door. The hinges were greased, and in the dark they were out in the black shadow under the wide cabin eaves side by side when the pirates headed for the cabin, guns and knives ready.

Eight old-time pirates, bad, and experienced, to just a pair of river-trippers, square men—but they'd been partners thirty years or so, and the odds were even, you might say. The radio was still playing, a band and a chorus whooping strong. I'd heard tell that when fussing begins in the mountains at a party, the fiddlers and pickers keep right on playing, so that just naturally everybody whacks, cuts and shoots to jig-time—though I didn't more'n half believe such a yarn.

WELL suh, 'twarn't natural for those two old boys to shoot without warning. They had the advantage, but they had that proud kind of honor which gives a chance even to scoundrels coming to murder, rob, or worse if they could think of meaner things to do.

"Stop right there!" Snash spoke up; and for answer the pirates just let go all they had, *kerslam*. They opened on the beat of the op'ry melodies, and back the answers came, from low down, elbow levels, which is best in the dark, close up. The flashes of the old boys' guns were a foot lower'n those of the pirates, *whackety-whack-bang!* Two shots with an automatic to one with the cylinder shot-gun was the measure, like waltz time.

Des'prit men, meaning business, they just let drive, right and left, hardly any noise but the shooting and the echoes! Somebody who was hit gave a screeching yell like a knife-stab in the dark; his gun clattered on the deck, and he stumbled

backwards, falling overboard with a soggin', thumping splash, and then another turned and threw himself right out into the water, *kersouse*, hunting a hole like an otter to die in, the waves covering his wailing pains.

Ten men shooting sure can make a terrible racket, but some were dropping out fast, and at that rate it couldn't last long. Suddenly it stopped short, still.

A LONE shot flashed orange yellow and somebody kinda gagged; the next minute there was another splash ending the fracas, the radio music taking up where the drumming left off.

"All right?" a woman asked, clear in the gloom. "You're not hit?"

She knowed by the sound of her own guns, where victory was.

"Don't think so," one answered, and then the other: "Not me!"

Funny what a lot of bullets don't do no business! Then dim figures like a ghosts came out on the deck—in the riding-light glow. A minute afterwards there was a heavy splash, and then two more. Pretty soon little splashes showed a lot of guns, some good ones, going over the side. The motor of the pirate boat turned over, and for a half minute red fire followed a lighted match on the cabin-boat deck. A wad of something burning was thrown into the raiders' cabin and then an ax cut the line loose, so the boat headed off diagonally down the river. In a minute she was blazing while she ran, throwing smoke and lifting tongues like posy petals blooming down the reach. Down yonder she blew up like fireworks, as the radio opera ended in a grand finale, followed by a loud and enthusiastic recommendation of soap, harmless in the wash, sweet-scented and good for fabrics and hides. Right in the middle somebody threwed the switch, gagging it, and all was dark and serene in the Widewater again, even the riding-light and eave blue lights gone.

Apparently nobody over on that boat needed any of my help. The night thickened so I couldn't see the black-cabined hull, nor hear a sound. Course, hit seemed reliable for me to hang just about where I was, minding my own business. I told Palura afterwards it made me nervous to think about going over to those boats in the dark. In the morning no boat was in sight.

Carp Charley the fisherman moseyed around out of Deep Chute to my boat so's we could talk things over. Over on a sand

bar we saw a gouge and following it came to a two hundred-grain thirty-eight-caliber lead bullet. While we were looking around, a stranger, reg'lar soft-paw, pulled in. A lady was with him and they claimed to be honeymooning. She was scared sick, hearing all that shooting, but we told them some coon hunters had treed a bear on a snag by mistake, so they had shot and celebrated.

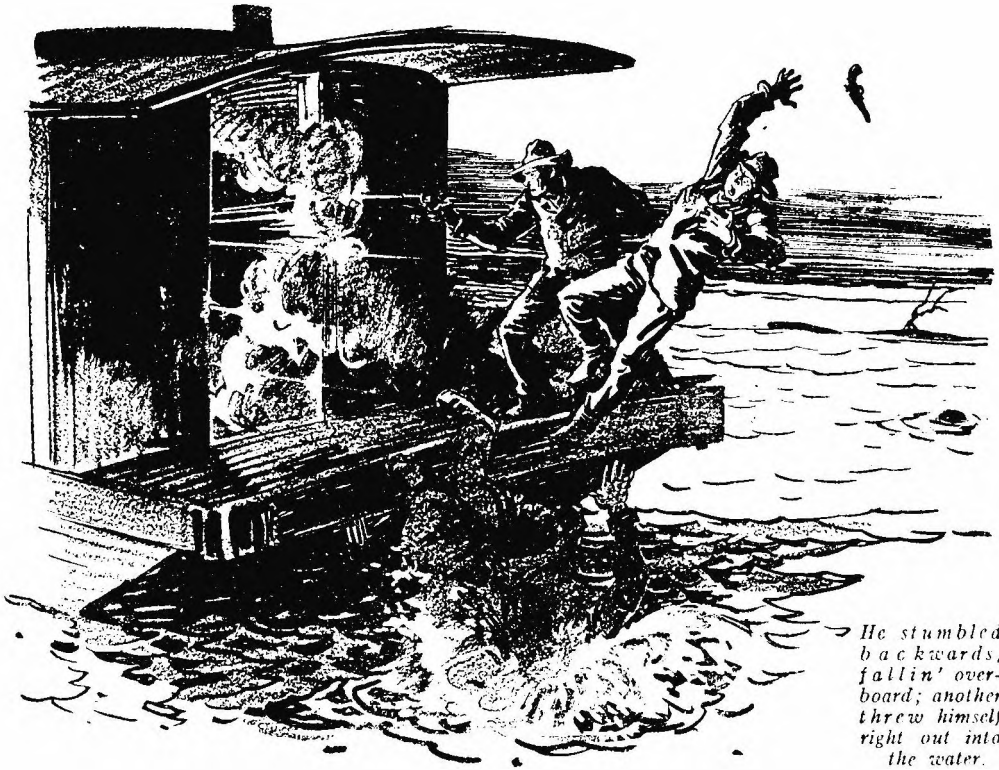
We went on to Charley's tent, taking a taste. Late the next evening a planter looking for a milch cow found three dead bodies. Course, he rode up the bank past us, yelping to his horse every jump. When the Sheriff arrived, we told him we couldn't make head nor tail of what ailed anybody. The posse gathered the corpses, and two more were found farther down floating below the crossing. Charley and me had to testify of course, and all we knew was hearing the shooting a long way off, not knowing just who nor what. The coroner sure noticed the victims were hit in the head or heart, or both, being shot awful accurate, showing how calm and indignant those old sports had been—nice, easy going, friendly—but come time, they sure had mixed homicide in their medicine!

QUEER the way it broke—sheriffs investigated, prosecutors cross-questioned, Up-the-Bankers hunted all over, trying to find what it was all about. For all the talk and bluster, they didn't learn anything.

Palura kept close tabs, ready to jump in if anywhere a cloud of dust or smoky wind storm was needed, but he didn't have to start anything. The duck hunters and lady trippers wa'n't even mentioned. Fact is, after a coupla weeks, we shanty-boaters begun to wonder about them ourselves. Nobody had seen the forty-foot cabin-boat, nor the trunk-cabin cruiser, either. Palura had trippers, whisky-runners, fishermen, and even scouts reporting back to him by telephone from clear below as far as Red River landing, beside bank folks. Two or three habitual liars claimed they had seen the boats snooping past at night, but they wa'n't corroborated.

Palura and all wondered about those bird hunters and their lady friends. For one thing, it tied up that pool we'd chipped in, betting all the ways we could think that combination'd tie up or break. No two had the same idees, course. . . .

A man and his wife opened a store-boat below Arkansasaw City, a yellow house on a black hull, with a glass-cabin tender,



*He stumbled
backwards,
fallin' over-
board; another
threw himself
right into
the water.*

all a kind of nondescript outfit. Us riveh rats wondered about that outfit, till one day I happened to go out on the stern deck. The paint was laid on thick with a blowgun brush—but shucks, no matter how tight you plug up bullet-holes, they always show through sticks and putty! Twelve or fifteen bullets had punctuated that cabin, and theh it was, plain as could be. Those old boys had headed up into the Arkansaw riveh and revised everything while hiding out, then selling, they ske-daddled, too.

This didn't settle anything as far as the ladies was concerned, but you know down here on old Mississip', same's everywhere else, these here confidential things presently sort of leak out and around.

There was one funny thing about this here pool we'd chipped into. This old fellow Wignore when he hears about it, bets "old Mississip' tricks everybody."

Palura, when he looked down the sheet, had to laugh, hisse'f, the way Wignore'd covered all the outside points, which nobody had bet on. It was a spread bet, you see.

The killings were known to everybody; who done hit was the secret of that whispering, chuckling, winking old Scoundrel Riveh, and of the four tripping humans he'd trapped and dallied along. The au-

thorities up the bank had a nice line of corpses shot plumb center. Us riveh rats knowed more or less, while Palura, privileged to partner some't with the Running Tide, like he's often done, had right smart inside ideas.

But them adventuring wives and speculating old sports sure had compromised fifty-fifty with old Mississip'. Scared they hadn't been, not a bit. They'd faced the music, not flinching, and if they'd made their mistake, now they took what come.

Those pirates and rats that knew every nook and bayou down the Bottoms, had planned, too, the best a mean, trifling, miserable crew could shape it. Theh they was, wiped out complete! Palura he didn't plot or fix nothing at all. All he done was kinda leave hit all to old Mississip', even betting both ways, so's the Spirit of the Riveh would know he weren't taking sides as to which tangle of a brace game of natural cussedness was going to seine or trap these trippers. Lots of real smart and intelligent people figure 't moral delinquency's easy, but down old Mississip', lots of times hit's a hard proposition to buck.

We wondered about those two men, reliable, honorable, now with eight dead men to their credit on their consciences. Shooting straight as that done them proud, pro-

tecting ladies that-away. But murder on the soul makes lots of dif'rence in most humans, even seli-defenders. Cain't never tell, and the way things were, Palura wouldn't pay off the pool bets. He hung it up, as undecided yet. People'd think of some new angle to it, putting down another dollar, backing their idea, so it went along real interesting. Down on old Mississip', course there's no hurry on these big, general propositions. What's the use sweating and hustling, huh?

This killing was just kind of an interruption, you might say. It stood to reason killers always drift back to look oveh whereat they'd done meanness, just to kind-a make sure. Same way as regards ladies in one of these yeah promiscuous difficulties. And then, course, more powerful'n ordinary delinquencies is old Mississip', once you're intimate and personal with him. We all come back, yes suh, if only to hear him chuckling and whispering those things to himself in the dark, hintings and confidentials, and we know he's told on us, scandalizing our reputations, and we aint no secrets even in our own hearts no more. No ocean, not the wind itself ever told so much!

COME a Wednesday night, three years to a day after the killings in the Widewater, the northwester was humming in the Bottoms, raw and rough, sure enough shivery for an off-night in Palura's, him expecting to shut up early, but trippers come in from the sandbar. Tourists come down from the Park camp. Right smart of locals naturally just wandered in, taking tables to sit. Fore any one knowed it, theh was one of those big crowds. Fiddling Joe Parmer, Banjo Jack and French Harp Lew come in, hungry as usual, wanting to play for a meal. Palura's milky eyes shone, for he was tickled to death to have special-extra music for that full house.

And they played, like they neveh done before, those old Riveh musics, like Muddy Creek humming to hisse'f. A Ridge Top gal walked out onto the vacant floor, impromptu stepping, caught right by melodies. Funny thing, she'd neveh done the like before! Nobody dreamed she knew those heel-and-toes, double-shuffles, walking struts, besides high-toned foot-work. She cut loose, all hep, yes, indeed!

And so one thing followed another, music, stepping, singing, all Riveh stuff. Old Mississip' was in the air that night.

Two ladies came drifting in alone, near midnight. They could have been anybody in the world, theh in Palura's. They had on long, modest skirts, wearing teaser veils, with wide thin windows over their eyes and obscuring filigrees all over the rest of their faces, but the bets were they must be handsome women, for they were tall and dignified, jaunty in the tip of their hats and the walk of their feet. They hesitated at the edge of the balcony shadows, looking around for a seat.

Palura knows a lady when he sees one. He steered these two to where he'd planted two seat-holders for emergency. The two took wild-grape juice, which is harmless but promising. How come these strangers knew wild-grape? Palura sized them up, twisted his shoulders—bothered. He brought the Spanish glasses full of grape, hisse'f. He leaned back against a pillar, and those ladies hadn't any mud on their laced boots. They smoked, but they were too modest and respectable for any one to think of insulting them, or even suggesting a dance between stage numbers.

Joe Parmer had invented the Tornado Tune, and which everybody said he'd ought to have patented. But he wouldn't.

"Taint mine," Joe says. "I stole hit off a big wind, myse'f!"

Those two ladies held tight hands, listening. Right afterwards, somebody else pushed open the front doors, and in comes two men, slow, dubious, stooping, ready to duck and run. Dog-gone! Checker short pants, long red string ties, stiff army brim hats, woolen shirts, good fitting, rough weave sporting coats, long stockings, short hunting boots—lots of us wanted to give a yell at the sight of those old twin-hearted hunters come down with the migrants again, shy and feeling like strangers, just when they'd reached home again! I had to laugh; they'd been gone just three years.

Palura looked surprised. "Taint often he lets go that much. He actually opened his mouth, showing those front double-teeth of his, all around his jaws. Then he scowled, stepped into a shadow and stared again at those two women. Then I tumbled.

IF it was a date, they didn't look it, no, indeedy. Their mouths was open below their veils—lawse! No lovelier lips or tongues than theirn was ever seen down this-away! And their bosoms lifted as they gasped. Palura seen their embarrass-

ment, and he nods to the switchboard, blotting out the light into the dark blue and purple of a new moon on a milky night.

PALURA whispered to a waiter and grabbed those old boys in one of those welcomes a man gets, if he deserves, around where good fellows and honorable meet. He led them in the gloom to the table where the ladies were sitting, saying something in kind of an apology, to them all on account of having to double them up, that-away, then left them in the gloom. My land, but Palura's quick-witted and polite, that-away!

"Now this yeah next piece," Joe Parmer announced just then, "is one we picked up and put together. We never did get to play hit before, on account of it was so hard to organize, getting hit told 'zactly right. Likely you 'member, a spell back, theh used to be a gang of mean, des'prit, dishonorable scoundrels, the Stacker Island Roosters, an' they come using down lookin' for to raid for jewels on a shanty-boat with two ladies an' that yellow gal, with one blue eye an' one brown eye—Nancy. And they was bent on robbin' those two trippers. An' they'd 'a' done hit, but for two duck-hunters.

"Those old-timers—honorable, brave, long-time friends—traveled in mountangs, in woods, and now followed down the duck flight on Old Mississip'. An' when they seen that pirate launch slick down the crossin', theh in Widewater, they was right theh with their guns, an' when the pirates boarded the stern them white men come in oveh the bow, to have hit out with the scoundrels, like gentlemen always does, yes, suh.

"Course, you know us, Banjo Jack, French Harp Lew an' Fiddlin' Joe Parmer. We floated in on the Tide, and stay. Shiftless, no 'count, triflin', we take hit kindly, jes' havin' anybody willin' to listen to us, let alone, like Palura does, giving us charity out of a big heart—"

"Cut that!" Palura broke in, growling, despising being made out to be kindly. "You earn yo' keep!"

"I didn't mean nothing, Palura," Joe begs off, sorry he'd bothered Palura, "I just wanted to explain about this here piece we're going to play, the Widewater Battle. Hit is a humdinger. Like all these musics we play, the best we can do aint the truth, but jes' a stagger at hit. Hit's jes' pickin' an' blowing, an' sawing away,

wishing we could make hit natural, good and important like the big-timers would, instead of the way three passersby, going down, has to. So heah goes, boys!"

And they started with the birds flying by high in the night, raining music on the River, a breeze in the trees, the eddies chuckling along the edges, a steamboat blowing for a landing far-away, and somebody fiddling "Money Musk" all alone, kinda off-tune and po'r white, but trying. One thing about Joe Parmer's fiddle, if any one knows Old Mississip', he can see along by it like following Government lights around bends and down crossings. I don't know how he does it, but we hear the All's Well of levee guards, the whistling suck at Grand Tower, and the roaring silence when we make the Jump-off at the Ohio Forks.

We could just see those duck-hunters out the Upper River and those ladies in their cabin-boat coming from Pittsburgh, just floating, minding their own business, not thinking nothing. Joe'd lie with his tongue, course, being polite and careful, but never with his music. A man can't never lie when his heart talks out.

THOSE that knowed the Riveh language, heard the birds and the eddies, the cyclone wind and the Night Voices in that music those players gave that night. Hit weren't rumor nor lies, gossip nor dreams, not fanciful or ignorant. Hit was Fiddle, French Harp and Banjo telling the news of Old Mississip', all about two husbands meeting two wandering wives, and Palura figuring on that friend of his of long ago, now messing into trouble of his own, not caring even if he knowed. I tell you, it took a man to help those losing out, not knowing it, and mad at those hornin' in, honorable but taking a friend's scorn.

So the tune came down to Palura's, the men together and the women together, acting and pretending innocence, but everybody with bets still in the pool on them. The music played Palura walking around in a circle, cussing himself, that Banjo just repeating Palura's thumping, exasperated walk, yes, suh! I could see Palura's ears wiggle and him trying not to grin, making fun of hisse'f. We could hear Old Mississip' gurgling and chuckling, and out there in the bright cabin boat was that high-toned classic radio music and the low voices with the chinking dishes and Nancy humming to herself in the kitchen the way a yellow girl does. And up the River, pres-

ently, come that pirate boat, whimpering and whispering, muffled complete.

Knowing what was coming we held our breath too long, and took to suckling it. We heard them slipping in.

Then the banjo bumped, and the pirates were against the stern. A board creaked and somebody cocked a revolver, slipping an automatic safety catch, loud in the silence. Bang! The shooting began and lifted everybody right out of their seats. Banjo Jack sure plunked and whanged the battle. He'd heard it. I'd heard it. And it was sure like an echo of the big fight coming around the world again.

Old Mississipp' kept right on humming his own tune through hit all. The shooting was to the same measures, run the same melodies, had the same echoes in the refrains. And I heard again the yell of the feller that was hit, Joe's fiddle shrieking at the surprise by death. Then the radio succeeded all the other sounds.

We could fairly hear the thumping splash of the dead as the old boys pitched them overboard. Then we could hear the worried people talking excitedly in sharp and hissing whispers. After a while the anchor was hoisted aboard and the sweeps began to pound the water in the eddies. In the last of it was just the purling and chuckling along down of that old Scoundrel Riveh, and over behind the levee an automobile were pearting up so's the women could make their get-away.

THAT automobile was new to me. I hadn't heard that. My land! But those boys played awful good that night. If I'd been in the killing on Widewater, 'stead of just listening, I'd sure felt that music. Those four that went through it, who'd met again in Palura's, sat just frozen. They hadn't been able to stay away from Old Mississipp'. He'd taken hold and toll of them. Long as they lived, they'd never be the same again. Nobody ever is, after messing in bad down a lonely bend or chute.

Arriving back, those handsome women and old hunters, it was just the anniversary night. Nobody'd ever figured it. It weren't a date. Come three years and there they were, come back just natural. Course, no smile came to their lips. They lived the temptation, the fighting, and the killing all over again. In the women's eyes we saw the surprise and fear. In the men's was their angry courage and murder.

Kinda comical, too, the bothered and startled looks on their faces, hearing all of that music as natural as the shooting itself had been. Old Mississipp' had used Palura as a kind of an agent to trick them. The music was the first those folks knew what had really happened, and Snash called the old boy over to the table to ask him about it.

"You sick'd those pirates onto us, Palura?" he asked, in the blunt way he had, talking.

"Yes suh, Snash, I fixed hit so."

"Why didn't you mind your own business?" one of the women asked.

"Snash here saved me from hanging one time," Palura answered.

That was the showdown, which always comes in such things. Mollie and the others thought awhile.

Then Mollie shook Palura's hand, and the others followed suit, Snash most reluctant and last of all. But he finally did. Palura didn't duck their gratitude nor cuss it, the way he generally does such things. He sent Joe-Ed to the office, while Wignore told how after the fight they'd all dropped down the river, getting away. They spied a tourists' campfire at a steamboat planter's landing and bought the wanderer's automobile so the ladies could sky-hoot for the back country. Then the two worked over the boats and sold them, going home. Joe-Ed brought Palura a heavy bag and gave it to Wignore.

"What's this?" the old boy asked, and Palura reminded him of the pool-bets on what'd happen.

"I'd forgotten it!" Wignore scowled. "So I made that spread bet, eh? I must have been drunk—to win."

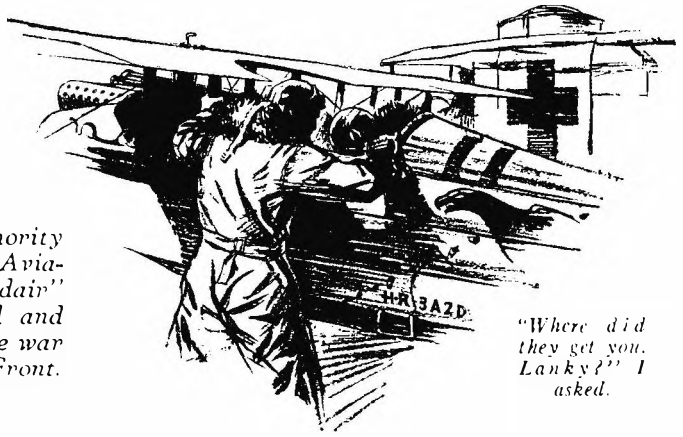
"Not on liquor," Palura told him in his blunt way.

Wignore and the others nodded. They all stared mighty thoughtful at the bag of silver and bills. Wignore wouldn't take it for himself, though it was a lot of money, close to a thousand dollars. One of the ladies said they might get rings or something like that, all alike, so they agreed to it. Palura sat in on the divvy, making five rings to get. . . .

"Old man," Snash said, "we're all grateful. If you ever owed me anything, you've paid it back a hundred times. Some can afford such things, but none of us could."

So they shook hands, and that's all there was to the Widewater affair—and I don't care who says different.

The distinguished authority who wrote "Heroes of Aviation" and "Arnold Adair" here gives us a vivid and authentic drama of the war above the Western Front.



"Where did they get you, Lanky?" I asked.

The Raw Recruit

By LAURENCE
LA TOURETTE DRIGGS

Illustrated by Hubert Rogers

EDDIE MARTIN flew in ahead of me, and dipped his wings. He leaned over the side of his cockpit and jabbed his hand downward.

I stuck my head over the rim and looked around. There was nothing to see but a small town—some dun-colored buildings facing each other across a white road. The houses stood compactly together along the highway, half a mile below us.

While I was staring down at them, I saw Eddie's plane dive steeply ahead of me: I didn't know what he was after, but signaling to Lanky Starr, our raw recruit, to follow me, I shoved forward my stick and slid along on Eddie's tail.

We three had been out more than an hour, trying to give Lanky his first fight.

Up and down the lines between Lunéville and Verdun we coasted along, but no German observation machines were out. We flew back into Germany as far as Metz, but the only thing we flushed was a bunch of seven Fokkers in one flock. They had several thousand feet altitude on us, so we turned tail and dropped into a cloud-bank, where we circled east and flew two or three miles before we emerged again into sunlight. Eddie as usual was keen to ambush the Fokkers, but I had serious doubts about

Lanky Starr. He was not the dead shot Eddie was.

The small hamlet beneath us appeared deserted, but as we approached nearer I noticed a stream of tracer-bullets climbing toward us from a clump of trees and underbrush just north of the houses. It was a lone machine-gun, and the hidden enemy was shooting about three tracers to the second. From Eddie's course I concluded this was what he was after, so I pulled up and swung about to wait for Lanky, letting Eddie go ahead and have his fun. It takes lynx eyes like his to detect a machine-gun nest from a mile in the air.

LANKY dropped alongside and looked at me inquiringly. I motioned him to follow, and in single file we roared down across the tops of the houses, letting go a short burst into the bushes where this village cut-up was concealing himself. He ceased firing, so I flattened out and looked about to see if there was anything else of interest in this little crossroads.

There was. A solitary German soldier walked calmly out of a house into the middle of the road. He threw a contemptuous glance at our three circling planes, then walked leisurely ahead toward the

concealed gun, his muddy overcoat flapping about his heels.

In a split-second Eddie was after him. Dipping down his nose while still in a bank, Eddie fired a burst which splashed fire from the stones a hundred feet ahead of the Fritz, who nevertheless continued to move slowly on, swinging his coat-tails.

Lanky and I both jeered at Eddie as he came around us in a stiff bank, but of course he could not hear. His jaw was set and he threw his Spad into a quick *renversement* to get into position for another go. He threw up a sheepish grin as he came whistling by, but we could see he was a little sore. He opened fire the next instant. The big Fritz leaped high into the air as a twisting tracer bullet disappeared into the tails of his muddy overcoat; as soon as his feet touched earth again, he went down the road like a jack-rabbit, and dived into the bushes head-first. Eddie Martin came back to us shaking his head in disappointment.

It was a sweet May afternoon, and the air was so still just now, the cumulus clouds hung motionless in the sky, without altering their shape. Both Lanky and I were ready to go home. The sun was getting low.

I climbed for altitude, my two pilots packed in close behind my wings. The gigantic white cloud to the south, as we neared it, appeared to have an inverted V-shaped cavern sharply carved out along its entire length. We entered this narrow split at twelve thousand feet, our three planes in formation nicely fitting the snowy tunnel, and our propellers filling the path behind us with rotating billows of eddying mist torn from the walls as we passed.

AFTER a few miles of this sport we suddenly popped out of the cloud. Perhaps it was imagination, but I swear I noticed less noise—as though we had left the echo—when we emerged from that tunnel. I turned and looked back. The concave passage through which we had come was almost closed by swirling tumbling masses of mist which had been picked up and sent whirling by our propellers. As I watched them twist and turn, I suddenly caught a glimpse of a curiously black object in their depths—a color which did not seem to belong there. For ten seconds I stared back at it over my shoulder. Then with a swing of my arm over my head to inform my two pilots that enemy planes were on our trail,

I pulled back my stick, shoved the throttle wide open and began to climb the rear bank of that cloud for altitude.

Out from the mouth of the tunnel appeared a Fokker—then another—then another. Three black machines evidently had been behind us all the way through. Instead of following us, now they were clear, they continued ahead toward the lines with the obvious intention of cutting us off from home.

As I was watching them, I detected from the corner of my eye Eddie's machine rocking violently from side to side. He was close in to my left, Lanky Starr keeping his formation on my right. Eddie stretched his arm upward and ahead. Four Fokkers were streaming across the top of the cloud-bank toward us, headed by a flight-leader whose streamers were standing back rigidly in the fast pace he was setting. Four and three make seven—these must be the acquaintances we had eluded half an hour ago. The flight-leader had ambushed us, sending three of his machines ahead to cut us off while he kept the other four at a nice elevation over us to have us at a disadvantage when we came out of the cloud.

I looked around at Lanky Starr, who was flying close behind my right wing. Lanky was a plucky fellow, but he'd had no fighting in air and was not entirely dependable. He was coolly clearing his guns, firing a burst from each to limber them up, casting an apprehensive eye at our four enemies as he did so. Eddie Martin, bare-headed and grinning, likewise was getting ready for any emergency. We were ten miles inside Germany; Thiaccourt lay twelve thousand feet below us. Lanky would have to fight his way through.

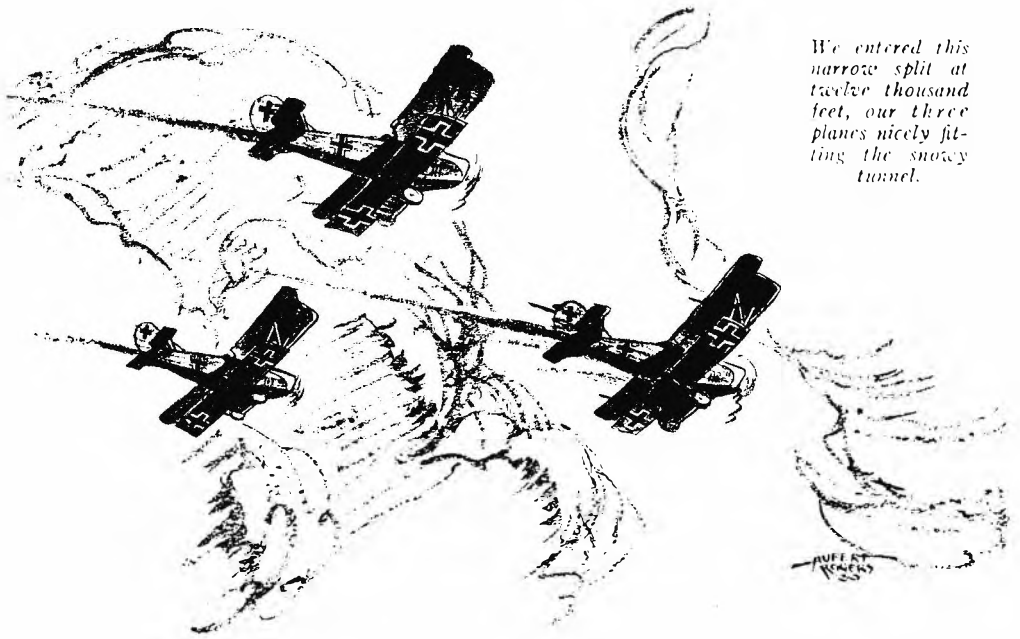
I had turned my formation south on a line parallel with the four Fokkers overhead. With their superior elevation, they could easily overtake us within another mile. The three enemy planes ahead were climbing back toward us, between us and the lines. There was no escaping at least one fracas. Good judgment dictated that this fracas had better be held with the four machines now above us—otherwise we should have all seven of them to deal with. It was not a pleasant situation. If they succeeded in separating Lanky from our formation, doubtless he would be butchered.

NOTHING that we were continuing to climb, the flight-leader suddenly began his attack. He alone kept his altitude,

while the three others closed up without him and descended upon us with gathering speed. This maneuver was executed with such precision that I knew we were up against a real fight. Quickly estimating the distances as they narrowed, I turned my little formation broadside, nosing down to collect all the speed possible for a quick loop at the crucial instant. The next few seconds were crammed with action.

had been hit, how badly it was impossible to see. He was holding onto himself grimly, sitting rigid in his seat and paying no attention to the three enemy pursuers who now were swinging about to prepare for another diving attack from our rear.

I caught Lanky's eye and motioned him down. Another godsend of a cloud lay to the westward and somewhat below us. It was our only chance, and that was a poor



We entered this narrow split at twelve thousand feet, our three planes nicely fitting the snaky tunnel.

As the tracer bullets streaked by my eyes, I threw out the signal, and like one machine our formation zoomed up into the loop, on the top of which we did an Immelmann turn with the hope of coming out of it, above the enemy attackers. Lanky was not skilled enough to keep his position, and as he fell off to the right, I noticed the flight-leader darting down upon him. The three Fokkers below me were likewise intent upon their victim. Lanky was steadily losing altitude and never would be able to rejoin us. Already the flight-leader was riddling him with short expert bursts.

Like a flash, Eddie was on the flight-leader's tail, following him down until he had him segregated from the others. I dropped down alongside Lanky and looked him over. Along the right-hand side of his cockpit I saw a neat row of holes which had not been there a minute ago. Lanky

one. He caught my meaning, and throwing one stoical glance at the two groups of circling Fokkers, he fed in the gas and led the way to that questionable shelter.

Immediately we were the center of a dogfight that lasted all the way to our objective. I was forced to abandon Lanky's machine time and again as the circling, darting enemy machines dived upon us. Firing first at one, and then another of the black Fokkers as they launched themselves upon us, I managed to keep myself between the cripple and his pursuers. Eddie was back in the midst of a tight circle, and in one moment of investigation I discovered that the enemy's seven had shrunk to six.

Two of this number were determined to get Lanky before he eluded them. Doubtless they saw he was not defending himself, and they were looking for a bargain this afternoon. However, they received

several tastes of my lead, and were wary of putting themselves at any disadvantage. Lanky was descending at a famous clip, and the Spad is swifter than the Fokker in a dive. I was a mile behind him when I saw his machine disappear within the opaque side of the cloud.

AS I followed on his trail and the first wisps of white drifted past me, I turned and saw that one of our pursuers was turning to the south with the expectation of greeting us when we left our shelter. The other evidently was intending to follow me—a silly idea. I cleaved into the thick mist, cutting and slashing my way through the eerie darkness like a snow-pow through a cut. For two minutes I flew in absolute blindness, every sense alert to keep my ship level, to avoid a collision either with Lanky Starr or with the Fokker which I believed was not far behind me. A feeling of panic growing as this unearthly sensation of blindness continued, I pointed my nose over into what I thought was a steep dive, the sooner to get out of this gloomy atmosphere. Finally the moisture grew less dense and I distinguished daylight ahead. I burst from the cloud, and with a swift look around I located the earth staring down at me over my right shoulder instead of from below where I supposed it was.

I leveled off and began searching the sky for Lanky—and for more trouble. The Meuse River and St. Mihiel were ahead. The floor of the cloud hung seven thousand feet above the forests.

A moment later there was a violent commotion in the white ceiling ahead of me, and a fast-spinning Spad emerged, nose down, its tail whipping with diabolical swiftness about its orbit. Lanky had fallen into a tail-spin. Was he confused merely, or had he fainted?

I dashed steeply after the spinning machine, my heart in my mouth. There was nothing I could do, save watch it crash. With all my speed I scarcely could overtake the descending ship. It was evident Lanky was making no effort to right it.

We dropped pell-mell almost a mile nearer the ground before I had the satisfaction of seeing my recruit pilot pull out into a long slanting dive and begin to head back into Germany. He had regained control, so he could not be unconscious. I came along his side and waved to him. He could not use his rudder properly.

Gradually I herded him south toward St. Mihiel. His face was grimly set, and he wasted no energy in communicating with me. He kept swerving slightly from his course, checking with his ailerons the machine's desire to fly to the left.

A little reflection assured me that Lanky had used his head in taking a long spin out of the clouds. As yet there was no sign of our pursuers, and down at two thousand feet we were far more difficult to distinguish from the sky, although we were in for a hot time with the archies. Already black angry bursts far behind us and overhead were beginning to dot the sky. The Meuse was about a mile away.

I dropped my nose still deeper and fed in the gas. Lanky was quick to follow, and without swerving from our course, we sailed over the river on a bee-line for our field. As it appeared ahead and the mechanics poured out of the hangar to meet us, I let go a signal flare for the ambulance, and motioned Lanky ahead for the landing.

His ship lurched badly as her wheels touched the ground, but after a heart-wrenching curve, she steadied and ran comfortably along the sod. Fortunately there was no wind. With a wide slow turn to the left, Lanky taxied back to the hangar, and I landed beside him and was out of my cockpit before his prop had stopped revolving. Lanky had slumped over in his seat.

"WHERE'D they get you, Lanky?" I asked as I reached down and put both arms around his shoulders. I could see that his right leg was thrust out straight in front of him. He was trying to pull up his right knee with his hands, but with a grimace of pain he desisted and straightening up again, he pushed back his goggles. Across the right side of his cockpit the bullet-holes were spaced evenly, about two inches apart. They fairly severed the scarlet emblem of our Red Hawk that was pictured there on the outside.

"Good shooting," commented Lanky Starr grimly as he rubbed one gloved finger across the holes. "I guess you and Eddie are too swift company for me, Adair. I thought I knew something about shooting, but I didn't get started quick enough to get my sights on that bird. He flew circles around me."

Lieutenant Starr looked gloomily at his leg. His slow, ponderous movements were

habitual with him in everything that he did. I noticed a pathetic look of mingled misery and self-condemnation in his face as his eyes traveled down the length of his long leg. He had begged me an hour ago for this trip over the lines, and while I had no delusions about his flying ability, still, he was a lieutenant in my squadron and he had to be given experience as soon as possible. No one ever would question Lieutenant Starr's stamina. He had the type of courage that is recognized in the first glance of meeting. One could picture him serenely mastering any emergency on the ground.

"Where'd they get you, old boy?" I repeated. "You badly hit?"

Lanky touched the outside of his right knee, then unclasping his safety belt, he placed both elbows on the edges of his cockpit and without a word, hoisted himself up, his wounded leg dragging.

THE ambulance was coming around the corner of the hangar and a group of mechanics were running toward us.

"Here, Sergeant!" I shouted to the senior mechanic who led them. "Lieutenant Starr is wounded. Lend a hand there on the other side."

Between us we lifted the long figure of Lanky Starr from his plane. The ambulance backed up and extended a stretcher almost on the level with the top of his cockpit. We eased him onto it, and in a moment the wounded man was placed inside. I asked the medical officer to wait a moment, as I detected a Spad boring down upon us from high in the north.

"It's Lieutenant Martin, sir," the sergeant volunteered.

Before his plane had stopped rolling, Eddie, bareheaded and his face smudged with black grease, was out on the ground and running to us.

"Where'd the blighters get him? Is he badly shot up? I paid back the guy that got him—he's down in flames south of Thiaccourt! How are you, Lanky?" the boy ended breathlessly as he stuck his head inside the ambulance.

"Two bullets in the right leg," the doctor answered for his patient. "One in the knee, I'm afraid. Do you want to come along, you two?"

Eddie Martin plunged a hand deep in his flying-suit and pulled out a cigarette-case. He stuck a cigarette between Lanky's lips and held a flame to it. We both got

in with the doctor. The ambulance orderlies climbed up with the driver, and the load of us started off for the hospital two miles away, in Toul.

LANKY STARR was a silent cuss, I reflected as I watched him sympathetically. With his hands behind his head, he was smoking as we sped along. Lanky was the oldest man in my outfit, but not so good a pilot at that. Little Eddie Martin, now, was a born air fighter; they didn't often come like him. But Lanky certainly was clumsy in a mix-up. He had all the nerve in the world, but he didn't have the hands for clever flying. This shot in his knee was bad business, but Lanky was lucky it was not worse.

My thoughts were interrupted by our arrival at the hospital. Already it was dusk. After Lanky was tucked away for the night, I would take Eddie to the Café Europa for a good dinner.

A nurse cut away the clothing and bared Lanky's leg while Colonel Wiley, the surgeon, was washing his hands. Lanky smoked two or three cigarettes and watched the doctor probe for the bullets. Only a flinch of pain, now and then, came from the patient. Finally both bullets were removed, washed off and dropped into a saucer.

"Now, you two birds," Doctor Wiley suggested as he stood drying his hands on a napkin, "order up some dinner. You'd better stay here and talk to Lanky till he falls asleep. I'll give him a little shot of something that'll drop him off before he knows it."

Lanky raised himself on his elbow and looked us over.

"I don't want any opiate. I want a good stiff drink, and a big steak. Don't I get anything to eat, Doc?" Lanky demanded, looking ferociously at the surgeon.

Colonel Wiley considered a moment.

"Well, all right—if that's the way you feel about it—eat a big steak! I'll stop in before eight o'clock and give you a shot then. Order up what you want to eat. A big steak wont hurt any of you."

"How long will Lieutenant Starr be laid up, Colonel Wiley?" I asked as the physician started for the door. He paused with his hand on the knob.

"He'll hobble around in three or four weeks, if he behaves himself," answered the Colonel. "Luckily the bullet only grazed the bone. You hang those two bul-

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By Laurence La Tourette Driggs

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lets on your watch-fob, Lanky." He nodded his head toward the saucer and disappeared from the room.

"Four weeks!" yelled Lanky Starr with a roar like a bull about to charge. "I've got to be in Paris inside a week!"

LIEUTENANT STARR was at least ten years older than myself. He had been assigned to my squadron four or five weeks before. His papers were regular and his appetite for work was insatiable. He made no complaints but fitted into whatever job was given him with the steady reliable air that marks the good soldier. He was respected by our entire outfit and if he'd only been blessed with a little more sensitiveness of touch on stick and rudder bar, he would have made a wonderful commanding officer.

He lay back in moody silence while I ordered dinner for the three of us. To our repeated inquiries as to how he felt, Lanky scowled and showed signs of irritation, replying shortly that he was all right. Finally he told Eddie to stop bothering him with questions; two bullets in the leg was no new experience to him, he claimed; he'd been shot through the body twice in his life and he was used to it.

"Not in this war!" exclaimed Eddie, staring at him.

"No, *not* in this war," grunted Lanky enigmatically, continuing to look at the ceiling in deep thought.

Our husky invalid disregarded our offers of help and cut his own meat, when the food arrived, devouring it with his usual strength of jaw. He was silent during the meal, evidently turning over in his mind the sudden change in his life which this afternoon's misfortune had forced upon him. When the dishes were cleared away and we had given Lanky a cigarette, I prepared to break the news to him that he was not cut out for a pilot, and that I would arrange some ground-work for him when he came back from leave; but before I had time to hand him the bad news he suddenly spoke.

"Look here, Major!" he said, rolling his head toward me and looking at me authoritatively. "I've got to get out of here. You'll never make a fighting pilot out of me. I'm going back to Paris. You'll do me a favor by getting my papers ready for me, right away. I'll damn' sure appreciate it if you'll get busy on it tonight."

I stared at this sub-lieutenant of mine

who made this very patronizing proposal. I had never before seen this side of Lanky Starr.

"No, I mean it," he went on quickly, gauging my thoughts and interrupting me as I was about to remind him who he was.

"I've been in your squadron about a month, not as a regular pilot, but to get the low-down on some of these birds in your outfit. I've got to get back to Paris just as quick as the Doc will let me travel. When I come back I'll give you the whole dope, but I want you to cut the red tape and get me to Paris."

He winced with pain and closed his eyes and lay back upon his pillow. Eddie Martin looked at me in consternation.

"You're getting feverish, Lanky," I said quietly. "You'd better get some sleep. You'll go to Paris when I give you leave to go."

He did not move but lay there with his wrist across his eyes. I got up and switched off the ceiling lights.

"Anything I can do for you, old boy?" I asked after some further minutes of silence. He shook his head without replying. We'd sat watching him for a time, in a state of uneasiness, when the door opened quietly and Doctor Wiley entered the room.

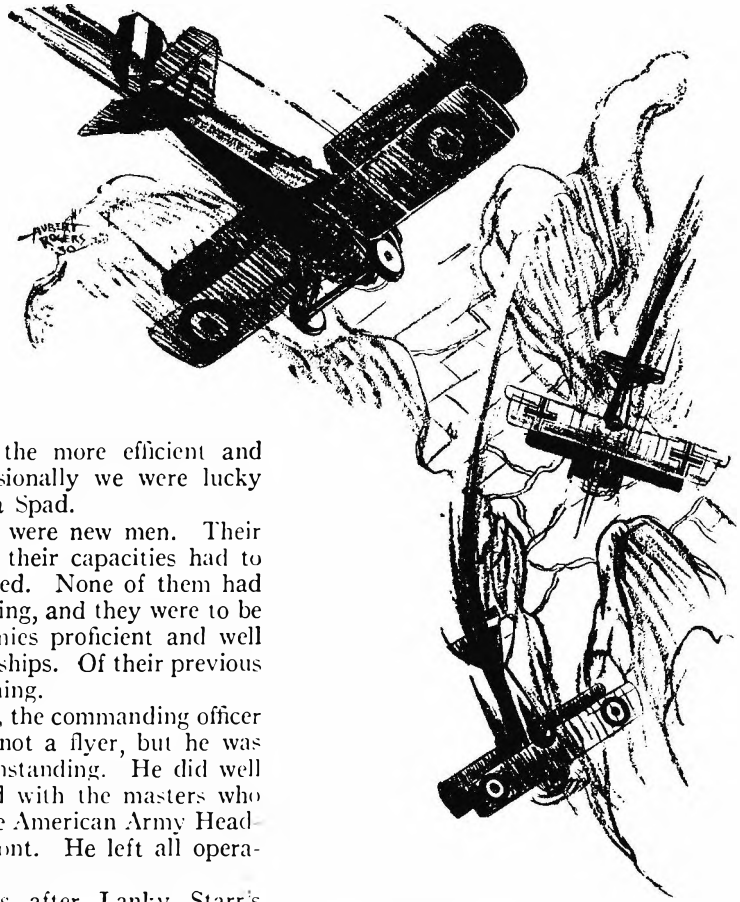
"How's the leg, Lanky?" he called cheerily; then he looked at us. "Get out of here, you birds," he ordered. "I've got one minute to put a shot into Lanky; then I've got a critical operation coming which will keep me up all night. Beat it, both of you!"

Eddie and I picked up our caps and made for the door.

"Come back here tomorrow, soon as you can, Adair," yelled Lanky Starr, suddenly rousing from his bed. "And bring with you that black dispatch-case from the trunk under my cot. Come alone; I want to show you something."

THE American Air Service was finding it very difficult to get proper equipment during these early months of nineteen eighteen. Our pilots were coming overseas in sufficient quantities, and at various training-schools they were receiving instruction, of a kind. Early in March we had several squadrons ready for the Front, but these squadrons lacked both airplanes and guns. Little by little we were able to wangle small allotments of Nieuports from the French—who already had abandoned

*Like a flash Ed-
dir was on the
flight-leader's
tail, following
him down until
he had him seg-
regated from the
others.*



them in favor of the more efficient and safer Spad. Occasionally we were lucky enough to receive a Spad.

All of my pilots were new men. Their characteristics and their capacities had to be tested and trained. None of them had experienced war flying, and they were to be pitted against enemies proficient and well trained on superior ships. Of their previous history I knew nothing.

Colonel Sheridan, the commanding officer of our group, was not a flyer, but he was a good egg, notwithstanding. He did well for us in Paris and with the masters who directed us from the American Army Headquarters in Chaumont. He left all operations to me. . . .

Some two weeks after Lanky Starr's misfortune, I was working in my office one morning when a motor-lorry stopped outside my window, long enough to let somebody get off; then it slithered away through the mud to the Park at the rear. The outer door opened and a tall bronzed lieutenant entered with a kit-bag swinging from the strap over his shoulder. He walked with a heavy cane and was limping noticeably as he closed the door and advanced past my desk toward the Colonel's office.

It was Lanky Starr, returned evidently from Paris, where he had gone by Doctor Wiley's orders after a few days in the Toul hospital. He gave me an elaborate wink and motioned me to accompany him to the inner sanctum of Colonel Sheridan's office.

"Hello, Lanky," called the Colonel, frowning characteristically at the interruption. "How's the old knee?"

"Pretty fit, sir." Lanky dropped his kit-bag on the floor and turned around to close the door.

The Colonel stared from Lanky to me at this impertinence, and to show his annoyance, he began to turn over the papers

in his basket without looking at them. Then, seeing that the Lieutenant had something to say and was not to be put off, he glanced at the cane and grudgingly pointed to a chair.

"Sit down," he said. "When did you get back?"

"Just came, sir. They kept me in Paris longer than I expected."

"Yes," the Colonel snorted, "the made-moiselles have that nice reputation. They don't care how short-handed we are. How long have you been gone?"

"Three weeks yesterday, sir," replied Starr, easing himself into the chair.

"Wasn't there an inquiry sent in here about you—from the Secret Service Headquarters, I think?" He turned his swivel-chair and shouted to the adjutant.

"Captain Ormsby!"

"Yes sir," the adjutant answered, coming to the opposite door and standing at attention.

"What was that inquiry we had a fortnight ago about Lieutenant Starr? Find it and bring it to me."

Starr sat steadily in his seat; his eyes deep and unfathomable as the Colonel wheeled about and looked at him. Their eyes locked for several seconds.

"Here it is," said the adjutant, placing some papers on the desk. The Colonel took them up and read them over while Captain Ormsby waited.

"Do you know anything about this, Starr?" demanded the Colonel, looking fixedly at his pilot.

"No sir."

Colonel Sheridan showed his skepticism. He prided himself upon his intimacy with every pilot in our outfit—yet what could he know of the personal integrity of these individuals, their education, their home life, their boyhood history? The stress of office work was heavy at present, and the Colonel had counted upon adding this incapacitated Lieutenant to his official family. Now as he looked at him he showed a vague distrust of the other's silence and poise.

"You are sure you know nothing about this, Starr?" repeated the Colonel sternly. "You haven't seen the Secret Service people in Paris?"

"No sir."

After another long look at the grim face of the Lieutenant, the Colonel held out the papers to the adjutant, who took them and withdrew to his own office. Starr got to his feet laboriously and limped to the adjutant's door, and closed it. Then turning to his superior with a grin, he tossed his cane to the couch and walked briskly back and resumed his seat without a limp.

"That's what I've come to see you about, Colonel Sheridan," he said. He reached into his pocket and drew forth an envelope.

"Here's something for you to look over by yourself. My orders were to speak to nobody but you. Major Adair, here, knows about it. This will tell you the story, Colonel. I'm glad to be rid of it."

HE unfolded a thin sheet of paper, spread it out and placed it on the Colonel's blotter. My chief glanced first at the signature and then swiftly read the typed paragraphs. When he finished he looked up with a new interest and regarded Lanky incredulously. The latter did not flinch, but sat erect, his strong and resolute features sharply outlined against the window. He had the chin of a fighter and his rest in the hospital had increased the appearance of great strength of his legs and shoulders. The Colonel burst into laughter.

"Well, I'm damned!" he said, and laughed again. "My hat! This is a new wrinkle to me, and I thought I knew 'em all. You've been here a month learning to fly through archy—getting a bullet in the knee—all for what your Chief calls 'active experience'!"

"I wanted to learn something of the country behind the lines," said Lanky Starr calmly.

"And you were a major all this time?"

Starr nodded.

"Where did you learn to fly?"

"At Issoudun."

"Did you enlist regularly—go there as a cadet—take your chances with the others about getting to the Front?"

"Some of it was arranged, of course. I picked out your outfit because you had a bunch of pilots I wanted to be with."

The Colonel shook his head and smiled at me.

"If this thing hadn't happened to me—this queer tale—I would never have believed it. My hat!"

"You understand nobody else is to know this queer tale!" Major Starr cautioned him sternly.

"Certainly. Of course." The Colonel was dignified.

"I am still on sick leave. That's why I'm limping about on my cane. Your records will let it go at that. There are two more of your pilots ordered down to Nice on sick leave, I'm afraid, Colonel."

"Who?" demanded Colonel Sheridan, instantly upon guard. His mind flashed over the list of his favorites and he prepared to defend his rights.

"Lieutenants Muller and Wolff," said Major Starr quietly.

"No, you don't!" replied my chief sharply.

Lanky sat motionless in his chair, neither acquiescence nor disapproval expressed in his bearing.

"Lieutenant Muller and Lieutenant Wolff probably will develop into the best fighting pilots in our service," snapped the Colonel. "You've got a nerve to think I'll give them up."

Major Starr pointed to the sheet of tissue paper on the desk.

"There are the orders," he said. "I'm to be given what I want, and no questions asked."

"This outfit is not under the Secret Service," retorted Colonel Sheridan angrily.

Lanky Starr glanced at his watch.

"Your telephone will ring in eleven minutes," he said. "We'll wait that long."

The Colonel gazed at my raw recruit with burning eyes, but Lanky calmly ignored him. Finally both of them smiled, their glances betraying mutual admiration and respect.

"How long have you been in this Secret Service—or is that a question I shouldn't ask?"

Lanky smiled again.

"I was born in it," he answered; "all my life has been spent in it. My father has spent his life in it."

"What do you want me to do?" asked the Colonel whimsically. "I might as well help you, since I can't help myself. My hat! I shall be left with a handful of green cadets who have never been over the lines. Do you mind telling me why you pick out Muller and Wolff?"

Major Starr hesitated.

"Because they both speak German like natives," he replied; "they ought to translate well. From today on, both of them are on your records as recovering from wounds—recuperating in the Nice hospital. But their names must remain on your personnel sheets as members of your squadron.—Where are they now, Adair?" he asked, turning to me.

"They're both out on the eight o'clock patrol," I replied.

My superior officer wheeled savagely.

"Did you know about this, Adair?"

"Major Adair has not received these orders, sir," Lanky Starr interrupted swiftly. "This order is addressed to you."

"Look here, Starr! What has their speaking German got to do with this? Are you going to take good pilots away from their ships and put them on your damnable paper work—or shouldn't I ask you that?"

"No sir, you shouldn't," said Horace Starr calmly. "Your orders are clear. Nobody but yourself is to know where Muller and Wolff are."

"Well, I'll be damned!" ejaculated the West Pointer.

THE telephone buzzed. Throwing an indignant glance at the two of us, Colonel Sheridan untwisted his legs and leaned back to reach his receiver. He shouted into it angrily; then he unfastened his lips and added:

"Oh, good morning, *sir*."

"Two of your pilots are ordered away today on indefinite leave," we heard the

voice squeak through the instrument. "Give them travel orders and passes to Nice—Lieutenant Muller, and Lieutenant Wolff. Are you in good shape there?"

"Oh, *splendid*, sir," shouted the Colonel. "You're leaving me five cripples and seven cadets to nurse them—just enough for three nice bridge-tables."

The General chuckled over the wire.

"Well, Sheridan, *c'est la guerre*; it's time your boys learned something about bridge."

"Yes sir."

"This order comes from Paris, and I cannot interfere."

"All right, sir. I understand."

With a muffled snort Colonel Sheridan laid down his receiver. My former sub-lieutenant, now metamorphosed into Major Horace Starr of the American Secret Service, rose to his feet, secured his cane from the couch and limped toward the door with his kit-bag again on his shoulder.

"There's a train for Paris at eleven o'clock, Colonel," he said as he paused before opening the door. "I'd like to take these two boys away with me as soon as their papers are ready."

"Oh, all right," snapped Sheridan. "You seem to have everything all set."

Colonel Sheridan called for the adjutant and directed him to prepare the travel orders and passes for our two pilots. I left the office with Lanky Starr, who limped along beside me, leaning heavily on his stout cane.

"I appreciate what you've done for me, Adair," said he, as we reached the field well beyond the listening ears of anyone. "You have not mentioned this matter to anyone?"

"Not to a soul," I replied.

"Well, I want you to keep it to yourself for another week," he said, turning his eyes sharply into mine. "Before the week is over, you'll read the announcement that Wolff and Muller both died from disease in the Nice hospital."

I stood fast and confronted my companion with earnestness mingled with much anxiety.

"You are absolutely positive there can be no mistake about these two men, Lanky?"

"Mistake! Certainly not. Do you think I'd spend two months of my precious time learning to fly, breaking in as a recruit, getting shot in the leg—just for the fun of the thing? Both of these men have been watched ever since they left the States.

Before they got to the Front, we knew positively that both of them were in the pay of the Germans."

"Then why didn't you arrest them long ago? Why did you let them come to the Front? Why have you permitted them to fly into the German lines and land there several times?"

"It's a mistake to ask questions of a Secret Service operative, Adair. However, you've been of more help to us than you suspect, and you're entitled to some information."

He eased himself down to the edge of an engine crate and spoke in a low tone.

"NINE out of ten of these German-American soldiers are all right," he said emphatically. "But of course we've had to watch them all. These lads who volunteered for aviation were a pretty problem. Among such volunteers were bound to be men who chose this line because the airplane gave them a way to communicate with the enemy. The only way to catch them was to let them have a free rein—and then see what they did."

Starr stared at me closely for a moment. Obviously he intended telling me no more than he felt compelled to.

"When did you first learn that Muller and Wolff were landing on enemy air-dromes?" I demanded.

"Muller got lost from his formation three times, didn't he?" countered Lanky. "You gave me that information yourself."

I felt my spine stiffen as I recalled those three occasions, one by one. The last time it happened, Lieutenant Muller claimed he had landed on a vacant field near Lunéville with oil trouble.

"You joined the squadron at the same time those two did," I suggested. "You came here from Issoudun with them."

"Yes, and I've slept next them in the same room ever since," rejoined Major Starr. "They're my two closest pals."

"Joe Wolff has never been over the lines alone, that I recall," I said, after a long pause. "I would feel better about this, Lanky, if you'd give me one bit of your positive proof that these fellows are in the pay of the Germans."

Major Starr sat silent for some seconds, digging into the turf with his cane. Off to the north I detected our eight o'clock patrol coming in; there were five in the formation which included both Wolff and Muller.

"You remember the Captain Koeller, who blew in here about three weeks ago, and spent the night with us?" said Lanky Starr, looking at me sharply.

I nodded.

"Well, he took these two lads into Toul for dinner that night, and they all came back to the field about nine o'clock. Captain Koeller gave Muller the information which Muller carried into Germany on his first patrol next morning—the day he said he landed with oil trouble near Lunéville. Wolff has not landed inside Germany as yet, for there's no use in both of them risking themselves. But you'll notice neither of them has accomplished anything in their patrols against the enemy."

I paid slight attention to the latter part of Lanky's speech, for I wanted to nail him on his first statement.

"How do you know Captain Koeller was a spy—and if you knew it, why didn't you expose him on the spot, before Muller delivered his information to the enemy?"

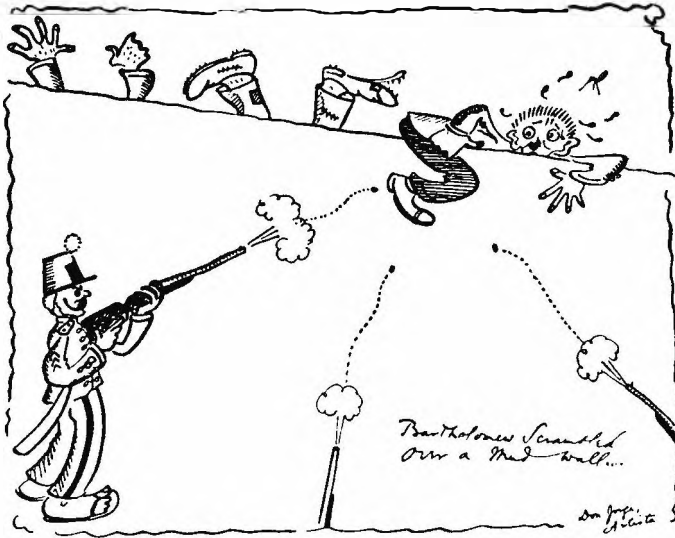
Lanky glanced overhead at the circling formation as the pilots, one by one, cut their motors and prepared for landing.

"Because," said Major Starr fiercely, "Captain Koeller is one of our agents, and he was here by my orders. The information he gave Muller was something we wanted the enemy to have."

HE rose to his feet and limped toward the hangars. Lieutenants Muller and Wolff climbed out of their machines, and with the others gathered around Lanky Starr to welcome his return. As they struggled out of their flying-suits, which the mechanics took, Ormsby, the adjutant, appeared walking across the road from his office with several papers in his hand. Lanky waved his heavy cane to the driver of the lorry which had brought him here and now was parked at the side of the hangar. He met the adjutant and took the papers from him.

"Oh, Joe," he called back to Lieutenant Wolff, "come here a minute! You too, Muller."

The two pilots in their neat uniforms walked together to the side of the lorry. After a moment's conversation with Lanky, they helped him in through the rear aperture and then leaped in beside him. As we stood watching them, the truck started away and soon was lost to our sight on the road leading to Toul.



GEORGE ALLAN ENGLAND

The author of "Bennington's Boom" and "Mamma Told Me" was in fine fettle when he wrote this blithe chronicle of tropic misadventure.

Bennington the Buccaneer

Illustrated by the Author

FROM the deck of the super-rusty old hit-or-miss steamer *Nauseatica*, Bartholomew Bennington through his horn-rimmed glasses surveyed Puerto Cochino, capital of the Republic of San Ocioso, and felt a trifle dubious. True, coconut and royal palms nodded with feathery grace over red-tiled roofs, a silver surf broke on sands of coral, and the cathedral tower stood picturesquely against a forest background.

But the idea of being left all alone in this spiggoty land, unsheltered save by the red-and-yellow banner languidly drooping from half a flagpole in the dusty plaza, rather alarmed our hero. The buzzards, too, looked ominous as they soared above the municipal slaughter-house. All in all, Bartholomew didn't like the prospect.

"It might be O.K. for a day or so," he decided. "But as for spending two weeks here—decidedly, no. Why, all the resources of a dump like this would be exhausted in half a day!"

Which proves that Bennington entertained no adequate idea of the possible resources of even the sleepest little tropical town. But then, what Americano ever does?

As—the only passenger to land at Puerto Cochino—he went ashore with his baggage in a huge *pitpan* or shovel-nosed dugout, paddled by four brown gentlemen in tat-

tered, once-white raiment, he felt very much an adventurer. True, his errand was commonplace enough. The Boston Bungalow Builders, by whom he was employed, had needed certain supplies of hardwoods, to be found in the tropical forests of Central America. Bennington's vacation had been due. So, with admirable thrift, the Company had conceived the idea of letting him use that vacation on business.

And now here he was in San Ocioso, thin-necked and narrow-chested as ever, all a-blink, trepitant yet determined.

THE Customhouse staff, on the broken-down government wharf where the navy lay moored by a single frayed hawser, awakened from a nap he was having in a sisal-fiber hammock. He took time to inspect and chalk Bartholomew's baggage. Shortly thereafter, Bartholomew found himself and his impedimenta in a low-cut hack with gaudy brass trimmings (brewage of 1869), being hauled by a tottering mule (same date) to the Gran Hotel Occidental, most luxurious of San Ocioso's two caravanserais.

Here the Señor Proprietor, an extraordinarily fat person all of whose sweating chins needed a shave, greeted our wanderer with real Castilian courtesy and gave him the room *de luxe*, so distinguished because it was swept once a month and the

water-pitcher had a handle. Presently, the baggage having been all brought up by a bare-legged Indian peon with a head-strap, Bennington sat, in a straight-backed chair covered with goat-hide, on the balcony.

WITH interest Bartholomew from his vantage-point surveyed the somnolent Plaza with its heaven-defying statue of the supreme and world-famous Liberator, the Generalísimo José Embustero. Bennington also observed the Palacio de Justicia; the *cuartel*, in front of which reposed soldiery of diversified color and equipment; the Ayuntamiento, or City Hall. His eye gazed at the Presidential Palace, home of his Excellency General Pablo Chivista.

In front of the Palace, he saw, ran a street-car track. This track extended up from the government wharf, skirted the plaza, and disappeared in a maze of narrow, tortuous streets to westward. As a track, it wasn't so much. It looked like two meandering streaks of rust, repaired for the last time, perhaps, a year before the hack had been built. Still, it was a track, and no doubt it led to the business section.

"*Compañía de Explotación Tropical*," he now once more, as so often during the voyage, read the address on his letter of introduction to the firm he was soon to interview. Again he pondered his resources: a return ticket to Boston; \$84.50 still remaining of the expense-money the Bungalow Builders had given him; a letter of credit for five thousand dollars to do business with; and private funds to the extent of \$9.04. When he left his Idlewilde home, Beatrice his wife—advised by Mrs. K. N. Pepper, his wife's mother—had allowed him eighteen dollars for personal spending-money.

"Why should you need more than that, I'd like to know?" Beatrice had demanded. "If you don't drink, or gamble, and if you remember you're a respectable married man with a young child, and don't let any designing Spanish-American vampires entrap you, surely three dollars a week for incidentals ought to be more than enough. Six weeks, eighteen dollars!"

"Yes, my love," Bartholomew had meekly bowed to this inexorable logic. Yet now, little more than a fortnight having passed, his personal funds had shrunk to only four cents more than half. "It was that day in Havana that knocked my finances out," he reflected. "I surely did hit it up pretty hard, that day. Those

three beers and that taxi-ride and those ten lottery-ticket fractions—hmm! Got to economize, from now on!"

But—ah, well, Bennington felt he couldn't really get stuck, down here in San Ocioso. Not while he still had his return ticket, and the \$84.50. After all life was adventurous, life was kind!

In this mood he descended to the office and bar, with its sticky zinc counter, its rickety round tables and broken-tiled floor. A gentleman at one of the tables, an American, raised a hand of greeting:

"Ah, sir, good day! Will you do me the honor, sir, to be seated with me and indulge in some slight libation, or such?"

BARTHOLOMEW, delighted to hear accents of his mother-tongue in this land of strange and not-understood speech, was seated.

"Just a beer, please," he elected his beverage. "In this climate, you know—"

"You have but now arrived, sir, on the *Nauseatica*?"

"Yes, yes," admitted Bennington, surveying the Americano. This Americano, it appeared, was somewhat shop-worn, time-worn, care-worn or something. Worn, anyhow. He had once been of portly mien, but circumstances—the Central American sun, or lean pickings, or what-not—had notably shrunk him. His skin hung in loose folds, like an aged elephant's, and looked almost as leathery. Likewise his raiment appeared about one-third too large. Its linen, once white but now age-yellowed, had been washed to threadbareness, though the most recent washing had apparently been some time back.

On this raiment, buttons were here or there missing. Even as the Americano signed a slip for the drinks, another button gave up the ghost and dropped with a click to the tiles. The Americano, as if this were a mere routine matter, picked it up without comment and pocketed it.

"Beer, sir," he observed in a voice of rotund sonority. "*Cerveza*—all very well, perhaps, but give me a more generous and enlivening nectar. Rum, sir, give me rum! Rum fits the tropics, sir, as heroism fits a San Ociosan soul!" He twisted up his immense white mustaches, which were tobacco-brown in the center: and from beneath bristling white brows directed a small, twinkling, blue-eyed gaze at Bartholomew. "I am, sir, a San Ociosan. Naturalized citizen of this glorious republic.

Finest country in the world, sir, bar none. What is your name, sir? Mine is McSwingle. Ithuriel B. McSwingle, capitalist and promoter, sir. *And pioneer!*"

Bennington reciprocated with his entitlements, adding:

"Perhaps you can help me in a business way, Mr. McSwindle—pardon me, McSwingle. If so, I'll be very grateful." He explained his hardwood-buying errand, and mentioned the *Compañía de Explotación*.

"I may indeed assist you," the other agreed, shoving back his broad-brimmed Panama, that must have been a-pioneering with its owner for many a long year. He adjusted his cravat, which was an ordinary black shoe-string, tied in a bow-knot over a shirt now being worn turned inside-out. He nodded. "Assist with advice. Always show plenty of cash, sir. The Latin-American appreciates cash. With checks, drafts, letters of credits and so on, progress is slow. But cash, ah—*Poderoso caballero, es Don Dinero!*" You speak Spanish, I presume, sir?"

"Sorry to say, I don't."

"Useful, but not essential," judged McSwingle, while Bennington fished a fly out of his warm beer and drank a sip. "Whereas cash is absolutely essential, for business. Yet after all, sir, why talk of business? Mere commercial pursuits, as such, do not intrigue me." He yawned slightly. "Vision, sir—that is what holds me enthralled! Vision of affairs on a gigantic scale—of vast commercial and financial transactions, titanic developments!"

"You seem to have a thriving little capital, here," remarked Bartholomew. The jingle of an approaching bell made itself somewhere audible.

"Tremendous, sir! Incalculable!" McSwingle sipped more rum, neat. "And when you consider, sir, that the new Interoceanic Canal, to wed twin oceans in bonds of indissoluble affinity—the surveys for which canal, sir, have already been planned—that this stupendous canal will make Puerto Cochino its eastern terminus; also that the canal will run parallel to the Rio Alacrán or Scorpion River, through its whole length in San Ociosan territory, our prospects are dazzling, indeed! Will you, sir, have another libation?"

"**T**HANK you, no," declined Bennington, as the bell grew visible. This bell hung to the neck of a moth-eaten and badly galled mule, so aged, rib-staring and attenuated

that not even a starving buzzard would have tackled it.

The best possible gait of this superannuated quadrupe was a slow stagger. Down the meandering track tottered the mule, driven by a somnolent gentleman of color, seated in a rocking-chair. The rocking-chair was located on the front platform of what had long ago been a street-car.

Let us pause, like Bennington, to observe this street-car. It had, to all appearances, been exported to San Ocioso from Toonerville, after having been worn out there. Its cracked, gaping sides were bulged and warped. One determined kick from man or mule would have disrupted the entire fabric; but neither mule nor man seemed to have energy sufficient for kicking. Two of its flat wheels bumped slowly as it crawled along the crooked rails. A bent trolley-pole, tied awry on the roof—which was liberally repaired with guanapalm thatch—gave it a coquettish air.

Slumberously the colored gentleman in the rocking-chair nodded. The motive-power, head hanging, also seemed to doze. At three-quarters of a mile per hour, the equipage moved onward.

Ithuriel B. McSwingle smiled slightly, as he leaned forward and repeated:

"Dazzling prospects, sir! Tremendous possibilities! Even there, sir, in that apparently unpromising transportation-system, lurk incalculable potentialities. Do you realize, sir, what you are now beholding?"

"It looks to me like a street-car, mule and driver that have seen better days—but very long ago."

"True, sir, true. Yet ah, vastly more. You are there confronting infinite opportunities. Infinite, sir! Illimitable! You understand me?"

"Sorry to say, I don't. How so?"

"A franchise, sir. Let me elucidate.—*Mozo*, more beverages! This street-car, sir, is not operated for profit. As a matter of fact, it never carries any passengers. Nevertheless, sir, the operation of this car possesses the very highest importance."

"Again," queried Bartholomew, "how so?"

"It holds and secures a franchise, you understand? It maintains certain vested rights." McSwingle seized a pair of pince-nez from inside his coat-lapel, pulled out a long chain and unrolled from a little round box with a spring in it, and through the pince-nez gazed at Bartholomew. "Forty-

seven years ago, after certain revolutionary events with which I will not now trouble you, yet which entitled me to the rank of colonel, I obtained a franchise covering all present and future public-service operations in the entire Republic of San Ocioso."

"And then?"

"Including any and all railroads, steamships on coasts, lakes and rivers, canals, lighting and power-plants, and so on. A franchise of inconceivable value, sir—that is, prospectively so. I and my associates built this street-car line and placed a car in operation—the identical car, sir, which you now perceive just passing the *cuartel*. The identical driver, sir—"

"And mule?"

"No, sir. Let us, above all things, be veracious. That original motive-power of our corporation passed away, gently and peacefully, in 1896, aged thirty-eight years, two months and some days. The present power is hardly more than thirty-four years of age. And for twenty-nine of those years, sir, I and my associates have been unjustly dispossessed of our stupendously valuable franchise-rights."

"How did that happen?"

"A terrific financial war was waged against us, by unprincipled traitors," explained Colonel McSwingle, twisting up his mustaches and drinking still more rum. "The legitimate government was overthrown by fraud and force. We were robbed, sir, robbed. Basely robbed of our railroad, our driver, car and mule. But more especially, of our franchise."

"Which," queried Bartholomew, "is still of value?"

"Enormously so!" the Colonel asserted, smiting the table, while two or three white-clad San Ociosans at the bar watched him with furtive interest. "Can you imagine, sir, when this proposed Interoceanic Canal is dug, and San Ocioso becomes the scene of gigantic engineering, commercial and transportation activities, with thriving cities everywhere—can you conceive, sir, the value *then* of a franchise covering all public-service operations, of whatsoever kind, throughout the entire Republic?"

"Why," admitted Bennington, "it *does* look promising, I must say." He wondered if, with only \$9.04 remaining by way of strictly personal funds, he could afford to pay for a round of drinks. "I should say it might run into millions."

"Millions, sir?" Col. McSwingle scornfully echoed. "Tut, tut! No such trifle

as millions. Billions, sir, billions! And all, to the very last *centavo*, dependent on this one and only street-car!"

"You mean, Colonel, that if the car stops running, the franchise lapses?"

"Exactly so, sir! Your intelligence does you credit. But it is only what might be expected of a man of your appearance. So long as the car is operated once a day, from the government wharf to the western terminus at Cerro Gordo, our rascally rivals hold the situation well in hand."

"And who," Bartholomew queried, "who are those rivals?"

"WELL, first and foremost,"—and Ithuriel B. McSwingle, releasing his pince-nez, let it snap back behind his lapel,—"there is President Pablo Chivista." He lowered his voice, leaning over the table with a conspiratorial air. "Then there is the Generalísimo of the army, Don Lobo Chambista. Also Admiral Tiburón, commander of the San Ociosan navy."

"Is there a San Ociosan navy?"

"Indeed, sir, there is! San Ocioso's battle-flag floats proudly over one stern-wheel steamer, purchased at New Orleans in 1879, armed with a three-pounder, and still—at times—running. Then there is the Chief of Police, General Chanchullero—"

"Chanchullero? You don't mean the same man that's running the Tropical Exploitation Company?"

"The identical individual, sir! Why?"

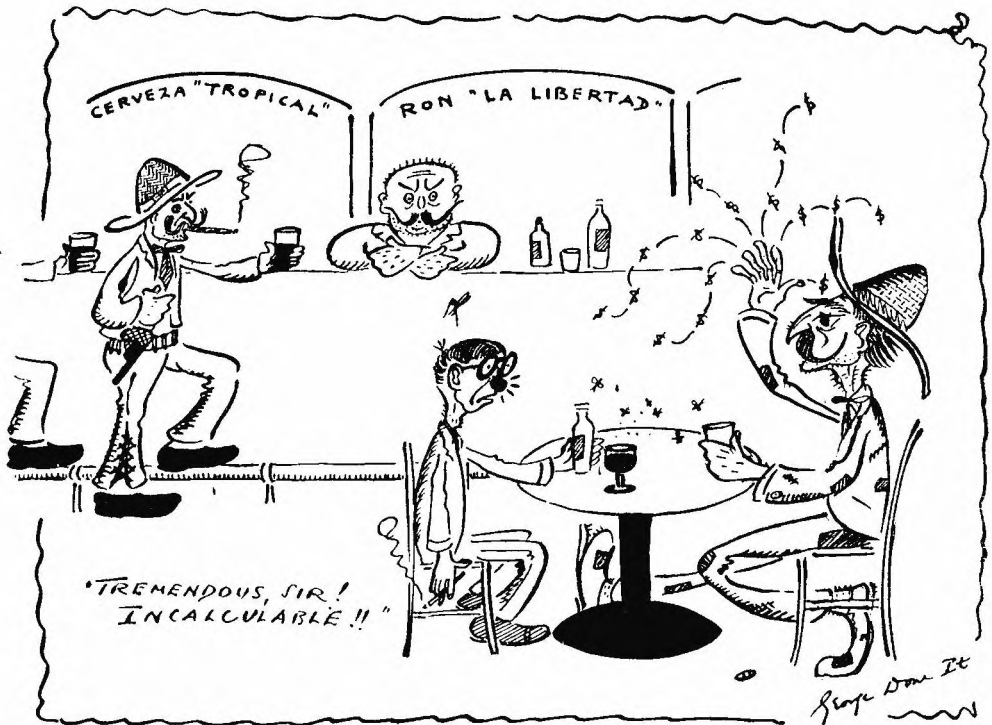
"Oh, nothing much," replied Bartholomew, vaguely sensing that complications impended. "Only, I'm here to do business with his firm, and—"

"Be on your guard, sir," warned the Colonel. "A more unprincipled pair of scoundrels do not exist than Chanchullero and his associate, General Bribón, in command of the *rurales*. They combine commercial pursuits with most extraordinary governmental abuses."

"I see. And this crowd has robbed you of your franchise?"

"Yes sir, of a franchise worth billions! And they are still safeguarding themselves by keeping the car, driver and motive-power in daily operation. What infamy, sir—what gross and tyrannical injustice!"

"You mean," interrupted Bennington, with a gleam of the sort of inspiration that had helped make his whole life so full of incident, "you mean that if the car could be kept from operating, you could get the franchise back again?"



"By all means, sir! It would relapse to our original organization!"

"You still have an organization?"

Nodding, the Colonel glanced round and lowered his voice still more.

"We have indeed, sir," he confided. "We are, in fact, the leaders of the Libertadores, pledged to extricate bleeding San Ocioso from under the grinding, iron heel of the oppressors! True patriots all, we have sworn to—"

"Well, why don't you do it, then?"

"How can we," queried the Colonel, "so long as the car, driver and mule continue to function?"

"You can't, so long as they do. But you can stop them functioning, can't you? And if you do—what then?"

"A genius, a positive genius, sir! That is what you are!" exclaimed Colonel Ithuriel. He seized Bartholomew's hand, wrung it warmly. "A marvelous inspiration, sir, so comprehensive, yet so fundamental that till now it has escaped us. A genius, sir—and like all true geniuses, majestic in your simplicity!"

Bartholomew flushed with pardonable pride. Now the Colonel was continuing:

"Pardon me, sir, if I seem abrupt, but I really must take my departure. While the iron of inspiration is hot, I must make the hay of achievement. You will hear from me again, sir, very shortly; and, I feel

confident, greatly to your advantage." The Colonel stood and again shook hands with extreme cordiality. "Good day, sir! *Hasta la vista—au revoir!*"

And cocking his hat at a formidable angle, he picked up another button that had just dropped off, then cast a truculent eye at the San Ociosans standing by the bar, and with stately and majestic tread took his departure.

FOR two days Bartholomew saw no more of Ithuriel B. McSwingle. The time passed heavily, for all the "sights" of Puerto Cochino could be exhausted in three or four hours, and Bartholomew found that trying to begin business negotiations in Latin America was like starting a long freight-train in winter on an up-grade.

Mindful of the Colonel's advice, he changed his letter of credit into cash, mostly American bills, but some in San Ociosan paper, silver and gold. He bought him a money-belt in which to stow this cash, as given him by the Banco Nacional. His expense-money, now reduced to \$79.22, also went into the belt, which he buckled tightly under his shirt—having to punch additional holes, for that purpose. Money-belts do not come in Bartholomew's size.

For incidentals he kept out only his private funds, now \$8.03. This money he stowed, with his lottery-tickets, in his

trousers-pockets, putting some of the cash in each side-pocket and the tickets in the little watch-pocket at the top.

"Nothing like distributing one's valuables," he pondered. "On a pinch, I might even carry some of my personal funds in my socks." But as San Ocioso looked too weary and unenterprising to be anything but strictly law-abiding, Bartholomew for the present did not take this extreme step.

His letter of introduction got him an interview with Señores Chanchullero and Bribón, of the *Compañía de Explotación Tropical*, in a queer, old tile-floored office up a narrow and awning-covered street. The Señores proved to be dark brunettes, affable and smiling. But when Bartholomew, through an interpreter, set forth his purpose of buying hardwoods, he was met with cigars, cigarettes, liqueurs and a discussion of the climate. Also with plentiful references to *mañana*.

Samples of wood? Could he see samples? Of course, señor—*mañana*. Prices, terms, methods of shipment, times of deliveries, would they state these? By all means, señor—*mañana*.

Bartholomew had to be content with elaborate promises for future interviews. So far as getting any action in San Ocioso—

"Dear me, you might as well try to start something among the residents of a cemetery," he decided. Which opinion, as events shortly proved, was totally in error.

UPON the third day, as Bartholomew was smoking a long cigar on his balcony, "suddenly there came a tapping." And through the opening door of the room, appeared Colonel Ithuriel B. McSwingle, followed by half a dozen swarthy gentlemen.

Bartholomew nervously patted his money-belt, to make sure it was all tight and secure under his shirt, then with some trepidation greeted his visitors. Colonel McSwingle carefully left the door open, to preclude any possibility of keyhole listening-in from the outside, and made introduction of all these various dons. Not one of them spoke English, had recently bathed, or ranked lower than *excelentísimo* or *distinguidísimo*.

"And now, sir, allow me to elucidate the object of this visit," continued the Colonel, helping himself to one of Bennington's cigars, from a box open on the table. They all helped themselves to Bennington's cigars, and all roosted on chairs, on the

bed, on Bennington's trunk. Wax matches flared. Smoke began to fill the superheated room. "The object, sir, than which none can be more crucially important in this severe crisis of public affairs!"

"Well?" queried Bennington, blinking through his shell-rims. "What's the idea, Colonel?"

"The idea, sir, is that you now behold before you the Supreme Inner Junta of the Libertadores. That we have become a Committee for the Abrogation of the Franchise. And that we have unanimously elected you, sir, to—"

"Hold on, wait a minute!" interrupted Bartholomew, while the others all blew smoke, twisted their mustaches and looked intensely fierce and patriotic. "I don't want to be elected to anything. I'm just an American business-man, down here to see about buying some wood. I don't understand your local politics in the least, or want to mix up in 'em. So, if you'll please excuse me—"

"Impossible, sir!" the Colonel exclaimed. "You are needed, as a liberator. An American! Wonderful, for our prestige. A business-man! Essential, in these stupendous negotiations. Intelligent, energetic, resourceful and of immense financial means—one merely has to observe you, sir, to be convinced of all this! And so—"

"But I tell you, I don't *want* to—"

"And so, sir, the loftiest motives of patriotism have induced us to elect you a member—in fact, secretary and treasurer—of our Revolutionary Junta."

"But listen—"

"And this being thus, sir, let us now proceed to a discussion of the part you are destined to play in freeing San Ocioso from the iron heel of that most infamous oppressor, President Chivista!"

FEELING like a swimmer taken with cramps and going under for the third time, Bartholomew struggled to interpose still further objections. All in vain. Colonel McSwingle swept him downstream, on a current of resistless eloquence. Both figuratively as well as literally breathing smoke, he paced the floor, declaimed, waved his hands, shed buttons and launched into an exposition of the Junta's campaign-plans.

In these plans, Bennington found himself elected to play a major part. At last—

"Well, sir, now what do you say to *that*?" demanded the Colonel. "Is not this

a grand proposition? We cause the franchise to lapse. It reverts to us. Does not this open up illimitable vistas of affluence and power? Shall we not all share wealth beyond the dreams of avarice—you with us?"

"I'd rather not, thanks just the same," Bartholomew declined. "I'm quite satisfied with my job, and—"

"What, sir, you refuse?" demanded Colonel McSwingle, darting a basilisk glance at the recalcitrant Americano. His huge white brows beetled. Seeming to breathe fire, he stopped in his stride and faced Bartholomew. The faces of the Junta grew menacing. "Can it be that in our midst we have a traitor to our Cause?"

"Oh no, not at all," Bartholomew tried to explain, though with a sinking heart. "I—I'm quite sympathetic, believe me. It's only that I have personal business. And besides, Colonel, I'm a husband and father. I simply can't *afford* to be a San Ociosan patriot!"

McSwingle's gaze became gorgonian.

"Sir! You have gone too far to retreat! You have obtained, sir, our plans, secrets, program, everything. You have insinuated yourself into our confidence—"

"No, excuse *me*," feebly protested Bartholomew, seated like a hypnotized bird confronted by a boa-constrictor. "It was you who volunteered all this information, and—"

"To retreat now will be construed by us as high treason to the Cause!" declaimed Ithuriel B., with a baleful look, a dramatic gesture. He spoke a few words in rapid-fire Spanish to the Junta, who all nodded. "And the penalty of such treason will be a duel with each and every one of us. A duel with swords, sir, or firearms, to the death! *A la muerte!*"

"*A la muerte!*" the Junta echoed, in voices deadly with menace.

Bartholomew smeared cold sweat from his forehead, and with a dry tongue essayed still further to expostulate. But no words came. Tense silence fell.

"Your duties, sir, will be as follows," the Colonel gave his ultimatum. In detail he laid out the program Bartholomew was to follow. "Tomorrow," he concluded, "you will be at the designated spot, sir, and at the appointed hour, and will act as just now directed. If you evade those duties—"

"But—but I tell you—"

"If you seek to flee, or appeal to the

minions of the Oppressor, upon your own head, sir, be your guilty blood. To all traitors, we have but one reply—*death!*"

"*La muerte!*" again repeated the Junta. And with no further word they all bowed low, then took their departure, leaving our hero shaken, weak and pale. Agonized and in despair he sat there, with unseeing eyes staring at the floor now strewn with cigar-ashes and buttons.

AND it befell that, intimidated beyond any possibility of retreat, B. Bennington of the Boston Bungalow Builders was next day, just before high noon, on the job as directed.

Inwardly quaking, outwardly rather pallid, he took his stand at the southeast corner of the Plaza, there to await events in which (like the dynamite used to bust up a log-jam) he was to play a leading part and still be entirely helpless to save himself.

His Panama was firmly jammed upon his brow. His white linen coat was tightly buttoned, not against the cold—for the thermometer stood at 103¼°—but in order to conceal his money-belt. He had dared trust nobody, either at the hotel or the bank, with that money-belt. No, come what might, he would cling to it till the bitter end. So there he stood, our hero Bartholomew Bennington, thinking of home and Beatrice and little Junior, and wondering if ever he would see them again.

Apparently nothing of any great moment was about to happen. San Ocioso gave no sign of being located on the lid of a volcano. In the plaza a few peons and Indians with bare feet, with short white trousers and little aprons, were smoking and loafing round the statue of General Embustero. Indian women in head-shawls and beautifully embroidered *huipiles* came crossing, with baskets, from the market. Goats wandered and blatted. A dejected bootblack slept by the Palace of Justice: small business for bootblacks, here.

"Maybe nothing's going to happen, after all," thought Bartholomew, trying to cheer himself up. Then he remembered that it was he, himself, who had to start the ball rolling, and his heart sank again. With lackluster eye he viewed the scene, now become how hateful!

Across the plaza, soldiers were yawning and dozing, like the firemen. From cafés drifted the rapid-fire chatter of political argument, of dominoes, the clink of glasses. Fruit-sellers were languidly peeling oranges

and hanging up long strips of peel. Buzzards drifted overhead, casting ominous shadows. All in all, everything looked normally inert. Nobody seemed to be paying any attention whatever to Bartholomew.

But he, standing there apparently at random, well knew that many keen and patriotic eyes rested upon him, from cafés, from balconies, from behind iron bars in windows, or close-drawn shutters. How many rifles, too, could in an instant be brought to bear on him? Bartholomew shivered, even to think of it.

And then, as he thus reflected, his nerves suddenly tingled. His blood for a moment stopped, then began racing. For, still distant, yet none the less ominous, he heard a dreaded sound.

That sound was none other than the dissonant *jingle-jangle-jingle* of the bell attached to the ewe-neck of San Ocioso's franchise-retaining street-car mule.

AT sound of that fell bell, Bartholomew Bennington squared himself for action.

Terror lurked behind his goggles, his heart palpitated violently in his thirty-three-inch chest; his glance shuttled round as if in vain appeal for rescue from this appalling situation.

But rescue there was none. All alone and undefended, Bartholomew had to face the music—of that mule-bell. The moment was now at hand for liberation from the Octopus, or death.

All at once, round the corner by the Ayuntamiento, at a slow and suffering totter the venerable mule came staggering. Behind the mule, with squeaking flat wheels a-thump and uncoiled over rusty rails, bumped the prehistoric *carrito*. On the platform, that sagged, and protected by the thatched roof over his head, dozed in his rocking-chair the Methuselic gentleman of color, the public utilities' sole employee.

Humping, creaking, yawing, the equipment advanced toward Bartholomew. As it approached, our hero nerved himself for the effort supreme. Licking dry lips, he unsteadily walked out into the red-dusty street, and raised his trembling hand in signal for the car to stop.

Now, not in many a long year had any such signal ever been given in the good city of Puerto Cochino. Like the Republic's political platforms, the platform of that ancient car had always been just to look at, never to ride on. Anybody who had ever tried to seek transportation

thereon would have incurred ridicule—most horrible torment of any in the world, to a Latin American. It simply wasn't done.

Thus, neither the mule nor the operating-staff of the railroad now paid any attention whatever to Bartholomew's signal. Utterly indifferent thereto, the rolling-stock continued uncertainly and gradually to roll.

So far, victory rested upon the Junta. The Octopus had failed to respond to a demand for public service. The next step, however—would that be as favorable?

THIS next step was the step that, according to program, Bartholomew made to the rear step of the car. Of fly-weight class though Bartholomew was, he caused the car to creak and sag. The handle he seized nearly came off. The platform groaned. Bartholomew did not linger on that platform. No, he entered the car, and with trepidation stumbled along its broken floor, toward the operating-personnel in the rocking-chair.

Never had any act of seemingly such slight importance attracted attention so immediate and widespread. In cafés, on balconies, from Cuartel and Palacio—in short, from every point where the deed was visible—instant observation was focused on our hero. An air of half-incredulous wonder pervaded Puerto Cochino. The capital, as it were, awoke from slumber, scratched itself and demanded:

"*Caray!* What next?"

What next was that Bennington tremblingly offered the Ethiop an American dollar bill, and with a shaking voice requested change.

This, the first such demand that the operating-staff had heard in several decades, startled him to a realization of the universe having suddenly got out of joint. He partly woke up.

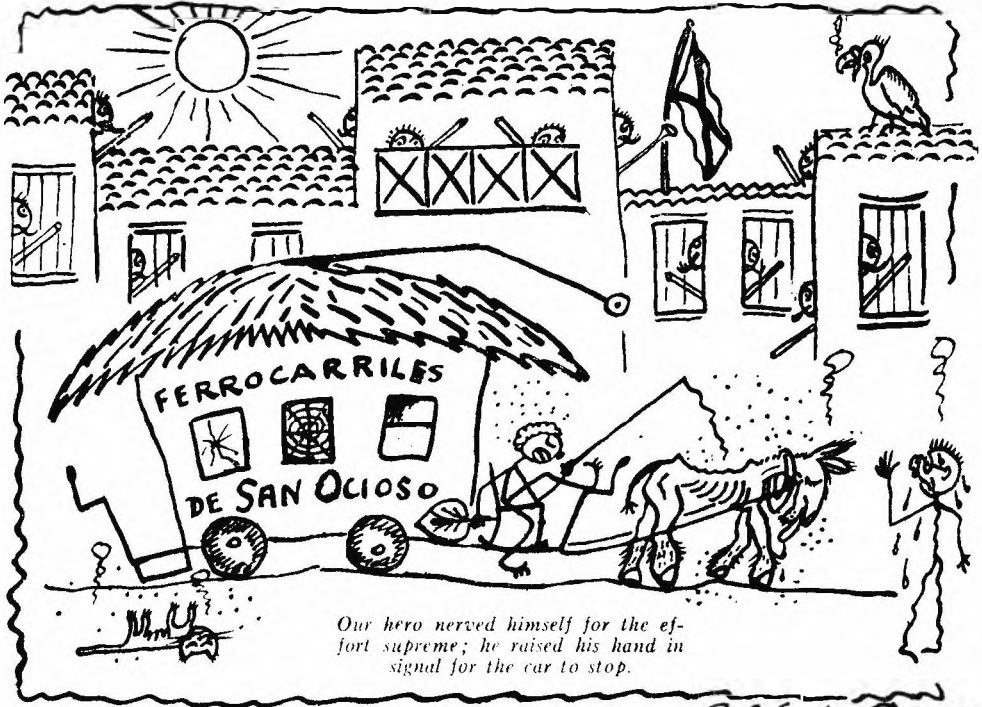
"*Qué hay?*" he queried. "What?"

"Change, please," repeated Bennington, using the few words of Spanish that had been taught him, parrot-like.

The personnel shook its head and stared. Change? Impossible! As well look for tortoise-shell on a duck's back, as expect to find change in the personnel's pocket.

"*No tengo!*" he replied.

"Then stop!" commanded Bartholomew. "This car is being operated contrary to law!" He seized the reins, hauled the mule to a stand—not much of a haul, that. "In the name of Liberty, stop!"



Our hero nerved himself for the effort supreme; he raised his hand in signal for the car to stop.

G.A.E. McSwingle

Outraged, the Ethiop woke up a little more, while the mule started going to sleep. He blinked, cracked his whip and slapped the reins—which were of rope.

"*Anda, Mariposa!*" he commanded. "Go, Butterfly, go!"

Bartholomew, mindful of his instructions, was already off the car. Seizing the now sound-asleep mule's bridle just in time to keep it from lying down, he shrilled forth the Junta's stirring battle-cry:

"No service, no franchise!"

Crack!

Bartholomew's glasses flew off, under the sting of the whip. His cheek reddened, with a weal across it. Half-blinded now, maddened, he dropped the bridle and advanced to vengeance on the Ethiop.

But on the instant he became aware of events swiftly unfolding. Yells echoed, howls of "*Libertad!*" "Death to the Octopus!" "*Viva la Patria!*"

Sandals, boots and bare feet slapped and pattered, swiftly running. Men in white, men of various colors, began swarming out of cafés, doorways and patios. A crowd, a mob, coagulated. In the forefront of that rapidly advancing horde, Bartholomew dimly perceived the members of the Junta. Above all others towered Colonel Ithurriel B. McSwingle, fetchingly garbed in an old U. S. Navy uniform, high boots with spurs, and a cavalry saber.

Before our hero was rightly aware of what was happening, the mob—or was it a Patriot Army of Liberation?—came surging about the driver, the thatched car, the sleeping motive-power.

"Long live La Libertad!" "Death to the Tyrant and the mule!"

DESPITE all this, "serene, indifferent to fate," the mule slumbered on. But eager hands, amid a tumult of uproar, wrenched off its rope-harness. Kicks rattled like peas on the mule's tick-bitten belly and ribs. Patriots dragged the beast away. It vanished. Other liberators, led by Colonel McSwingle, were meantime storming the street-car, trying to haul down the operating personnel.

The personnel, however, seeing his job, his world and all, suddenly a-crumble, fought with desperation. Bartholomew could dimly see his arm rising, falling, could hear the crack and slash of the whip.

All in vain! A moment, and amid dust and cheers, the personnel was engulfed. Where had it gone? *Quién sabe?*

Streets grew full of excited citizens. Balconies became crowded. Señoras and señoritas appeared on those balconies, cheering, hissing, waving scarfs and banners. Aroused from lethargy, Puerto Cochino awoke to frenzied life.

But now, what was this?

Opposing shouts, yells and screeches echoed. Hostile feet came pounding, slapping, scuffling. From across the Plaza, from the barracks and the Palacio, forces precipitated themselves—*ruralcs*, soldiers of the line, bellowing battle-cries:

"Viva the Government! The Company! Viva Law and Order! Long live the mule!"

"No!" roared the Libertadores, in the forefront of whom battled the Junta and Colonel McSwingle. "*No! Viva la Libertad!*"

"Yes!" bellowed the Government, led by President Chivista and Admiral Tiburón. "*Yes! Viva la Libertad!*"

Thicker dust arose, and louder execrations. The press grew stifling. Every man a hero, all sought to win immortal glory. Blows fell; fists waved; steel gleamed; shirts were torn; patriots fell—on both sides—and other patriots fell upon them, hip and thigh. One patriot got a nose-bleed. Another lost two gold teeth.

MMULELESS now, and driverless, the car of Juggernaut rocked in the midst of attackers who sought to overthrow, defenders who labored to maintain it. The Government forces, with ropes, essayed to pull it down the track. President Chivista himself, noble patriot, bore a hand on a rope that—suddenly hacked through by Colonel McSwingle's saber—precipitated the President and his suite backward in the dust.

Dazed by the stifling heat, stunned by violence and tumult—by smiting, panting, cheering, by curses, groans, cheers, battle-cries—Bartholomew got only confused impressions of the War of Juggernaut's Car.

He saw the thatched roof sway, as in a cyclone. He beheld two opposing factions, each now armed with ropes, undertaking to drag the car ahead to the terminus, or back to the Government wharf. Then all at once he perceived the fragile vehicle, its aged structure overtaxed, rent in twain.

Half of it, with two wheels, surged ahead. The other half, astern.

Howls of triumph burst from the Government. Even though with only fifty per cent of a car, they still might save the franchise. Bellows of rage and vengeance roared from the Libertadores. Abandoning their fifty per cent, they now under the saber-swinging leadership of Colonel McSwingle hurled themselves to the attack.

Swirling masses of patriots battled round the Government half of the car. Shots be-

gan to pop from the Cuartel, the Ayuntamiento. On top of the Palacio, a cannon boomed. The charge shrieked overhead—thirty pounds of railroad scrap-iron, spikes, nuts and bolts. It landed among a group of buzzards on the Presidio roof and did terrible execution.

Stified, battered, jostled, Bartholomew also fought—but only to free himself from the battle-field. Hat gone, coat with one sleeve and two pockets ripped away, he struggled through to the outskirts of this Armageddon. One eye was neatly blacked and closed, but with the other he could see fire and smoke in a most unexpected place—the thatched roof of the Government half of the car.

Yes; flames were already licking upward, there. Smoke-wreaths were coiling on the super-heated air.

"*Socorro! Incendio!*" the howls redoubled. Cheers mingled with execrations. Rage blent with exultation. "The traitors! They burn to us the *carrito!*"

Who had done this deed—this act foul or heroic, according to which side you were on? Who had lighted a wax match and thrown it among the sun-baked guana-palm leaves? Impossible to tell. But at all events, the roof was now briskly burning. From the crackling thatch, rats leaped out and scuttled away. As these fugitives ran among the trampling feet, some were immolated. Others reached the narrow sidewalks. Strong men cursed. Women screamed and fainted.

Clang-a-lang-a-lang!

Hark, what is this? Ah, the *bomberos*, the fire-brigade!

A blaring of horns grew audible. The bells redoubled their wild alarm. From the Puerto de Bomberos came dashing a company of heroes all, in their red shirts, broad belts and high boots, with immense black helmets and valiant axes, scaling-ladders and—at the end of a rope—an old hand-tub and several yards of hose.

As the *bomberos* charged, shouting, and with bells and horns, toward the up-leaping conflagration, everything grew dreamlike and unreal to Bennington. He was conscious only of an immense and formidable uproar, through which shots now began to spatter.

Soldiers, tattered but determined, were charging across the Plaza—President Chivista's *corps d'élite* and bodyguard. Somebody shrieked and collapsed. From the Libertadores pistol-fire commenced to an-

swer the attack. The street and plaza filled with powder-fumes, yells, curses. Combatants ducked for doorways and into cafés.

Bartholomew found himself jammed up against an overturned fruitstand, alongside of Colonel Ithurriel B. McSwingle. The Colonel's mustachios were singed nearly off, likewise his bushy brows, but his saber was still intact. He swung it, vociferating:

"We are betrayed! The army, navy and police—they promised to rise!"

"Well, didn't they?" panted Bartholomew. "Didn't they rise?"

"Yes—but on the wrong side! Heroes and patriots, all is lost but honor! We must flee!"

"Where to?" Bartholomew quavered.

"Follow me!"

SOMEBODY—he knew not who—thrust a pistol into his hand, as Colonel McSwingle with surprising vigor battered his way through the now-thinning crowd.

Bartholomew had never in his life fired a pistol at anything more lively than an empty bottle, but desperation gripped him now. He raised the gun, ready for victory or death—and lowered it again, ducked and scuttled, as a bullet kicked the plaster off a wall near his head.

Pale and wan, like a hunted hare he fled in the wake of the now swiftly departing Colonel. With them, abandoning the blazing battlefield, ran half a dozen other libertadores.

Into an alley they dived, scooted, doubled a corner. Even though somewhat limping and crippled by the loss of one cavalry boot, the Colonel proceeded with astonishing alacrity.

So did they all. Behind, shots and shouts increased, likewise howls and shrieks. Smoke drifted; bells clanged; horns brayed. Once again the booming cannon hurled assorted junk and ironmongery over the revolution-riven capital of San Ocioso.

As a field-day, it had rarely been equaled, never surpassed.

"Flee, we must flee!" panted Colonel Ithurriel. "Treason, treachery—ah, the Judases! Curses on them!"

He quickened his pace till the other boot nearly spun off. Bartholomew and the other patriots could hardly hold him in view, down twisty, narrow and many-balconied streets. Ahead, a file of soldiers suddenly blocked the way. The fugitives

ducked into a lane, scrambled over a mud-wall surmounted by broken tiles, and dropped into a patio.

A moment later they were in a deserted warehouse; and through this they presently emerged upon the water-front. Near the Government wharf they made reconnaissance, eight of them. No one was in sight. Apparently everybody was attending the fiesta, uptown.

"Behold!" rejoiced the Colonel. "There, heroes and martyrs, there is salvation!"

He swung his saber in an expansive gesture toward the navy.

"There, there is deliverance!"

It looked as if the Major, for once, was right. The navy, with smoke drifting from its tall twin funnels ornamented at the top with filigree-work, looked utterly abandoned. It was, as we already know, a "wheelbarrow-boat" or stern-wheel steamer, purchased in New Orleans, A. D. 1879. At its rear floated the yellow-and-red banner of San Ocioso. Its three-pounder gun, loaded (but never fired in the past seventeen years), gave it a martial air.

"The navy, behold!" shouted Colonel McSwingle. "With one bold *coup*, my heroes, it is ours! Forward—*victory or death!* Charge!"

CHEERING, the Colonel, Bennington and the six other liberators charged across the deserted wharf. On the way they woke up the Customhouse staff, who promptly surrendered and was captured to do duty as a fireman.

The patriotic fugitives leaped to the deck of the navy, whereof the name was *Eagle of the Seas*. It was but the work of a moment to cast off the single hawser. Some of the patriots ran to the engine-room; others—hustling the Customhouse staff with them—to the boilers. There, hidden in the bunkers, that held only pitch-pine knots, they discovered two African firemen who had taken refuge at sound of the first shots. Instantaneously impressed for service, they and the Customhouse staff began heaving pine into the furnace, with pistols cocked at their quivering forms.

Colonel Ithurriel had meantime mounted to the pilot-house, and waved his saber through the window.

"Ungrateful Patria!" he orated. "We leave thee in the hands of the Octopus, but not for long. We shall return to save thee, yet. Full speed ahead!"

Steam gushed, as Colonel McSwingle

took the wheel. Bennington, gun still in hand, knew not what to do. So very wisely he did nothing. As he stood there with a black eye, blinking and in rags under the tropical glare, he made a singular and ruffianly figure on the navy's after-deck, that day of horror and defeat.

Whoof-whoof-whoof! The engine began to cough and snort. Slowly the *Eagle of the Seas* moved away from the wharf, and turned in a clumsy arc. She headed her square bows toward the harbor-mouth. The rickety paddles thrashed foam. Groaning, leaking, quivering, she cleared a turtle-schooner by three feet, scraped a banana-lighter, reeled and shivered onward.

Wheezing into an unsteady stride not much different from the mule's, she shook—as it were—the dust of Puerto Cochino from her debilitated heels.

"Thank heaven!" breathed Bartholomew. Whither bound, he knew not. How, if ever, he could recover his baggage and pick up his business again, was mystery insoluble. But life, at all events, remained. Life, precious life! As he watched the town dwindle under its pall of smoke, shots and dust, he felt as never before how far superior to presence of mind was absence of body. Once more he ejaculated:

"Thank heaven!"

His pistol now seeming a bit superfluous, he tucked it into his belt. So doing, he noted that the belt was open. A sudden, sickening terror assailed him. With trembling fingers he verified the appalling fact—

"My money! My five thousand dollars—it's gone! Where—*where* is my money?"

Where, indeed? Anywhere, except in that belt. How, when and whither had it departed, who could say? Nobody at present available. The only essential fact remained that Bartholomew's cash had suddenly evaporated. But where?

FOR a moment Bennington felt that misery had reached its nadir. But no; more, far worse, was still to come. For hardly had the *Eagle* flopped halfway down the harbor, with Colonel McSwingle holding the wheel in one hand, his saber in the other, and glaring through the window, when a tooting whistle off astern gave notice of continued hostilities.

"*Carrao!*" shouted McSwingle, brandishing his steel. "We are pursued! If captured, we shall all be shot at sunrise!"

"Pursued?" Bennington trepidantly called up to him. "Who by?"

"The Octopus!"

It seemed like a good bet. Any old eagle ought to be able to outdistance even a first-class octopus. But Bennington felt keenly renewed alarm. He entertained positive objections to being shot at sunrise, moonset, or any other astronomical period.

"How can the Octopus pursue us?" he quavered. "I thought we'd captured the entire navy."

"The oppressors have commandeered a tug! They are approaching. Patriots and heroes!" His voice blared wildly. "Man the guns—the gun, I mean! Prepare to conquer or die!"

The fleeing patriots and heroes prepared to conquer or die. Leaving one of their number to keep the firemen at work, the others—all ranking as majors, generals or upward— assembled on the after-deck. Here they inspected the gun. The stern-wheel somewhat interfered with its arc of efficiency, but by swinging the *Eagle*, it could still be brought to bear on the pursuing tug.

Search, however, failed to reveal any ammunition save that which was rumored to be already in the weapon. The tug meantime, belching black smoke, was rapidly overhauling them.

"With one shot we must annihilate the Octopus!" shouted the Colonel. "They have only rifles. Wait till you see the whites of their eyes, then death to them all!"

"My Colonel," reported one of the liberators, "by the way they are overtaking us, they must have hung a negro on the safety-valve."

"Hang two on ours!"

The Libertador departed, to obey this order. For a few minutes, with steam-pressure thus heightened, the *Eagle* whipped foam at a livelier rate, making now almost five knots. But still the tug came up on them. In another few minutes, combat obviously would be joined. The Colonel made brief but eloquent speech:

"To your places, immortal heroes! Whether we live or die, 'tis for La Patria. Remember the mule, and—"

A peremptory hail, over the waters, interrupted him. From the bow of the tug, somebody in a ragged uniform was shouting through a megaphone. Bennington could understand nothing of this message, but the Colonel made it clear.

"It is you, Mr. Bennington, they desire."

"Me?"

"Yes sir. They claim you initiated

the revolutionary disturbance. You are charged, sir, with high treason. Also with having seized the San Ociosan navy and absconded with it. Which act constitutes piracy on the high seas. In other words you are now held guilty of being, sir, a buccaneer!"

"ME, a buccaneer?" stammered Bartholomew. *Me?* Why, gracious goodness, no! I—I never ran off with the navy, at all. It was *your* idea, and—"

"Never mind, sir; the Government insists you are the prime mover in the act, and that you are an outlaw, a filibusterer, pirate, bandit, marauder and corsair, an international menace and under sentence of immediate execution. We are all offered amnesty, sir, and a—fresh deal all round, as it were, if we will return the navy and deliver you to the Department of Justice."

Bartholomew sagged against the gun. P'allid to the lips, he quavered:

"What—what will they do to me?"

"You know, sir, the pains and penalties attaching to piracy on the high seas? A capital offense, sir, without reprieve or pardon!"

Visions of a gallows, a firing-squad, an electric chair quivered before Bartholomew's horror-smitten eyes. But no, as for the electric chair, how could there be any in a country where there was no electricity? That was *some* comfort. But the gallows and the firing-squad still remained. Bartholomew, with despairing thoughts of home, managed to articulate:

"And you—you're going to turn me over to the Government?"

"Never, sir!" declared the Colonel, smiting his breast, so that another button flew off. "Let us conquer or die together like officers, gentlemen and liberators."

"Thank heaven! But—open fire, Colonel. They're coming up on us, fast!"

Again a hail, an imperative demand from the tug. Colonel McSwingle flung back fire-breathing defiance. Rifle-shots began to crackle from the pursuers. spurts of foam snicked up, all round the wallowing *Eagle of the Seas*.

"Man the gun!" roared McSwingle. "Ready, aim!"

The Libertadores manned the gun, made ready, aimed. One of them seized the lanyard.

"Fire!"

A volcano, abetted by an earthquake, shook the *Eagle* from keel to pilot-house.

Smoke wafted. The gun-crew, together with Bartholomew, scrambled up from the shattered deck, at one side of which lay the gun where the recoil had ripped it clear and flung it.

But alas, the *Octopus* was not sinking—yet. The rusty old shot from the three-pounder had in fact whizzed clean over her, struck the water close to shore, ricocheted into a hog-sty, and made instantaneous orphans of thirteen as handsome sucking-pigs as you could find in all Puerto Cochino.

"Millions of curses!" the Colonel vociferated from his pilothouse window, while the old *Eagle* wheezed wearily seaward. "Without artillery, all is lost. Against their rifles, what can our pistols do? Shall we accede to the tyrant's demands? Shall we surrender this Americano buccaneer, and thus survive to fight—and win—again, some happier day?"

Bartholomew turned green with panic. He felt himself irretrievably lost. And so indeed he would have been, had not the negro on the safety-valve of the tug just at that moment been projected upward and outward in a graceful arc, strictly according to ballistic law.

Bang! PE-OOOO-ooooooo! O-o-o-o-ooo!

The shrill diminuendo of off-blowing steam, through a hole where the safety-valve had been, coincided with the sudden slowing of the tug. While Government troops aboard her shrieked, waved wild arms, flung execrations and fired vain shots a-crackle, the pursuing craft swung a wide curve and came to a halt.

Cheers burst from every throat aboard the *Eagle*. Flinging white foam, with ripped-up deck and disabled gun, also with two colored gentlemen still hanging to her safety-valve, she kept her staggering pace toward the harbor-mouth, beyond which beckoned the illimitable sparkling freedom of the Spanish Main.

EIGHT days later, Bartholomew very privately landed in Havana from the Norwegian tramp-steamer *Thor*. Six hours out of San Ocioso, the *Thor* had stopped for the *Eagle's* distress-signals, and sent a boat to rescue all hands. The *Thor's* captain had taken every *centavo* on all of them, for passage to Havana. There being no wireless-station in Puerto Cochino, no charge of piracy had been lodged against Bartholomew—as yet. And now, there he was in Havana.

Yes, there he found himself in the Pearl

of the Antilles, abandoned and all alone, minus his baggage, in tatters, unshaven and filthy, blinking without glasses and practically a hopeless wreck. Of all he had started away from Havana with, so blithely, hardly ten days ago, now nothing remained but the crumpled lottery-tickets that nobody had bothered to strip him of.

Farther down and out than he had ever been in all his life, Bartholomew sagged on a bench in the Parque Central, and tried to think. Of course his job was gone, and—

"Perhaps I can tell them a story about a revolution, and how I was robbed and expelled, like all foreigners," thought he, "but if I do, the charge of piracy will be brought against me. I'll be extradited, sent back to Puerto Cochino, and—"

He shuddered at that prospect, quite too awful for contemplation. Despairing, hopeless, he remained there, completely all in.

LIKE many another down-and-outer on a park bench, he picked up a discarded newspaper. Squinting, half-blind without his glasses, he could make out only the headlines of the paper—the *Havana Star*, printed in English. Idly he turned its tattered pages. What to him now meant this busy world's news? Financial distress in Europe! Didn't he have enough financial distress of his own? Valuable hardwood tract opened in Cuba! What had he now to do with hardwood?

Another page. Naval reduction! Huh! Hadn't he seen an entire navy reduced to no artillery at all, by a single shot? Lottery-list! How could a lottery-list now be of any interest?

And yet, and yet—

Three sets of numerals stood in big type at the head of the list. Something about one of those sets struck him as familiar. Where had he seen those numbers before?

Not yet quite understanding, he fumbled from the watch-pocket of his torn trousers the little wad of tickets purchased in happier days. He opened the wad, all ten tickets. Painfully he blinked at the tickets, at the newspaper, and—and—

ITEM from next day's *Havana Star*:

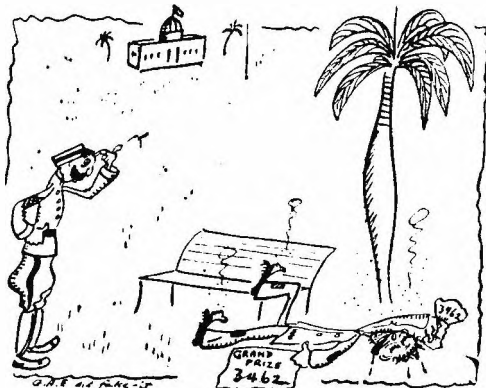
UNKNOWN AMERICAN FAINTS ON WINNING BIG LOTTERY PRIZE

An American of impoverished appearance, and without a penny in his pockets, was found by Vigilante No. 4563 in Parque Central yesterday. This American who had a black eye and seemed to have been recently engaged in active hostilities, was ragged and filthy in the extreme. When discovered, he was lying in a dead faint, holding in one hand a copy of the *Star* with a list of drawings in the last *sorteo* of the Loteria Nacional. The other hand clutched ten fractions of Ticket No. 54,321—i.e., the winning number of the Premio Gordo, or Grand Prize, each fraction worth one thousand dollars.

The mysterious stranger's fractions, when he was revived and assisted in cashing them at the Gato Azul *colectoria*, brought him ten thousand dollars. He refused to make any statement or to divulge his identity, but mumbled a few incoherent words about "Saved—Beatrice never know—bungalow-builders—Junior—buy Cuban wood—recoup—make fresh start—" and hurriedly departed in a taxi.

Thus we glimpse another enigma, one of the many that make life in the Cuban capital so perennially entertaining. How diverting this down-and-out hobo's story might have been! But we, alas, shall never know it, save that Dame Fortune had suddenly smiled on some wretched outcast at the bottom of life's ladder—some vagabond obviously agitated far beyond all coherency of mind!

Which agitation, for a highly nervous family man of thirty-three-inch chest-measurement, who had just got over being a dead-broke buccaneer fleeing from the very jaws of death, is hardly to be wondered at. Is it, now? I'm asking you!





"A Wireless Bomb" dramatically brings the Free Lances to the rescue of a sore-beset monarch.

"Psst! A news-correspondent taking down the message in shorthand!"

Free Lances in Diplomacy

By CLARENCE HERBERT NEW

Illustrated by J. Fleming Gould

AT the time three of the Free Lances were in the Cabinet, they purchased an old building between two of those occupied by the Government in Whitehall and equipped it as a Wireless Intelligence Department, connected by telephone-cables with a one-hundred-kilowatt broadcasting station (beam type) near the top of Mt. Snowdon, and with Trevor Hall in South Devon. A portion of its services was leased to the Foreign Office for half the cost of operation, on yearly contracts renewable as long as satisfactory but terminable by the owners if at any time there happened to be friction with the Government—the service being entirely a private enterprise. When the Labor Government came in, the connection with the Foreign Office was severed, there being a disposition to do away with everything in the nature of espionage; but the owners continued to slip the Foreign Secretary odd bits of vital information.

The Marquess of Lyonesse, Earl Lammer-

ford and Prince Abdool of Afridistan are men with a wide variety of interests. At least once in each few weeks, one or two of them make a point of listening to what their operators are getting from the air in the Whitehall Intelligence Department.

One evening in January, the Marquess and Earl Lammerford were up in the room devoted to Eastern Europe and Central Asia. The operator had been tuning up and down his wave-bands for broadcasts from Russian and West Asiatic cities, and had picked up two messages which unquestionably were intended for soviet agents in Afghanistan and India, messages which even then were being decoded and transmitted to officers of the Indian Secret Service without knowledge or permission of the existing Government—the I. S. S. men having begged the Marquess to let them have anything he got in the interests of imperial safety, regardless of any red tape in Downing Street. Then had come twenty minutes of absolute silence from that sec-

tion of the globe. Presently, on twenty-nine hundred meters, the operator caught a faint murmur. Switching on more power, he clearly got what was evidently a code-message in Russian and began jotting it down. The stations supposed to pick it up asked for a repeat—and then he got every word. Lammerford and the Marquess, who both spoke Russian fluently, took down the words as they came from the four-foot cone hanging on the wall, and compared their version with the operator's. Then the message was sent down the tube for decoding, and since it was in the same code as occasional messages picked up before, the translation was returned shortly.

After reading it, Trevor whistled.

"Do you fancy Snowdon got a bearing on that chap, Phil?"

"Fairly sure to, sir, because I gave him the compass-signal when the message first started—and Trevor Hall also. The Hall will get your station just south of Paris for another bearing. I'll have Snowdon ask."

He talked with the beam-station over the phone-wire—jotting down what he got—and then said: "Here we are, gentlemen! Snowdon's bearing, seventy-seven degrees; bearing from Paris, sixty-three degrees."

LAMMERFORD walked over to the opposite wall upon which a six-foot map of Europe was hanging down from a spring-roller. On the operator's desk was a transparent celluloid compass-card twelve inches in diameter with a pin-hole in the center and a long black linen thread hanging from it. Sticking a thumb-tack through the pin-hole and then through the map exactly on top of Mt. Snowdon in Wales, Lammerford drew the thread taut over the 77-degree mark and with his pencil, drew a line along it across Russia. Then he placed the tack on the hills south of Paris—being careful to see that the north and south points were exactly on the meridian-lines of the map—pulled the thread taut over the 63-degree mark, and made a pencil line along it until it cut the first line. Where the two intersected was at a point a few miles outside of Smolensk in Russia.

"*H-m-m*—it's been hinted to me that they were building a fifty-kilowatt station somewhere in that neighborhood for both long and short-wave communication with their secret agents all over the world—but this is the first I've known that such a station was actually working. How long have you been picking it up, Phil?"

"Three or four nights, sir—judging by what's been coming from it. If those rotters pulled off all they talk about doing, the whole world would go to smash! Fortunately, most of it doesn't get beyond talk."

"Hmph! . . . Civilization would be a lot safer, son, if *none* of it went beyond talk! Those bounders are just as insane as paranoiacs in public institutions—an' they do pull off something sickening occasionally. Take this message, for example. Here are a lot of rotters who have no financial or other interests in the Iberian Peninsula—deliberately planning to murder its ruler and plunge those people into a bloody revolution! All for what? . . . Those rotters invariably work out their plans in some other country—don't risk their cowardly skins until after they've inflamed the natives to do most of the dangerous work in advance. They'll be figuring out this particular outrage in Paris, Rome, or London. Possibly we may be able to get at some more or less valuable information here in the East End. Phil, not long ago you dug a couple of names out of the air, by luck. Happen to remember what they were?"

"Rather!" The operator grinned. "The chap at this end certainly got what-for when he mentioned 'em! Message something like this one had been coming through from some other part of the country—nearer Moscow—broadcasted in coded Russian. There was a reference to a couple of operatives—'B-K' and 'P-M'—having all the data mentioned in the message; the others were instructed to confer with them personally and get orders at least once in two weeks. Then some station in France—neighborhood of Grenoble—said that Bourlakoff and Schramm would be called upon within two days. Three minutes later the Russian station said, in code: 'Operatives are constantly warned against violation of General Order Number thirty-two—violation punishable by a very severe penalty.' My inference naturally was that Bourlakoff and Schramm were the operatives referred to as 'B-K' and 'P-M'. From the way the message read, I was fairly certain those two men were in London."

"Good man! That little incident suggests something to me. They're broadcasting these instructions vocally, over a wave-band not likely to be used or listened to by anyone else unless suspicion has been directed to it, which ordinarily would be

very *unlikely*—for there's no other Intelligence Service like this anywhere in the world. Now, they wouldn't keep on broadcasting unless they had some means of checking up on whether their agents were getting the stuff and understanding it fully. Several considerations would be against the agents in any country having one or more stations of sufficient size and power to broadcast on the long waves above twenty-five hundred meters—they'd be spotted as 'Red' equipm't by everyone who saw or heard them, they'd mean a heavy outlay in money, and it would be difficult to avoid Governm't interference with 'em. But a short-wave equipm't, transmitting I-C-W on a half-kilowatt of power, is small enough to be concealed in a lodging-house room and operated under an amateur's license on the restricted bands. Amateurs may send all the telegraph-code they please over their own bands, and in cipher-messages if that amuses them. So my impression is that their agents are doing just that.

"We're getting everything here by phone from the Snowdon Station because their antennæ and beam-system are sensitive enough to pick up low-powered transmission from any corner of the globe—but we have on the roof of this building six aërials of differing length and direction capable of picking up most anything within a six-thousand-mile range, or transmitting voice over that distance. Point I'm tryin' to make is that we'd locate any amateur station in London, Manchester or Paris, possibly a bit closer by using these aërials and the radio-compasses in each room than by getting the Snowdon bearings over the phone-cables. What? Suppose you fish round a bit with your short-wave set tuned in on the amateur bands, Phil, an' see if you don't pick up something which sounds like a return communication to that broadcast message. Eh?"

GARNER nodded in agreement, switched his short-wave receiving-set onto one of the roof-aërials which was connected through the big radio-compass on the same operating-bench, and began tuning up and down over the amateur wave-bands. On the third band he tried, some one was sending Russian in telegraph-code—and the meaningless jumble of words indicated cipher. While Garner was taking down the words as they came through the cone, the Marquess was turning the loops of the radio-compass and listening intently as he

modulated the strength of the incoming signals. When the message stopped, the operator instantly plugged in his most powerful set and waited for some sort of answering communication on twenty-nine hundred meters. The compass loops pointed exactly 148 degrees on one side and 328 degrees on the other. Trevor went over and drew this line on the map of Europe.

"It's not Paris—the line is a good sixty miles east of there. It could be Liverpool or Manchester if the signals were noticeably stronger on the northwest—Dijon, Geneva, or Turin, if they were stronger on the southeast. As it happens, I couldn't distinguish any perceptible difference on either side when swinging onto the marks. The hundred-and-eighty-degree axis must be always discounted, anyhow, but those signals were not twenty miles away—if the chap was using a half-kilowatt, which is about all he'd be allowed. That puts him in London, almost without doubt." He rolled up the map of Europe and pulled down the big Bartholomew plan of London—drawing a pencil-line on the 148-328-degree axis. "Well—he's anywhere between here and Dulwich Park on the southeast. If he's northwest, he might be somewhere between Holborn and Marylebone. —What do you say, Lammy?"

"Well—the Intelligentsia have a way of flockin' a good bit with the 'modern-school' artists, you know; I'd say that any communist wireless amateurs would be likely to have their short-wave transmitting and receiving equipm't concealed in some studio around St. John's Wood or Primrose Hill."

"Fancy you're right, old chap! *H-m-m*—seems to me that Jim Farwell of the F. O. might be useful along this line of investigation—'Bohemia' is his special hunting-ground when he's looking for a particularly noxious breed of foreign agent—he knows London, northwest, as he does the beard on his face when he's shaving. Let's see. . . . His digs are in Wigmore Street, not far from Cavendish Square. We'll put through a call and see if he's in."

Captain Farwell was at home, as it happened—and glad to see them.

"Jimmy," said Trevor, "we want information; after which we propose tearing you from your happy home and sallying o'er the town for more to supplement it."

"Shoot!"

"Ever hear of two bounders sometimes called Bourlakoff and Schramm?"

"Can do—they're rather inspirational in

the line of sheer devilment, though I've not filed any *dossiers* in the F. O. as yet because I've been unable to get any real evidence. I know what they are, mind—but so far I've not caught 'em out, addressing any labor meetings, or conferrin' suspiciously with our own bad eggs in the East End. I've a vague sort of impression that for a month or two they're bein' specially offensive under the surface with regard to some other country, but I don't know which. They've been hobnobbin' with half a dozen anarchists of mixed nationalities who seem to be coming here for instructions."

TREVOR nodded—then rapidly sketched the messages picked up in Whitehall during the evening.

"Any idea where they're holing-up, in London?" he asked.

"Oh, aye—they've two places. One is a second-rate hotel in Trafalgar Road, Walworth—the other is a studio occupied by a young Russian painter of the degenerate school, in Woronzow Road on the west slope of Primrose Hill—all St. John's Wood district. They occupy the bedroom—he uses a convertible divan in the studio itself, which is none too large or too clean. There's a kitchenette closet adjoining. But where the bounders do most of their conferrin', I fancy, is in the rather modish an' better-known studio of Natacha Landova—one of the new service-apartm't buildings in Elsworth Road. The rear of it, where her diggings are, overlooks the Park on Primrose Hill; that's why your compass-bearing seems particularly suggestive. If it cuts a line through the center of Regent's Park—as I should say it does, without looking at a compass card for verification—that line would pass directly over her studio. She gives a reception or two every week—packs in about as mixed a lot as you'll see anywhere. She has a big roof-skylight which partly covers two adjoining rooms as well as the big studio (which is all I've managed to see, so far). I picked up a bit of gossip that she's by way of bein' a wireless-bug—qualified for an amateur's license after an examination in code. But there's no sign of any wireless equipm't in the studio."

"I suppose, like most of the apartm't buildings, that roof would be flat. Eh?"

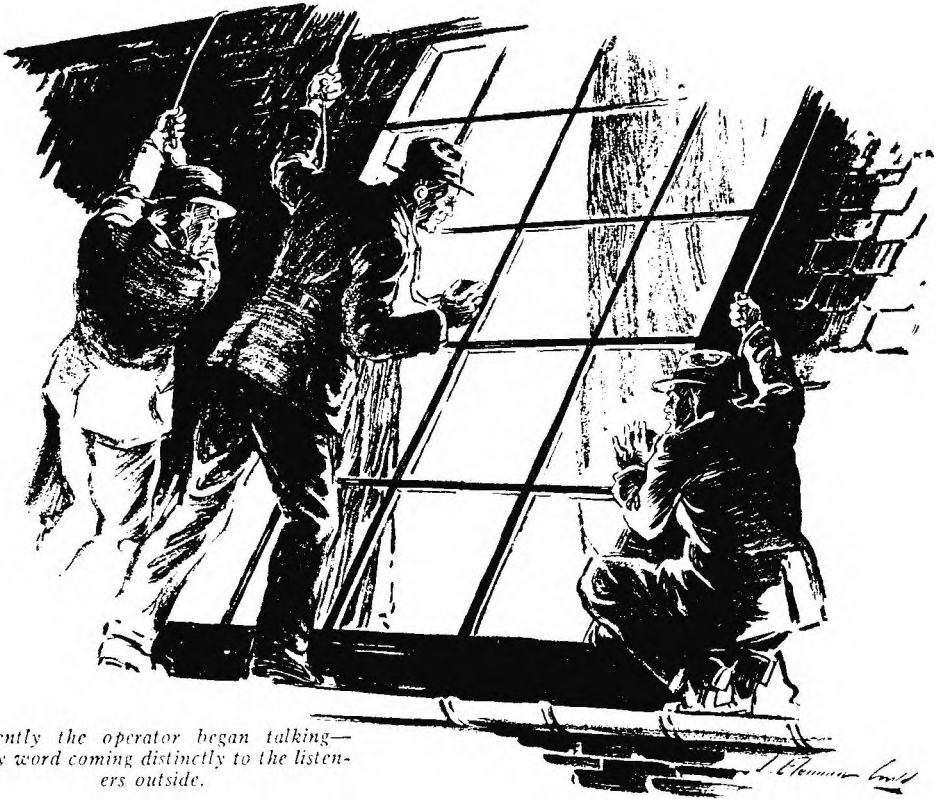
"Graded to outlets, to carry off rain—otherwise flat except for the skylights. (I was after some one in the same block not long ago, so I know how those roofs are

arranged.) The studio-skylights over the top-floor apartm'ts are in a very steep mansard at the north end of each suite, with a projectin' gutter of galvanized iron—which prob'ly would give way under a man's weight if he stood on it. Those skylights are along the edge of a court running through the center of the block between the front an' rear apartm'ts. Say we change our appearance a bit an' get up on that roof this evening—now! What? I've some exceptionally strong half-inch silk rope with little grapnels to fasten on the ends—we can hook them on some projection and hang to the rope for safety if we try standin' on that gutter. It's quite possible that we may pick up something—no telling; this happens to be one of the reception-nights, and they keep up the affair until three or four in the morning."

"Perfectly sound idea, Jimmy—but we'll go around in my car to Park Lane, first. I've some exceedingly sensitive little microphones—less than three inches in diameter, with small pocket batteries—which make window-glass a transmitting diaphragm. With small earphone receivers, one can almost hear a whisper in any room."

CAUTIOUSLY they managed to let themselves down to the gutter which ran along under the the skylights, hanging onto the silk ropes, without making a sound which could be heard in the big studio.

Picking anything of interest out of the jumbled conversation in the studio would have been difficult if not hopeless—but in the adjoining room, lighted by a single incandescent bulb, they discerned a complete short-wave equipment against the farther wall. A black-bearded, poisonous-looking man was sending a message with the key, and three others were sitting close to him with head-phones over their ears. Presently the operator, whom Farwell identified as Bourlakoff, switched off the set and began talking—every word coming distinctly to the listeners outside through the microphones. He told them that January twenty-fourth was the date decided upon for the assassination of a certain ruler in the south of Europe; operatives would receive their instructions that everything must be in readiness for the revolution to start before the next evening. Bourlakoff and Schramm went over a lot of data which showed that no detail had been overlooked. Then all five went out to join the others in the studio.



*Presently the operator began talking—
every word coming distinctly to the listen-
ers outside.*

The three men on the roof now found that they had an exceedingly ticklish job to get away in safety. Letting themselves down that steep mansard to the gutter hadn't been so difficult—but getting back up it to the flat portion of the roof was another matter altogether. It meant hauling their weight silently, hand over hand, up eight feet of slippery slates by half-inch silk rope held only by small grapnels caught on two chimneys at the upper end. If the rope parted or a grapnel slipped, it would mean a fall of eighty feet to the stone flagging of the court below.

Finally they managed it, however, and got down to their car, parked farther up the street. Inside the car, where they couldn't be overheard, Trevor said:

"We've simply got to take a hand in this—no gettin' out of it! Briefly, the job is this: a Royal assassination and a well-organized revolution to be stopped by two men on or before January twenty-fourth! It'll take some doing—if you ask me—but I had the glimmering of an idea, while up on that blasted mansard. We'll go down an' talk it over at once with Boothby, the General Manager of our big Press Syndicate. I'll outline it to him—then you can mention objections, if they occur to you."

When the four men were closeted in Boothby's private office at the top of the block occupied by the Syndicate, Trevor laid a typewritten copy of the Smolensk message received in code, described the other messages picked up, and their activities during the evening. Then he said:

"If you'll examine that Smolensk message carefully, Boothby, you'll see that its effectiveness depends very largely upon its being kept strictly to the operatives receiving it. If the rank an' file of their organization were to hear that message broadcasted in the very streets—a message which they were not supposed to hear or have repeated to 'em—it won't be long before they'll get a suspicion that the organization may be rotten with graft an' treachery—that they're being exploited and their lives jeopardized for the sole benefit of the few on top and a lot of meddlers in another country. Isn't that the effect you'd expect in giving that message the utmost publicity? Wouldn't it very likely smash this plan for a revolution on January twenty-fourth?"

"Faith, I fancy Your Lordship may be quite right as to that! There's no law or censorship to prevent every news-sheet on our list from puttin' a loud-speaker outside of its street-windows and giving the public

anything of the sort we pick out of the air—we've had the highest legal opinion upon that point, an' it's not libelous if anyone can get it just as we do. Doubtless you're intendin' to put this decoded message on the air from some station you're able to control—from which we can pick it up? I'd suggest your giving this Syndicate all of such messages you get up there in Whitehall an' have our sheets rebroadcast 'em."

"Sound idea, Boothby—we'll do that! Then we still have the problem of how His Majesty is to be protected on that date. I fancy Lammerford and I had best go down there, get him off with us somewhere, incog.—an' keep him doggo until the revolution's smashed."

DURING the following week, the Marquess and Earl Lammerford spent several hours in Santander, Cadiz, Toledo, Seville and Barcelona. In each city there was little noticeable disturbance on the surface, but the tone of the more radical news-sheets was becoming more threatening. At night, in spite of the penetrating cold there were crowds in the narrow, poorly lighted streets of the lower quarters.

On Friday afternoon, the English peers were comfortably chatting in a private suite of the newest hotel in Madrid when cards were fetched up to them—El Duque de Monteverra was calling, accompanied by El Conde de Fuertaventa-Mayo, presumably an intimate friend or some one closely associated with him. As the Duque entered the room, cordially embracing his old friends, anyone would have recognized the tall slender figure—the long prominent jaw and twinkling eyes so well known to half the world at least. His companion the Count they recognized as one of the few men whom they were reasonably certain the Duque could implicitly trust in almost any circumstances. He was himself a grandee, but evidently accompanied the Duque upon occasions like this more as a self-effacing bodyguard than as friend and companion. Knowing that his illustrious friend had come for a confidential chat with the English noblemen, he strolled along to the other side of the big room and seated himself by the triple window overlooking the Plaza Reale.

The Duque evidently was much intrigued by this unexpected visit from his old friends.

"It is not a social call, *amigos*—or you would have come at once to the Casa Reale. So I have complied with your telephoned

suggestions—told nobody where Don Guillermo and I were going or when we might return, and left by the service entrance with our cloaks around our faces. Now—why did you not come directly to the Casa?"

Both the Marquess and Earl Lammerford were too seasoned in diplomacy to explain everything they might know or have in mind in the presence of a fourth party, even though he might be absolutely trustworthy, as they supposed.

So the Marquess smilingly replied:

"Because everybody in Spain would have known of it before morning—tried to figure out a political reason behind our visit even though we're known to be old friends. We registered under assumed names, as you know. Ever since you were with us those weeks at Trevor Hall, we've been anxious about you—and we've sources of information which we believe to be several pegs ahead of any Chancellery in Europe. . . . Recently we've stumbled upon what appears to be a secret understanding among leading news-sheets all over Europe, to put receiving sets in the windows of their offices and let the people in the street listen to whatever they pick out of the air. On the surface, it's a good advertising stunt for the papers. In less obvious ways, we fancy it's likely to be up-to-date politics. We can suggest certain wave-lengths that are likely to prove interesting if you tune them in on your receiving set—but you'll get a better idea of what those editors have in mind and its probable effect upon the masses if you listen to the broadcasting from among them in the street—"

"*Diablo!* . . . That is an idea! But—in the present condition of affairs here, it's rather an unnecessary risk, I think. I should be recognized at once. Of course you two and Don Guillermo are more dependable than ten average guards—but none of you could prevent somebody potting from a window with a pistol, or using a knife in a crowd. Eh?"

"Oh, we had no idea of suggesting that you accompany us as El Duque de Monteverra—you're quite right as to that being a prohibitive risk! But you went around Barcelona with us six months ago, through some of its most dangerous slums down near the docks, and nobody had a suspicion who you were—after your assuring us it would be impossible to disguise you."

"*Hmph!* . . . I wonder why that had slipped my mind at the moment! That little adventure was one which I never shall

forget. It is suspected now that I must have been once or twice where I overheard a few scoundrels plotting treachery—but I don't think anyone imagines I could have been disguised. —Don Guillermo, how would you like to accompany us on an escapade of that sort?"

"A foolish risk, Señor Duque! It might not be difficult for me to disguise myself so that I could pass in a crowd—but with your Gracious Highness the case is different."

"Yet I did it six months ago without being suspected!"

"Si, Señor Duque—it might happen *once*—but the next time would be a risk!"

Earl Lammerford smilingly made a suggestion.

"Suppose we try a little experiment, Don Guillermo? You shall leave His Grace with us now. At seven we will meet you in the grillroom of the Aviation Club—of which the Marquess and I both are members and where it is quite possible we may happen upon some other friend to dine with us—some mutual acquaintance. After dinner, we will take you to a rendezvous with El Señor Duque—a perfectly safe one—and we'll see whether you recognize him without a very close examination. What do you say? That's a sporting proposition, isn't it? We'll be responsible for the safety of the Duque."

The Count considered this for a moment—then said frankly:

"I wonder if you *caballeros* realize how very heavy a responsibility you would be assuming—have you any idea as to the conditions here recently?"

"Possibly a more thoroughly informed one than even you, Don Guillermo. We came down here to see if we could be of assistance—an' we fancy we can, if this rumored newspaper stunt actually is tried out."

"What has that to do with it?"

"That remains to be seen. Possibly little or nothing—possibly a demoralizing upheaval among the various groups of conspirators."

"Very well; the decision rests with His Grace, of course—one must respect his wishes and commands."

The Duque patted his friend reassuringly on the shoulder.

"Let's try it out, Guillermo—they may surprise you! Perhaps you'd like to lay a few thousand *pesetas* that they can't really alter my appearance—eh?"

"Si! . . . Si! . . . I will gamble five

thousand *pesetas*. Fortunately I am not a poor man—I can back my opinion and my curiosity. Eh?"

WHEN El Conde de Fuertaventa-Mayo entered the grillroom of the Aviation Club and looked over the tables, he soon located the English peers, with a friend—a big man weighing more than either of them—by his appearance, an Austrian, for there were several Viennese members. He was apparently slightly taller than the Marquess—not in the least fat, but large in every proportion. His hair and Vandyke beard were a rather light brown—thick and curly; his eyes a dark-brown, almost black—as one sometimes sees among light-complexioned Austrians. His loose morning suit was of excellent brown cloth, evidently cut by a Viennese tailor—with tie, shirt, socks and shoes to match. As they all were going down into the lower quarter of the city, none of them had dressed for dinner and were somewhat conspicuous for that reason. The Englishmen had been recognized by some of the members who supposed the big man to be a guest the peers had introduced. Don Guillermo found him a pleasant table-companion with certain vaguely familiar tones in his voice.

The dinner was thoroughly enjoyed; after it, they played one game of billiards—then the four took a taxi down into the commercial and poorer quarters where most of the news-sheets had their offices.

As he saw where they were getting to, Don Guillermo muttered anxiously to the Marquess: "Surely, *caballeros*, you did not permit His Grace to come down here alone!"

Señor Walburgn, the big Austrian, overheard this—and chuckled. Then he said, in a familiar voice which nearly made the Count jump out of the cab:

"Most regrettable, Guillermo! It pains me to say it—but you really owe El Conde de Santa Yves five thousand good *pesetas*, of which I will pay half because you didn't know these *amigos* as well as I, and I shouldn't have permitted you to make the wager."

"But—*diablo!* The thing is impossible! Nobody would suspect—"

"That was the intention, Guillermo—that was the intention! Ah! We approach the offices of El *Nuevo Mundo*. One understands that there has been a notice in the window all day saying they were starting a series of wireless bulletins every evening

between nine and midnight—picking up everything in the way of news coming through the air and placing the speaker of their wireless set upon a shelf outside the window. They made no statement beyond that, but one hears there is a rumor that some of what they pick up may be devilish interesting. Do we keep the cab?"

"If there's anything of a crowd, the police

of the Dictatorship!" "Si—he knows the power of Sanchez with the people!" "Oh, El Rey is a good politician—a clever fellow—does very well as a head for the country!" "Ah—what do we want of a King, anyhow? Chuck him out, I say!" This, and much more, in the vernacular. The crowd was increasing—milling, now, up and down the narrow street



J. Pennell wood
 "But—diablo! The thing is impossible! Nobody would suspect—"

wont let any vehicle park in this narrow street. It'll be tiresome standing about—but—"

"But we can roost on these steps or a railing, as others do. Our clothes are not conspicuously better in the dark. We must appear to all intents like the rest of the crowd if we avoid trouble."

In a large window of the *Nuevo Mundo*, opposite, a bulletin-sheet had been pasted to the glass stating that El Rey had issued a royal decree of amnesty in favor of Sanchez Buerra and others implicated in the rebellion of '28—Buerra, it was understood, being about to form a new Liberal Party while Francisco Tambo the noted financier was consolidating the Conservatives. There were audible comments upon this among the crowd: "El Rey is trying to curry favor with the Liberals, now that he's rid

—muttering of changes to come, of the expediency of throat-slitting in certain cases—murmuring of unspeakable things in the way of license, pillage, debauch, if the revolution broke.

A single arc-lamp hung in front of the newspaper office—except for this, the street was in darkness beyond the nearest corners. Faces, dimly seen, had a saturnine ghastliness. The loud-speaker outside the window began to blare.

THERE were a number of slowly enunciated sentences in Italian, broadcasted on nineteen hundred meters. The man in the office who was tuning the radio-set pasted the number of meters on the window-glass, with the comment: "Who but the amateur ever tunes in on nineteen hundred meters? That's why you never catch any

of these private Government broadcasts!" Latin languages resemble each other closely enough to catch the gist of anything in one if you speak another of them—probably half the crowd understood most of the words coming from the speaker. Apparently the station was somewhere in Italy—sending out instructions to communist agents in France. But mention was made of large sums sent to Spain, where certain operatives would see that they reached the proper district leaders. There was no proof as to who the senders were, or where—or to whom the message was going—but the inference was too plain for any communist to misunderstand it wherever heard. There were comments among the crowd in low tones. Nobody seemed to have heard of any money coming from Italy—nobody had seen the color of a single *lira*. Who was getting—and keeping it? Nobody seemed to know who the operatives were—but there was increasing determination to find out. They stood no nonsense about money!

Then came a message from somewhere in France to a person or agents somewhere in Morocco. Taking it one way, perfectly innocent orders to exporters of figs and dates. Assuming the figs and dates to mean soldiers, army officers or revolutionists, it took on a much more sinister meaning. The jealousy between Spain and France along the Riff promptly suggested the latter. After this, the crowd was regaled for fifteen minutes with a favorite Spanish opera, "Goyescas," from the Metropolitan in New York where the *matinée* was just closing.

IN a few moments, an announcement in colloquial Spanish silenced the applause, and brought strained attention:

"This is a presentation of the Service Radiotelephonique Internationale. It is a part of our nightly program to broadcast, at ten-thirty, translations of certain code-messages picked out of the air on various wave-lengths during previous nights, and decoded in our office. Not every message heard, of course—we select those which seem to have direct bearing upon the masses and the politics of certain countries, believing that the people have a right to know what is being done under the surface which vitally concerns them. The message we broadcast this evening was picked up from a station in Eastern Europe at three o'clock in the morning on a wave-length of twenty-nine hundred meters. The message follows:

Department S. B. Official.

February 2 (Old Style)

Instructions to Operatives—Iberian Dept.

Funds for final details now available in banks. Operatives of Section C will draw and distribute as previously arranged. Operatives of Section A will be responsible for the army on the zero date. Section S, the university students about to be granted royal amnesty. Elimination of the Crown has been voted for night before zero date. Section E will carry this out. Operatives of Section X (King's suite) and Section Y (*grandees*) can be trusted to act on date given. Operatives G-B, G-H, G-M, L-H and L-J are known to have betrayed organization plans through channels supposed to have reached the King. It is ordered that Section E take the usual measures with them at once. The organization is warned that five men supposed to be entirely trustworthy—a baker, a restaurant *patrono*, a steamship agent, an army-lieutenant and an exporter—are secret agents of the Crown who have obtained enough information to send a number of our party to the garrote. It is not definitely known which man affiliated with us in each of those five lines is the guilty one. Exert the most rigid caution and espionage among yourselves. U. B. S. K. A. 24

Lammerford had drawn a small pad from one of his pockets and was quietly taking down the words in shorthand as he heard them. Near him, two men with felt hats pulled over their faces were muttering:

"Treachery—from a dozen different quarters! Nobody could decode that message without a key—we know how complicated it was!"

"*Si!* We must spot those traitor operatives and slit their throats!"

"But how to spot them? Operatives only know the numbers of those in their own section—except the executives, who are supposed to know all of them, but whom nobody else is permitted to know! What we must do at once is to go into that office and force them to shut off that wireless set! There are at least a score of our fellows in this crowd—we'll wreck the building and set it on fire!"

"We'd be spotted by Government Agents! They're just looking for some such betrayal of interest on our part—we'd be arrested inside of five minutes, and the time has only now arrived for the revolution. What plausible reason could we give for objecting to what we've just heard? Can't you see that betrays us at once?"

"Hmph! At least we can go in there and ask them what they know of this mysterious Wireless News Service, and how they knew where to tune in for them—whether the broadcast wasn't a hoax?"

"*Psst!* There's a news-corre-

spondent taking down the message in shorthand! —Pardon, señor—is it that you have caught the message in full?”

Lammerford glanced up with an expression of intense concentration.

“I *think* I have, señor. Of course my journals were getting this in their own editorial-rooms. But they wouldn't know in advance what might be coming—might not have been prepared to make a record of every word.”

“Would the señor have the goodness to permit that we make a copy of what he has written down?”

“With pleasure, señors! If those of you who would like copies will gather around me, I will read slowly, exactly what I got, and you can be writing down the words.”

WHEN this had been done they thanked him courteously. Then a dozen of them went into the newspaper office and asked to see the managing editor—Lammerford and his companions going along with them. The editor received them pleasantly, but could give no information.

“We know no more than you do, señors! For the last fortnight, the various journals of the great syndicate with which we are affiliated have been listening through the nights to what was being broadcasted from little-known stations and those which seemed to be under Government management—picking up some rather amazing talk, and these decoded messages of instruction from what we assume to be six or eight of the European Foreign Offices. At a meeting of our syndicate directors, it was decided that the leading journals in each city should place loud-speakers in their windows and let those in the street hear just what we pick out of the air—as a matter of public interest.”

“But, señor, how did you know the very unusual wave-lengths of stations like this Service Radiotelefonique?”

“We didn't, until we logged everything we got, as it came in—tuning up and down from thirty-five hundred meters—and checked the stations most likely to be of general interest.”

“Are you not running a most serious risk of having your plant and building wrecked by those who are threatened by such broadcasts as the one we have just heard?”

“A very negligible one—if they stop to think. Consider, señors! Such men would have to wreck twenty or thirty plants in Spain alone—all of which, presumably,

have been putting that message through their speakers at the same instant we were. You will observe that we have simply let you hear what everyone in our editorial-rooms hears every night. We assume no responsibility for it whatever. It was on the air. Anybody with an all-wave receiving set could have given it to you.”

“But the decoding, señor? . . . You guarantee the reliability of that?”

“We most certainly do not! If you wish to hear the message in its original language and code form, we will run an ad to that effect without charge in our morning edition—and you may get it tomorrow night or the night after. Some correspondent of that service will read the ad, and communicate with those people during the day—presumably. Then I dare say the Government Foreign Office will decode it for you upon request, because that's part of their business. They have so much practice in that sort of thing that their experts can translate almost anything in any language or combination of phonetic symbols.”

As they went out into the street crowd again—which now consisted of nearly a thousand persons—the Marquess began muttering to his companions, in tones which could be overheard by those nearest them:

“Nothing gained by wrecking the building! . . . The fellow was quite right in saying so—he's only one of hundreds, all putting that message on the streets at the same time—any wireless amateur can do the same thing whenever he wishes. But it's going to make any concerted plan much more difficult than before. Presumably Section E are already carrying out their orders—if the information against those operatives is really correct, the E's can't silence them any too soon. But if it's a bit of personal vendetta, the rest of the organization should know just what proof was found against them. Avocados and deadly nightshade make an unhealthy dish!”

Two of the men near them turned slowly and glanced searchingly into their faces. It should be remembered that for many years the Free Lances had learned through their own experiences, and had picked up from Foreign-Office men, passwords and recognition-signs from many secret organizations.

“Evidently the señors do not relish a fruit and flower diet?” said one man.

“Hmph! . . . One might expect sudden death if he did!”

“There is a small *fonda* in the Calle de los Amigos near by, señors, where one may



A lance of flame spurted from the Marquess's sack coat, paralyzing the fellow's fingers.

obtain a private room, with most excellent wine and chickens roasted in oil. If the señors agree that there may be matters of mutual interest for discussion, perhaps they will confer pleasure upon us and accept our poor hospitality in such a place. *Si?*"

"*Vaya con Dios, señors—we follow.*"

SOON the eight were seated in an upper room of the old inn. When an appetizing supper had been laid before them, and the *mozo* had disappeared, one of the strangers said:

"Do we give a baptismal history of each one before talking, or do we chat more or less ambiguously? Eh?"

The Marquess smiled coolly.

"For ourselves, *compañero*, we give no explanation. We are what we are—we say what we please—we discuss matters of interest; if you object to such discussion, we change the subject. To make a beginning, I would ask you who are the *patrono de fonda*—the *agente de vapor*—the baker, lieutenant, and exporter, mentioned in that message—which we heard over our own receiving set in code. Who are operatives in the G and L Sections who have been turned over for execution? The executives are supposed to have on file the identities of those five men—presumably with proof that they have betrayed the organization. But how do the rest of us know somebody with a personal vendetta against those men

hasn't faked up false accusations and proof just to get them out of the way? It seems to me that a committee of representatives from all the Sections should pass upon the evidence against them! In the way this matter is now handled, any personal enemy of yours or ours may denounce us secretly as traitors and get us knifed without a chance to prove our loyalty! In my opinion, señors, the whole organization is rotten with graft and treachery! Who has seen a single *peseta* of that money sent from Italy? Not one of us, anyhow! Who sent the code-key to this Service Radiotelefonique? You can't convince *me* that anybody worked out a translation of that code in twenty-four hours! . . . It takes me too long to decode it, even with the key! I'm not saying a word against the organization as a whole—even if it isn't accomplishing what was claimed for it in the outside countries. There are many efficient men among us. But there seems to be far too much personal risk in the way this Iberian Department is being run! How do you feel about it yourselves?"

This was what the other four had been thinking; they unanimously agreed.

"*Si! Si!* The señor says what is but the truth! But—what to do?"

"I do not know—I cannot answer that. We are pledged to carry out certain instructions. If we do so—and others do not act in concert with us—we make but a futile,

unsuccessful attempt—are arrested—quite possibly garroted as traitors to the government of El Rey. But I have a thought. Suppose an unsigned letter were sent to the S. B. Department at headquarters, stating the uncertainty created here by this message—the doubts as to who may be trusted and who not—the impression that a committee of representatives from each Section should be appointed to pass upon evidence against any member before proceeding to execution, and the probability that no concerted action can be depended upon until the conditions here are straightened out. It seems to me that such a letter might clear the air sufficiently for us to know better where we are!”

“Would you refuse, señor, to carry out the present instructions?”

“Well—that’s a dangerous position to take, of course. On the other hand, it may be even more dangerous to carry them out without the support we’re counting upon. I do not propose to go further until I have considerably stronger assurance!”

“Will not that brand you as a traitor?”

“Not with any person of sense. It’s merely that I like my own skin and body better than I do the unsupported chances of an abortive revolution. If you prefer calling that being a traitor—well—do so!”

HERE the big man called Walburgh came into the talk:

“What I would like to know, *compañeros*, is exactly what sort of government it is proposed that we establish? Obviously, there has to be a government—an efficient one—with capable financiers who can soon balance the budget and materially reduce widespread poverty—with army and police sufficiently disciplined to maintain order and control senseless rioting—with sufficient knowledge of foreign affairs to keep us out of annihilating wars with other nations. We are supposed to be a socialistic and communistic organization. I came in with the crowd because I believe that Labor should have an equal chance with Capital—abolishing one would be just as senseless as abolishing the other. The theory of communism has had fourteen years to work out in Russia—if we can’t do any better than they have done, I’m willing to accept a capitalistic world! What I mean is this: If we can’t better the country’s condition by any other means than a revolution—then let’s have the revolution—but personally, I can’t see why it should be neces-

sary. El Rey strikes me as being a fairly well-educated fellow whose ideas of good government are considerably better than mine. Certainly they are democratic enough. Why not give him all the rope he wants for ten years and see what he’ll make of it? As far as I know, he’s never shown the slightest treachery against the Spanish people or his friends—which seems to be a lot more than we can say for our own crowd just at present. Mind you, I’ve talked my bit of socialistic rot during the last five years, as well as others I could mention. I was pretty hot against the Dictator when he started in—but he certainly steadied and improved the condition of the country. What the new Premier will do with the King behind him, we don’t know. It seems to me their chances of running the country satisfactorily are better than those of our crowd. Wonder if you don’t really agree with me, in your hearts?”

The little street outside had been exceptionally quiet. As they were considering the big man’s remarks, distant cries from newsboys echoed faintly from up around the publication offices. They came nearer—one could make out the words:

“Assassination of El Rey at the Palacio!”

One of the men sprang across the room and flung open a window. A boy shouted up at him: *“El Rey and two of his suite have been shot in the Palacio!”* The revolutionist closed the window and swung around to them with an expression of rage and amazement in his face.

“Who has done this? It was not ordered for tonight! It is a frightful mistake—it will turn the people against us—he really was popular with the masses! That message said his death had been decided upon—yet there would have been a general protest had the people heard of it in time!”

DON GUILLERMO laughed contemptuously.

“The report is a lie—I happen to know that His Majesty couldn’t have been shot! At least, I am quite positive—because I know that he went out of town this afternoon—possibly upon affairs of State. I do not doubt that some one has been shot at the Palacio—presumably some of those turned over to Section E. But none of them was His Majesty—I’ll wager a thousand *pesetas* upon it!”

The revolutionist leaned across the table and looked at the speaker with sly menace in his eyes.

"So? And if one were inclined to accept the señor's wager—should it be booked as with El Conde de Fuertaventura-Mayo—a friend of El Rey who prefers safety in the streets while his sovereign is being killed? Eh?"

It was evident that Don Guillermo had been recognized from the first. An ugly automatic suddenly appeared, covering him.

"The hands will be raised above the head, señor—at once! The others, here, have given proof that they belong to our organization, and will not object to the execution of a spy!"

BUT even as the man spoke, a lance of orange-colored flame sputtered from the side pocket of the Marquess' sack coat—tearing the automatic out of the fellow's hand, spinning it across the room, and paralyzing his fingers.

"I regret exceedingly, señor, if I have injured your hand—but I saw your finger pressing upon the trigger. In another second, you'd have killed a very good friend! Recall, if you please, the operatives referred to in that wireless message—three, of Section X, among the King's suite, and four grandes of Section Y, all men to be trusted. Is it then so impossible that El Señor Conde may be one of the seven?"

"It is because of that, señor, I was about to kill the coward who ran away, leaving his King and friend to be shot! We are revolutionists here—why deny it? But not regicides! El Rey is very popular among the people—a good fellow. He has courage—he makes the joke a moment after he has escaped assassination by a hair!"

"Then we are all *amigos* together—for that's the way we feel about him! And you have accused El Señor Conde unjustly—he did not leave His Majesty until the King was safely out of town. He may belong to our organization, and still protect the life of his sovereign. No sensible man assassinates rulers today, because most of them are more than willing to live private lives as country gentlemen—there's nothing attractive left in the business of royalty. It is now time for us to leave you, señors—the supper and your acquaintance have given us much pleasure. *Vaya con Dios!*"

Apparently the four who went downstairs and walked away from the *fonda* hadn't the slightest fear of treachery from those left in the room, for none of them hesitated about turning his back or made any motion toward drawing a weapon as he

went out. But the revolutionists had been profoundly impressed by the marksmanship they had seen; they were taking no chances with a man like that.

Outside, the big man remarked thoughtfully:

"Looked for a moment or two like a rather near thing—when the fellow pulled out that heavy artillery. Really, Señor Marquess, your brain works about the quickest of any man I know; and I believe you haven't your equal in shooting from any position. That was a superb shot—you hadn't more than a split second! The other pistol exploded as it flew across the room—the two reports blended. Wonder if those fellows ever dreamed of entertaining royalty in a casual way—and what they'd say if they found it out? I think we've gotten some valuable hints about the real feeling among the masses. They're not going to relish being exploited as cat's-paws by another nation, either—the gist of that wireless message will be all over Spain by morning. In fact I'm of the opinion that a few exposures of that sort would break the backbone of any revolution ever started, because they arouse so much suspicion among the conspirators themselves. How much do you good friends know about that Service Radiotelefonique, anyhow? I swear I believe you're mixed up in it!"

"Well, it struck us as rather a pious idea when we first heard of what they were doing, and we came down to see how it worked out in a country seething with communism. . . . I doubt if you're quite out of the woods yet, old chap—but the general situation is prob'ly better than it was this morning. Now, if you'll come to our suite in the hotel, we'll undress you a bit—split a bottle or two—and then we'll all go up to see what really happened at the Palace. If three traitors were killed, they're no loss at all—we're hopin' none of your real friends were in the mess!"

THE four men strode methodically along through the narrow, ill-favored streets toward the cleaner part of the city as if merely out for exercise—but actually pondering gravely the events of the evening.

Presently the big man said:

"I wonder if their intention really was to eliminate royalty this evening? Just 'King's luck' that royalty happened to be somewhere else—eh? Colossal joke on somebody. Oh, well—all in a day's activities!" And the four strode on.

STOWAWAY GOLD

By FREDERICK R. BECHDOLT

Illustrated by
J. Fleming Gould

I WAS working for the Dickinson Agency then; and it was one of the two great detective institutions in the country. So I had learned to keep my eyes open to what was going on about me—to notice faces and to retain such of them as seemed worth while in my memory. That was how I came to pay attention to the man who called himself Rhana the Great.

I was young, you understand, and I was of course ambitious; to me the world seemed always promising adventure and opportunity. And when my work was done, which was sometimes late in the night, I used to look about me in the city's silent thoroughfares, conjuring all sorts of mysteries—the beginnings of great cases—from the groups of night birds whom I passed. Of these there was no lack in San Francisco then. No city in the world held more of intrigue; none saw the beginnings of so many bold affairs by sea and land.

I was rooming on Bush Street, and it was my habit to walk up the hill from Kearney on my way home of evenings. A few doors beyond the junction of Dupont, where the clangor of the gongs in Chinatown's joss-houses was always audible, there was an old wooden house that had been quite a mansion in its time but had come down in the world until it was all placarded with the signs of hairdressers and masseurs and fortune-tellers. And the biggest of these was on the first-floor bay window—"RHANA THE GREAT."

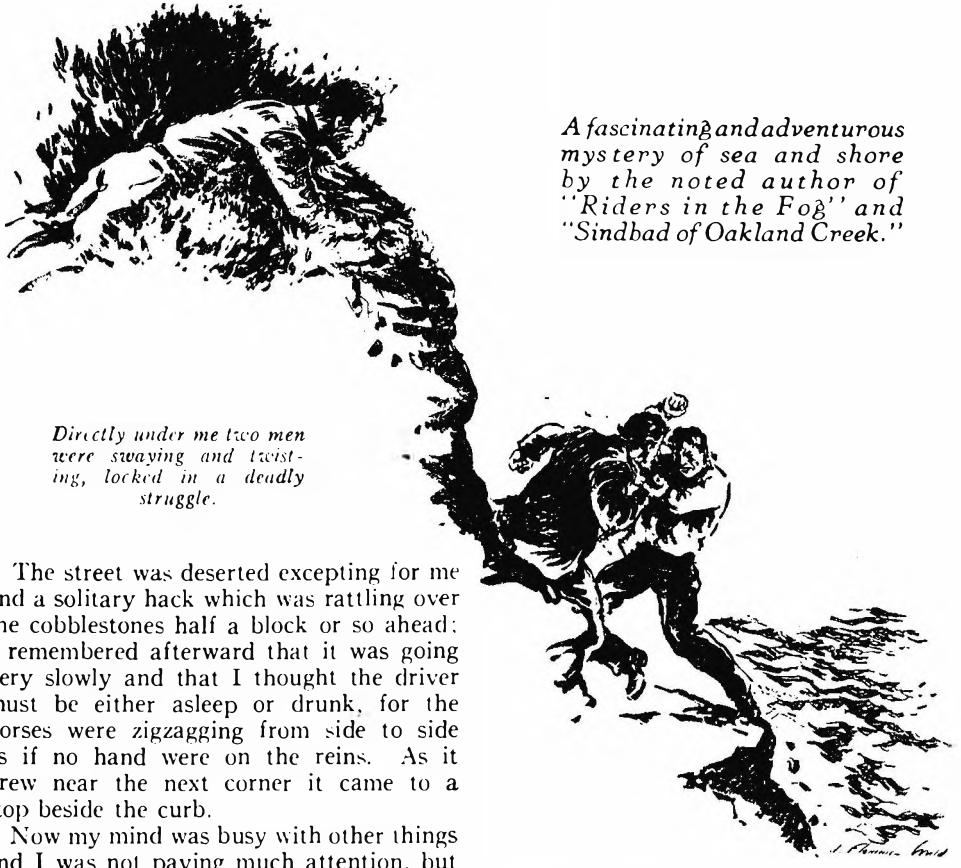
THAT was all it said; none of the usual stuff about the past, present and future; it left all that to your imagination. And hardly a night but there would be one of those old-fashioned hacks which carried men and women to weddings and funerals and Turkish baths and all sorts of secret meeting-places, standing before the curb.

Once, as I was going by, I saw this Rhana the Great standing in the front en-

trance of the dingy building, with the porch light shining on his face: a tall slim man with a swarthy complexion and black eyes that glittered cold as glass. He was dressed, of course, in a frock coat, and instead of a collar he had a high stock; a big yellow turban was wound around his head. To size him up from his general appearance, you would say that those hacks which were standing before the curb at all hours after dark were bringing him good money.

In those days there were some hundreds of others like him, plying their vocations, as the newspapers used to say: big ones and little ones, ranging all the way from waterfront palmists to charlatans who were growing rich by going into trances to get advice from the spirit world for some of our big business men. So naturally I used to wonder now and then, when I saw one of those women cloaked and veiled from head to foot and hurrying from a hack to the entrance of that dingy house, who she might be and where she might come from. But of that speculation nothing ever developed. What did happen had to do with stronger stuff than bedroom secrets.

EARLY one morning, it was, when the first of these events took place, away beyond my usual time for going home; but I was working on a case downtown, shadowing a party who lived at the Palace Hotel and it was past two o'clock before I "put him to bed," as the saying is. After that I had a bite to eat and when I started up Kearney Street to Bush the nighthawks from the Barbary Coast were hurrying down the sidewalk, and the paper-carriers were going by with the last editions under their arms. I turned into Bush and went up the hill, and as I passed the dingy old house, I noticed a rim of lamplight around the drawn shade in the bay window. Rhana the Great I told myself, was keeping late hours.



*A fascinating and adventurous
mystery of sea and shore
by the noted author of
"Riders in the Fog" and
"Sinbad of Oakland Creek."*

*Directly under me two men
were swaying and twist-
ing, locked in a deadly
struggle.*

The street was deserted excepting for me and a solitary hack which was rattling over the cobblestones half a block or so ahead: I remembered afterward that it was going very slowly and that I thought the driver must be either asleep or drunk, for the horses were zigzagging from side to side as if no hand were on the reins. As it drew near the next corner it came to a stop beside the curb.

Now my mind was busy with other things and I was not paying much attention, but it had come to me that there was something unusual about this hack and when I looked now I saw what it was. There was no driver on the seat! So I hurried my pace a bit to catch up to it before the horses would change their minds and be off again. And when I reached them I saw that the strap which held the hitching weight had been cut, leaving about two feet dangling. And there was a passenger inside.

I could make him out plainly enough by the light of the corner gas-lamp. A tall lean man huddled down in the back seat with his head bent forward over his chest. A drunken hackman and a drunken fare, I said to myself; but you can't leave a man at the mercy of a team of driverless horses—so I flung open the door to waken him.

Then I saw the manner of clothes he was wearing, and that struck me as curious—one of those black Liverpool caps on his head, such as stokers and common seamen used in those days, no coat, a knitted jersey with the sleeves rolled up showing a tattooed mermaid on one forearm and a pair of American flags crossed on the other. A seafaring man, and evidently one who sailed before the mast. What was he doing in a

hack? In those days a common sailor was in luck if he had as much as twenty dollars coming to him at the end of a voyage.

I asked myself that question; then I gripped him by the shoulder. I shook him vigorously, but it did not rouse him. His head rolled from side to side, and he slumped forward, limp as a sack of meal. And then I saw the reason why he did not awaken—why he never would awaken in this world:

The bone handle of a huge sheath knife was sticking out from between his shoulder-blades.

WELL. I called the police, and they took him to the morgue, and although the murder of a sailor was a fairly common matter in those days of crime and night-birds, this made some stir because of its mystery. But the inquest brought out nothing excepting the statement of the hackman, who said he had left his team down near the corner of Dupont while he was getting a drink or two half a block or so away. There were some seafaring men who came to look at the body, but none of them

identified it. The department and the papers dropped the case within a week. And I might have forgotten about it if it had not been for what I saw one night not long afterward.

I WAS still working on that other investigation and my man had kept me up well after midnight. When I started to climb the Bush Street hill the curb before the dingy house was deserted—not a hack in sight. In fact, no one was about excepting a solitary pedestrian walking ahead of me. As he passed under the corner gas-lamp at Dupont, I saw the yarn cap and knitted jersey which he was wearing, the roll in his gait. A sailorman—no doubt of that. Remembering that other one who had come to a tragic end in this same neighborhood, I crossed the street and took the opposite side, whence I could watch him the better without being myself observed.

Now, as he drew near to the old wooden house, another man emerged from a doorway and joined him, and the two went together up the steps. They vanished in the entrance of the dingy mansion. I stepped back into the shadows and waited.

There came the sound of knocking, and then a moment's silence. And after that—just about long enough for a man within to open the door—the devil broke loose in that front room behind the bay window whose drawn shades revealed thin lines of lamplight about their edges. Furniture was being overturned; some one had thrown a chair against a wall; there was a tinkle of broken glass and the trampling of feet; an outburst of voices.

It lasted for less than ten seconds, but there was something hideous in the violence of those noises. And then, all of a sudden, a shape burst through the big bay window. It came out, with a shower of broken glass about it, all huddled up and fell upon the ground; it leaped to its feet and scudded across the sidewalk into the middle of the street—a figure in a frock coat, the remnants of what had been a yellow turban streaming about his head. He was running like a rabbit up the hill.

And now the two men who had entered the room a few moments before rushed out the entrance—one first, and the other a half a dozen paces behind. The foremost was reaching back of him with his right hand as he ran. I knew that gesture; I had seen more than one sailor getting out his sheath knife from beneath the strap of

his breeches to cut a quid of chewing tobacco. And when this fellow's hand came forth I was not surprised to see the gleam of a steel blade. He was making good time, gaining on the fugitive, but as the latter heard footfalls behind him he increased his pace. I saw the pursuer's right hand go back over his shoulder; the knife flew from his open palm and Rhana the Great faltered for an instant in his stride as it struck him. I had a brief glimpse of his face as he whipped one look over his shoulder, and there was something so terrified in those twisted features that I felt frightened myself. Then he recovered himself and dashed on.

So he passed up the hill and out of sight with the two men after him. And I saw no more of them. I only had the memory of their sunburned faces and their ragged forms. One of them—the one who had thrown the knife—was dark-skinned, some sort of half-caste; I would have known him anywhere were I to see him again. Of the other I was not so sure, excepting that he was swarthy and larger than his companion.

From that time on, going homeward of a night, I saw no further sign of Rhana the Great. The bay window which had borne his name was placarded with notices stating that the rooms were to let. But I indulged in a great deal of speculation as to what deadly feud had been going on between him and those sailormen. For I was sure now, in my own mind, that he was the owner of that bone-handled knife which I had seen sticking between the shoulders of the dead passenger in the hack

CHAPTER II

THAT happened in the autumn; and it was spring—a good six months afterward—when I was detailed to work on a confidential matter under Judge Garretson. There wasn't a more conservative law-firm in the city than his; and when I reported to him in his private office, I felt as if there had been a mistake somewhere: this room, lined with shelves of law-books and this precise old man with his close-clipped gray mustache, didn't seem to fit in with my business at all. Well, I sat down across his flat-topped desk from him and he balanced his nose-glasses on one finger while he talked; and I learned in a very few minutes that all the excitement in life isn't monopolized by the criminal lawyers.



The devil broke loose in that room; of a sudden, a shape burst through the big bay window, in a shower of broken glass.

"This is a delicate matter, Mr. Yard," he said, "and it may be dangerous. My client is Miss Sarah Kingston."

I knew that name all right—a maiden lady of a wealthy old family, who had endowed a hospital and helped to build a church or two.

"And I've good reason," he went on, "to believe she is being swindled. That's why I sent to the Dickinson Agency. She's financing an expedition to hunt for a lost mine."

Now the Alaskan excitement was still fresh and there were all sorts of fake projects being carried out. Men who would have examined any reputable proposition with a microscope, were backing treasure hunts and turning over good money to charlatans who claimed to have found the location of the Breyfogle ledge down in the desert. This quiet little old lady, who had more money than she could ever use, was bitten by the same bug. She'd spent about ten thousand dollars chartering a schooner and buying an outfit for some fellow who called himself Professor Valdez. He had been telling her a story of rotten quartz all seamed with wire gold down in Baja California and of enemies trying to beat him to it; and the vessel was to sail at once to secure those riches for the two of them.

"The chances are," I said when he had gotten that far, "it wont sail beyond San Diego or San Pedro."

"That," Judge Garretson replied, "is just the point. Since I happened to learn of this, I've looked into it far enough to be sure that the schooner has been provisioned with her money and they've shipped a crew. There is the chance, you see, that my client may be backing a cruise to smuggle opium or Chinamen; or this may be only the beginning of a systematic series of extortions. And we have got to guard against that. So you are to go along. I've managed to convince her that she should have a representative; a mining expert to examine the property, you understand. If I'd as much as hinted that I thought the affair was a swindle, she'd have shown me the door, I believe."

WELL, we talked the matter over at full length, and the upshot of it was that I sent a dunnage-bag of luggage down to the harbor for the schooner *Dora*, lying at Meiggs' wharf, and went out that afternoon to Miss Sarah Kingston's house, with a flannel shirt and a broad-brimmed som-

brero hat to pass me off for a mining engineer. There, it had been arranged, I was to meet the party who had managed to get ten thousand dollars out of her.

It was an old house on Fillmore Street, well out where the hill comes down steep toward the bay, with grass growing between the cobblestones. And when the silent Chinese servant let me into the front door it was like coming into days gone by. Mahogany furniture that had been brought around the Horn, and China carpets that had been brought over by the old clipper ships were on the floor. The Chinaman was gray-haired, and the little old lady who received me in the parlor looked like a piece of pink-and-white porcelain; one of the sort who made you think of lavender and prayer-books, with a sweet voice that trembled just a bit. It seemed queer to associate her with sailormen and schooners and gold down in the desert country—but wilder stuff than all that came out of the association before I was through with it!

Now, from what the lawyer had told me, I was expecting a cold reception, and like as not a little cross-examination on the subject of mines and mining, about which I knew as little as the next man; but she welcomed me like a long-lost brother, and brought me a glass of wine with a piece of cake after she had seated me in one of the spindle-legged mahogany chairs whose backs were inlaid with mother-of-pearl.

"I was afraid Judge Garretson was going to send me an elderly man," she told me. "I've been watching the street for this last hour, and when I saw you come to the door I was so relieved to see that you were young. You understand that there is danger on this expedition?"

I SAID I did; and I think I got the reason for her spending her money right then: this little old lady with the pink-and-white cheeks was getting the same kick out of it that makes people of all kinds—boys and men and women—love to read stories of adventure. It was as if she were going on the voyage herself. Her bright bird's eyes were sparkling with excitement, and she was asking me if I was armed—and I was telling her that I was and that I'd been accustomed to using weapons all my life. And while I was in the middle of that the bell rang and the white-haired Chinaman stepped in, announcing Professor Valdez.

He followed the servant into the room, a tall man with a black forked beard that

came down over his chest, and eyes like two jet marbles. They were as cold as ice and the hand which he gave me when she introduced us was like a dead fish. His hair was long and he was dressed very much like one of those patent-medicine fakers who used to entertain street-corner crowds under the light of gasoline torches, with a wide-rimmed black hat which he laid beside him on the floor. He wore a pair of moccasins. *Swindler* was written all over him!

But the thing which struck me then—and it remained with him during much of the time I knew him—was a sort of air he had about him—an air of deadly fear. I remember moments afterward when it made him seem like a coiled rattlesnake that is about to strike; and even now when there was no hate mixed with it, the presence of that dread was poisonous. It kept him twisting in his chair while he was talking; he got up from his seat half a dozen times and glided to the window, soft-footed as a cat. Those shiny eyes of his were forever moving, as if he expected some one to come up behind him at any moment. He kept passing his tongue over his lips to moisten them. And, although he had come in a hack which was waiting by the curb, he was breathing hard during all his stay here like a man who had been running.

"You'll have no trouble in looking over this proposition, Mr. Yard," he told me. "It doesn't need a mining engineer to see the gold. But that's all right. I'm glad you came." And, oddly enough it seemed to me, from the way he said it, as if he meant those last words. If he was trying to impress me, he was, I thought, doing some remarkably good acting, for he talked no more about his mine but switched to the schooner and her departure, which was to be with the ebb tide that night, and answered the little old lady's questions as to a lot of small details. Now and then, when he was not looking out of the window or over his shoulder, his hard eyes would take me in from head to foot. And when we were about to go he turned to me.

"Your baggage is aboard?" I told him it was. He shook hands with Miss Kingston, absent-mindedly, almost as if she were not there at all, and when we were on the doorstep together and she was out of hearing, he said:

"Do you carry a revolver?" I assured him that I was armed. "Then," he said, "I want you to come with me. If I am to get aboard that boat I need protection."

IT was the first time that I believed I had caught him doing any poor play-acting; but when I looked at his face, I did not feel so sure. A man can fake a good many things but I never saw one who could make the little drops of sweat stand out on his forehead. So I got into the waiting hack with him and before the door was closed behind us he had the driver whipping his horses on a run down the steep hill. In that first two hundred feet of our travels we nearly came to ending them, for the team had all they could do to keep ahead of the vehicle and we rounded the next corner on two wheels, with Professor Valdez kneeling on the seat looking out of the back window. But the street behind us was empty and he sank back again.

It was evident that he had something on his mind, for he made no effort to talk to me, but sat there huddled in his corner of the seat. And the few attempts I made toward conversation come to nothing—excepting for one. I was looking at those moccasins of his and it struck me that their pattern was familiar; then I noticed that they were of hair seal hide. So I said:

“You’ve been in Alaska, Professor?”

It is odd how often you will get a rise out of a man by an innocent remark, when you might talk to him for an hour with a purpose in your mind and find out nothing. He started at my question as if I had struck him and, for just an instant, I had that impression—which I was to feel more than once afterward—of deadliness in his whole presence. Then he recovered his self-possession and relaxed.

“What makes you ask that?” he demanded. I told him it was the moccasins. He shook his head and smiled.

“I bought them on the waterfront from a sailor,” he said easily. But I was sure that I had caught him in one lie.

NOW the hack was going southward, and Meiggs’ wharf lay to the north. And as time went on I began to wonder more about this, for it had become apparent that we were crossing the city. On past Market and through the old Tar Flat down by the gashouses and still farther across the lazy creek where schooners and hay barges lay, through Butchertown and the Potrero. The fog was rolling in over the bare hills and the gas-lamps were burning when we left the outskirts behind us, passing the iron-works and waste grass lands beside the bayshore. It was dark when the driver

pulled up and we two got out. And it came to me that perhaps this Professor Valdez was figuring to lead me into some trap or other that he might get rid of me before the voyage began. But, when we started on afoot, he went before, asking me to keep a look behind for anyone who might be following. And so he led the way for nearly a half-mile to an old house which stood close by the water behind a row of tall gum trees.

The place was dark, and I could hear the key rattling in his fingers as he thrust it into the lock and no sooner had I entered than he shut the door and locked it behind me. It was pitch black inside. My hand was on my revolver; my back against the wall, and I could feel the dampness of it through my clothing—cold and clammy. But none was here excepting us two; and he lighted a kerosene lamp bidding me to sit down. Two chairs, a table and a cot bedstead in one corner and that was about all. The wallpaper was peeling off in big patches and the plaster was discolored from mildew. The windows were boarded on the outside up to the second sash. I looked at my watch. It was past seven o’clock, and the schooner was to pull out into the stream at eight. As if he had read my thoughts Valdez said:

“There is a launch to come for us. Another half-hour and we will be off.”

AFTER that we sat in silence for some time. I was thinking what a strange manner of departure this was, wondering what it might mean, whether this man might not have brought me here for some trick after all, when I heard a little sound outside. It was as nearly as I can describe it like the rubbing of one piece of wood against another. It ceased and then I heard it again and then it stopped for good. This fellow Valdez had risen from his chair and was pacing up and down the room; it was evident he had not caught it. My eyes went to the window—to the upper sash.

There was a face there looking in on us, a dark face and I could see the white teeth shining behind the drawn lips; it was not a smile—rather a sort of ferocious wolfish grin. And as my eyes met the dark eyes, my hand found the butt of my revolver. I drew the weapon and the face vanished. There came the soft thump of feet landing upon the earth outside.

Valdez whirled in his tracks.

“What was that?” he whispered; and

when I told him he passed his tongue over his lips to moisten them. "I knew they'd come," he said quietly and put out the light. "Keep your revolver ready," he breathed the words into my ear, "and come with me." And as I followed him through the deserted room into another, I could hear the *put-put* of a gasoline launch in the bay. A door creaked ahead of me and I felt the cool breath of the open air. We were outside and the smell of the fog was thick. I caught a glimpse of a pair of sidelights blurred by the mists ahead of us. So we stole together toward the waterside.

We had gone perhaps fifty feet, and the rising tide was not more than that far away when we heard them coming—two of them, and from different directions. The launch was gliding in close to the shore, bows on. A pistol flashed, and I was conscious of the sharpness of the report, its nearness to my ears; but the man who had fired it ran straight past me. And Valdez was ahead of me now, bent double, running for his life. It must have been the light of that revolver-shot which had shown him to them, for the pair of them paid no heed to me; and one of them fired again as they dived after him. I heard him splashing in the bay. I had a dim view of the pursuers, outlined against the night, and I rushed on to overtake Valdez.

Then one of them closed with me. I felt his fingers gripping for my throat, and I struck upward for his chin. The blow was lucky. It caught him fairly, and he went down like a log. I leaped over his form and I felt the water round my knees. The voice of Valdez came to my ears.

"To hell with him! Shove off, I tell you."

Another shot—this one from the boat. And if it had been I that those fellows wanted, they could have drilled me without a bit of trouble in that moment, for I was alone against the two of them. But they were wading out headlong, waist-deep and intent upon the launch, as I gripped the stern and drew myself on board.

A moment later we were out on the bay with the shore a hundred feet behind, speeding along. I was pulling myself together in the sternsheets, untangling myself from the man at the tiller, and realizing the solution of the thing that had been puzzling me for the last hour; a vague sense of resemblance that had been growing stronger upon me while I sat in that old house watching this man who called himself Pro-

fessor Valdez; an elusive knowledge which had been escaping me. I had overtaken it and seized upon it for a certainty in the instant of the second pistol-flash. For the light of the shot had shown me the face of the man who fired it; the dark face of the seaman whom I had seen that night on Bush Street flinging the knife at Rhana the Great. That so-called Hindoo seer who had fled up the hill from the three men of the sea was no other than this same Professor Valdez who was this night again in full flight from them!

CHAPTER III

IT was nearly an hour later when we pulled up alongside the schooner and went aboard. And all that time this fellow Valdez had said no word to me. I had nothing to say to him for that matter; I was remembering what I had heard him call out when I was fighting his would-be murderers and he was snug aboard the launch.

"To hell with him! Shove off, I tell you."

I do not know whether he thought I had caught his words or not, but from that time on, right to the end, there was hardly a moment when we were together but I was conscious of his watching me. We two were civil to each other all the while; it was like playing a game, where if you make a false move you lose; and, remembering that man in the hack with the knife-handle sticking out between his shoulder-blades, I was sure that it was not going to be healthy for me if I were the loser.

For the first two days as far as I was concerned there was no playing any game, however. For no sooner had we got outside the heads than I was deadly seasick. By my good fortune Professor Valdez was in as bad a fix as I—worse even. For when I was able to stagger out on deck, he was still lying in his stateroom, limp as a rag. I got my sea legs, as the sailors say, before he was on his feet. We were somewhere out in the Pacific and the weather was what the seafaring men call dirty, which just about expresses it: low gray clouds overhead and the great gray seas rushing by underneath. Now and again one of them boarded us and the water swept hissing over the deck; always there was the motion of the schooner and the everlasting noise of creaking timbers as if at any moment she were going to twist apart. She was, the captain told me, a former private yacht—

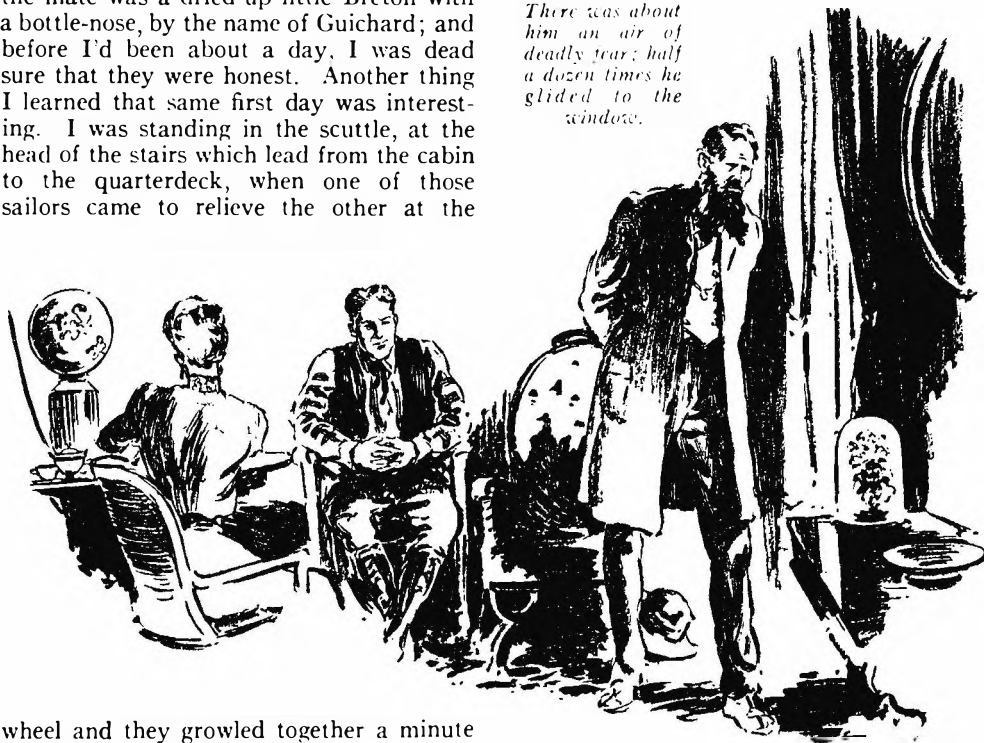
two-masted and fine lines; forward there were four men bunking in the forecabin; and there were four of us in the cabin: the captain, mate, Valdez and me.

The skipper's name was Olson, a blocky Swede who had spent most of his days on lumber-carriers up and down the west coast; the mate was a dried-up little Bréton with a bottle-nose, by the name of Guichard; and before I'd been about a day, I was dead sure that they were honest. Another thing I learned that same first day was interesting. I was standing in the scuttle, at the head of the stairs which lead from the cabin to the quarterdeck, when one of those sailors came to relieve the other at the

of the west coast of Lower California. And I learned we'd been blown off our course.

We'd left the lightship behind us several days when Professor Valdez showed up, slipping about the deck in his moccasins as quiet as a snake; shaky at first and about

There was about him an air of deadly fear; half a dozen times he glided to the window.



wheel and they growled together a minute or so as men do the world over, who work for wages. We were running before the wind at the time and their words came forward to me clearly enough.

The one who was leaving said: "Hell of a v'y'ge when none of the foremast hands knows where we're bound!" And the other answered, spitting tobacco-juice to leeward:

"Aye, and they give it out our passengers is going mining; but me, I seen her loaded, and I'll hand you over my wages when we come to port if you can find a dollar's worth of minin' tools or any other tools on board."

WELL, that, of course, wasn't any different than I'd expected, but it was not calculated to set a man's nerves at rest. As to the destination, I asked no questions and neither skipper nor mate offered any information; but I kept my eyes and ears open and my stateroom door ajar; and when they'd come into the cabin to talk things over, I saw them looking at a chart

the color of a dead fish round his black whiskers; but those cold black eyes of his were missing nothing. And within a couple of days more things began to happen.

The first of these was a bit of talk that came off down in the cabin. The wind had begun to die down and the schooner was taking it a little easier; her movements were a little less like those of a bucking horse than they'd been. I was lying in my bunk with my door open and I could see Professor Valdez sitting at the cabin table stroking those black whiskers of his with one hand when the captain came down and opened up a chart to prick off our last run for the last twenty-four hours.

"And where," says Valdez, "are we now, Captain?"

The skipper stuck his pencil stub at a point on the chart and says he:

"Which is just about three hundred miles north of where we ought to be, my friend."

And from the tone of his voice, I could see he didn't like Valdez a little bit. At his words the Professor let out a yell. I don't know whether I told you or not, but he had a thin high voice, and when he was excited it was like the screaming of a woman. But the language he was using was strong enough for any man.

"You've done me proper," he wound up. The skipper got to his feet and leaned across the table toward him, and I thought for a moment he was going to take him by the throat and shake him like a rat.

"You talk like that to me once more, my friend," he growled, "and I'll give you such an overhauling as you wont forget as long as you live! What do you mean, I've done you? D'ye think I make the wind? I take it as it comes, and I do the best I can." He started to blaze up again, but the Professor had got himself in hand.

"If you only knew how much time means to me, you'd understand," he says. But the skipper was still mad.

"Time!" he bellowed. "D'ye think this is a steamer, to sail into the teeth of a living gale? If you wanted to make time, why didn't ye take the *Curaçoa*? Ye'd not leave San Francisco till today and ye'd make Enseñada in four days. Then ye could charter a small boat and sail on down to—"

BUT that was as far as he got. Before he could say the name of our destination, Valdez stopped him. He looked like a cornered rat crouching there beside the cabin table, and after Olson had finished pricking off the day's run on the chart—

"You say the *Curaçoa* sails today?" he asked. And when the other nodded, he rose and took him by the arm. "All that I ask is for you to make the best time you can, Captain." With that Olson went out on deck and Valdez sat there staring at the table, looking very sick.

It was two nights later, and we were running down the coast again with a good stiff breeze behind us, and I'd turned in. My stateroom door was closed, and where I was lying in my bunk, I could hear the lapping of the water against the schooner's planks a few inches away from my head. Well, I was restless that night, and when I did drop off to sleep, I kept dreaming and waking, and dreaming again. And I don't know how long this had been going on when I was taken with a regular old-fashioned nightmare. I thought I was lying there on my back, and that Professor Val-

dez was bending over me, with his face close to mine, with those cold black eyes of his boring straight into me. I could feel his breath upon my cheek.

I was struggling to raise myself; I knew I was asleep. I struggled to cry out, and I could not make a sound; and finally with a tremendous effort, when his face was right over mine and his hand was stretching out, I managed to groan. That seemed to help things a bit: I made a louder outcry, and sat up with the sweat pouring down my face. And—I was not sure whether it was a part of the dream or what my waking senses brought me—I saw the door of my stateroom swinging shut.

WELL. I drew a deep breath and I was thankful I was awake; and I swore at myself for being such a fool as to dream such dreams as that. But the impression of reality hung on; and I did not want to go to sleep again for fear the horrid thing would come back upon me. So I lighted a cigarette and smoked it out.

While I was smoking the mate came down into the cabin and I heard him saying: "Who in hell capsized that inkpot?" which I did not think at all important until a few minutes later. I was ready to turn on my side and to go to sleep once more when I happened to thrust my hand under my pillow where I always kept my revolver. It was the only weapon I'd brought with me, one of those old "police positives" that so many officers used to carry in those days.

It was gone.

Now I was certain I'd put it there as usual. But to make doubly certain I got up and struck a light and looked at my shoulder holster where it hung while I was awake. It wasn't there.

I went out into the cabin. The mate was still swabbing up the spilled ink. And he was still using bad language. Evidently some one had been abroad without a light and done that damage—the same man who had taken my gun. I glanced at the Professor's door. It was shut. So, just for his benefit, for I was sure he'd be listening, I told the mate that his swearing had awakened me and passed him good-night. And when I went inside, I quietly locked my stateroom door. But that didn't bring back the gun. And from that time on, I went about my business more carefully than ever. But I was dealing with a crafty man; and, if I'd only known it, he was keeping just about one jump ahead

of me—which I was to learn with considerable risk to my own skin before the week was over.

CHAPTER IV

YOU'VE heard the old saying: "More good luck than good management." It was the case with me on that occasion, or I'd not be here now to tell the story. I was young then, you understand, with more muscle and less sense than I've got now. And a good deal of the sense came to me on this voyage; I learned a whole lot from Professor Valdez. The most impressive lesson came in Enseñada.

It was two or three days after the quarrel in the cabin when Olson announced the *Dora* was to make the port. It seems the big water-cask had broken loose from its moorings on deck during the stormy weather and had sprung a leak, and we'd just about enough left to carry us into the harbor. When he got that news Professor Valdez turned dead white; the two of them were sitting at the cabin table and I'd just come down from deck in time to listen in.

"Which means another day's delay," he was saying and his voice was nasty.

"All of that, as like as not," the skipper told him coolly, "but if you want to lie around down there near Magdalena Bay at a hundred in the shade with your tongue as big as your fist and as black as your hat, why, you can try it for yourself. Me, I have got no fancy for it."

So we made Enseñada, and when we dropped anchor half a mile or so out from the beach one morning, I made up my mind to buy a new revolver. But there wasn't any need to let the Professor in on that, and he was going ashore with the skipper; so I said I would prefer to stay aboard; and just before the yawl was lowered, I took Olson to one side down in the cabin and asked him if he would do the errand for me on the quiet. I said nothing about having lost the other gun and didn't mention Valdez—only asked him to keep his mouth shut; but he must have had an idea that something was wrong, and anyhow he didn't like my fellow-passenger any better than I did, and so he agreed without asking any questions. After he had left me and gone on deck, who should show up but Valdez himself. He'd been in his stateroom all the time. However, if he had overheard anything, he made no sign of

it; and a few minutes later I watched the two seamen rowing the yawl ashore with its pair of passengers.

That was long before noon and Captain Olson had said it might be nightfall before he came back aboard. Some time past the middle of the afternoon the yawl returned with the Professor, and he went down to his stateroom. When he'd gone, one of the oarsmen slipped up beside me—a rat-eyed fellow whom I'd noticed more than once before, because he was always slow about answering orders and forever getting the rough side of the skipper's tongue.

"Cap'n wants to see you ashore, sir," says he. So, when the boat went back, I was aboard; and when we landed on the beach, the sailor who had given me the message waited until his companion had gone—to get a drink, I suppose. Then, "This way, sir," he said, and I followed.

NOW Enseñada wasn't much of a town in those days; there had been some sort of a farming boom down there, and it had busted; but what there was of it was, for the most part, very neat compared to most Mexican villages—frame houses and American-style buildings. The place to which the seaman was leading me was off to one side, however—the regular native quarter which you'll find in any town near the boundary—adobe buildings and narrow alleys, and chocolate-colored men lounging in the doorways. It wasn't so long since I'd spent three years in the Philippines, and I had picked up a good deal of Spanish there; I was thinking it seemed good to hear the language again, when it occurred to me this was a queer neighborhood to be looking for our captain.

But I knew enough of Mexico to understand that the purchase of firearms isn't always as simple a matter down there as it is on our side; and I figured that perhaps this revolver which Olson had promised to buy was contraband. So I followed the rat-eyed seaman into a narrow alley at whose dead end he stopped before an adobe drinking shop. He pointed to the door and I went in, whereat he turned his back and vanished and I looked around for my man.

It was a little room, with low ceiling and mud-colored walls; and four men were seated about a table playing monte bank. Two Americans and two brown-skinned natives; and whose faces were the worst it would be hard to say. I hadn't a doubt in my mind that the pair of my countrymen

were what we used to call "line dodgers"—fellows who were wanted on our side and had found sanctuary down here. When you are handling thieves, you get to know their look; and these bore the stamp—all four of them. This I took in with my first glance around the room.

And while I was doing it, one of them slipped from his chair, closed the door and stood beside it. That did not look so good.

NO others in the place. No doubt about it: I'd been tricked. And as to who was at the bottom of the trick, I had no need to do much figuring. Three men at the table and one beside the door. And I was unarmed. A good half-mile from the decent part of town. And evening coming on. One of the Americans glanced up at me, a putty-faced fellow with the eyes of an opium smoker.

"You are looking for some one?" says he in Spanish.

By that time I was beginning to think quickly. And before he'd done asking the question I was asking myself why he hadn't put it in his own tongue. So I shook my head and told him that I did not understand the language, which was the first wise thing I had done that afternoon. He smiled and repeated it in English and I said I was looking for the captain of the schooner which was lying in the harbor.

"He'll be back in a minute," says he, and tossed his bet into the middle of the table. The dealer, who was a Mexican, slipped a card from the bottom of the deck, as they do in monte bank; and my putty-faced friend spoke once more in Spanish:

"Stay there beside the door." And in the same tone: "We'll finish the deal out before we do this little thing."

I should have felt my hair rising, but as a matter of fact I hadn't time for being frightened. I had to do a lot of figuring. The dealer was placing another card. I noticed there were only two or three left in his hand.

"Set down and take it easy," the putty-faced man said in English, and pointed to a chair. It was a heavy chair, homemade, thick seat and back. I nodded and stepped over to it; and they were placing their bets on the table for the last turn of the cards. I stood behind the chair, one hand resting upon its back. The fellow who had been doing the talking was speaking to his companions, as coolly as a farmer telling his hired man how to stick a pig.

"We will give him a drink. While he's taking it, José will seize him from behind and jerk back the head; Anastasio will then cut the throat. So! Good!" The last card dropped. He looked up at me as he scooped in the bet, which he had won.

"You will have a drink with us?" He poured one from a bottle and shoved the glass across the table to me.

I picked it up. And I had my mind fixed on just what I was to do. It is strange how steady a man can be while things are going on. My fingers did not tremble then. I was as cold as ice. And tingling all through.

I whirled, and flung the whisky into the eyes of the man who had slipped up behind me. I seized the heavy chair and leaped backward. I brought it down with all the force of my two arms upon the head of the man who had stepped up in front of me. And there was something in the sound of that crack which made me sure he would never cut another throat. But I thought of this afterward; no time for thinking now.

The other was on his feet, the one who had done the talking. I saw his hand sliding to his waistband. I let him have the chair as hard as I could hurl it, and I never waited to see him fall. I leaped for the fellow who had been standing at the door—the other American. He fired, and I could feel the heat of the burning powder—we were that close. The noise all but stunned me. I was half dazed when I struck him—head on, like a man making a tackle on a football field. We went down together, and I twisted myself on top. His head had struck a corner of the doorway, and he was out. I did not wait, but flung myself out of that room, and as I ran up the alley, I could hear the voices of men behind me.

LUCK was with me then, for I had no time to seek direction. I made a turn or two, and found myself out in the open with the beach on my left hand and the fresh salt smell in my nostrils—very sweet after that reek of powder-smoke that I had left.

Near by the spot where we had landed, there were some small-boats. A Mexican was baling out one of them. I showed him a five-dollar gold-piece and told him to shove off; and when we were riding the easy ground-swell which came into the bay, I bade him head for the schooner's lights. My face was bleeding from a nasty cut. Where I had gotten it I do not know—



"You talk like that to me once more," the skipper growled, "and I'll give you an overhauling you won't forget!"

whether it was from the knife of one of them, or from something I had struck when I went to the floor with the last man.

I noticed that the yawl was lying alongside the schooner when I went aboard. And when I started down the companion, I heard voices in the cabin. The skipper was there talking with Professor Valdez. Their faces were a study as they looked at me—Olson's puzzled and scowling, as if in that cut across my cheek he saw something which had increased already aroused suspicions. The Professor's—for just an instant startled, and in that same instant drawing back. As if he did not believe what he saw, and as if he wished it would not come true! The look was over him which always made my blood slow up when I got it—that deadly malevolence of one who is like a cornered snake. But in the passing of that instant his composure came back. He nodded to me as if nothing had happened.

"You seem to have gotten hurt," he said, and went straight past me up the stairs. When he had gone, the skipper handed me the revolver which he had bought—a good new weapon of the same caliber as the one which I had lost. And with it he laid down a box of cartridges.

"Anything wrong?" he asked. I told him I'd had a little trouble ashore, and I

knew that he knew I was covering up. But he asked me no more. Presently he went on deck. A few minutes later I heard his voice. He was swearing like a pirate.

It seemed one of the crew was missing. He'd slipped off within the last quarter of an hour in the yawl. They found the boat on the beach that evening. But the man had disappeared. It was the rat-eyed fellow who'd led me to the drinking shop.

CHAPTER V

TWO nights and days more we ran straight down the coast. And the Professor was a changed man. Something had happened in Enseñada besides that little affair of mine; I was dead sure of it. For his thoughts were not of me. He was as he had been that afternoon when I left the old-fashioned house on Fillmore Street with him—in deadly fear. And with the fear there had come to him a tight suspense; he was in those two days and nights as much in doubt of what lay ahead of him as I was. He walked the deck, back and forth and back and forth, as silent as a cat in his moccasins; he borrowed the skipper's glasses a dozen times a day to look over the ocean; and when a sail was sighted—as was the

case two or three times—he was at the elbow of the man who made the announcement asking all sorts of questions as to what manner of a ship it was. I might as well not have been aboard for all the attention he paid to me then.

So I had plenty of opportunity for speculation. The situation was sizing up much differently than I had expected when I set forth. That there was something down here—something of great value—was plain enough. And there was a strong likelihood that there were others after it. This seemed like a race, but what the stakes were was another matter. One thing had turned out to my satisfaction: the rest of the ship's company were honest men. This fellow Olson had it written all over him; and he had shown me evidence of his good intentions in the matter of the gun. I made up my mind to have a talk with him.

But a schooner is a small place for holding conversations unobserved and Valdez had sharp eyes. So I waited my chance; it did not come until the very last moment.

IT was well along in the morning when we came to the little bay where this affair reached so strange a climax that I would not believe it myself, were anyone else to tell me the story. Inland, a matter of only a mile or two, the range of mountains, which is in sight all the way down the sea coast, rose into the hot blue sky—bare desert mountains, ragged and savage. Between them and the bay there were sand dunes—white sand, white as snow; and you could see it drifting from their tops in the sea-wind. The beach was glaring white.

The bay was shaped almost exactly like a figure three. It really was two bays, separated by a point of rocks that jutted out between them—a high promontory on which the surf leaped fiercely with a dull roaring which was audible a mile or two away. We could see from the schooner's deck where two or three steep walled inlets penetrated its cliffs. And not a tree upon it—just rocks. Otherwise the shores of the two bays were smooth as a floor, clear to their outward ends, where the rocks were almost as steep as those of the point which I have described before. Here and there the dark teeth of a reef showed through the snowy smother of the breakers. There were some gulls, and that was all the sign of life, except for some drifted wreckage on the beaches—such wreckage as you can find on many shores along the west coast.

I say there was no other sign of life: we searched for some—at least the Professor did, and Olson helped him. We tacked back and forth, running in sometimes so close that the skipper was uneasy for fear of those reefs, and in that manner we passed the length of the bays three times. This fellow Valdez had his glasses to his eyes every moment; and he was not a pleasant sight to look upon, with his oily black beard, and his nostrils widened, and his cheeks dead white with excitement.

"You're sure there's no one?" I heard him ask at last; and Olson swore.

"No sign of boat or man, I tell you, so far as I can see," he answered.

VALDEZ laid down the glasses; he took a deep breath as if he was relieved.

"I'll go ashore," he announced; and as if he had just thought of me for the first time that day, which I believe might have been the case too, he turned to me.

"Well, Mr. Yard," says he, "we're here. And I suppose you want to see the property?" There was a sneer in the way he said it which made me want to knock him overboard, especially when I remembered what had come and gone between us; but I answered him quietly that I was here for that purpose. And as I spoke, I noticed Captain Olson, who was standing within earshot; his heavy features wore the look of a man who is trying hard to keep a poker face, hiding some strong emotion.

"I'll arrange for that," the Professor told me, "but it will have to be tomorrow. You don't mind staying aboard until then, I suppose?"

He was correct in part. The one thing which I did not intend doing was to go ashore with him. Not that I was afraid of him, now that I knew him and his methods. I felt confident I could take care of myself. But I had an idea of a means by which I might get more information than I would ever get in his company. So I told him to suit himself. And he turned away from me like a man who had something important on his mind and has got rid of an unwelcome intruder.

ALL this tacking back and forth and observations had taken time, and it was past the middle of the afternoon when they got the yawl over the side. I saw they had a few provisions and a keg of water; and when the bottle-nosed mate and the seaman who had taken the oars were rowing

toward the distant shore, with the Professor sitting in the stern, Olson stepped to my side.

"Well, Mr. Yard," says he, "what do you make of it?"

"He's going to stay all night?" I asked. The skipper nodded.

"And," he added, "if I hadn't seen to it, he'd not have taken a drop of water or provisions—he was that anxious to be gone."

I knew my moment for a talk had come, and I proceeded to take advantage of it.

"He didn't act to me as if he's been here before," says I.

"Him?" The skipper shook his head. "Well, no. I'd say not here, nor anywheres near here. Why did you think he had?"

"I didn't think it," I answered, "but he claimed he had." And then I made up my mind to put full confidence in him. So I told him the story of the mine with the wire gold and rotten quartz, and of my visit with the lawyer, and who I was.

"Now that ye've been fair with me, I'll be fair with you," Olson said. "This passenger of mine has offered me five hundred dollars, to be given me when he comes on board tomorrow noon, provided I see that you do not go ashore until then."

"You took him up?" I asked.

He grinned.

"I did," he said; "I thought 'twas best to lie to him, although I'm a poor hand at hiding the way I feel when I come to dealings with his breed."

I thanked him for that, and I asked him what he thought was in the wind. But he had no more idea than I did.

"What he was looking for, I do not know," he went on, "but this much I am sure of: he was afraid of finding something which he did not find; and there was something else which he wanted—something which he has not discovered. Yet he is sure that it is here. And for the rest, well you've got to get to work and learn it, I guess."

THE yawl was getting smaller every time it came into sight at the top of a swell; and it was heading for the middle of the northern one of the two beaches. In a few minutes more, just before it landed, it would be out of our sight, hidden by the rocky point which separated the pair of bays. It could not have been more to my liking. There was another boat on board.

"If you set me ashore while he's out of sight, it's all I want," I said.

Well, that was settled soon enough, and

before I went over the side to the small-boat, Olson had a final word with me.

"When I first talked with this land-shark, Mr. Yard," he said, "I set him down for a dangerous man. And everything I've seen of him during this voyage has made me surer of it. All I want to say to you now is, keep your eyes open and that revolver ready. And there's one more thing, come to think of it: if you want me to lend a hand, get down to the beach and wave your coat for a signal. I'll post a lookout in the crosstrees as long as it's daylight, and with sunup he'll be there again."

With that we shook hands and I let myself down by the man-ropes to the boat, and the two sailors rowed me ashore in the southern bay. They carried my handful of grub and little keg of water above the high-tide line and shoved off; and here I was, alone, to learn what I could—and to deal with Professor Valdez when the time came.

NOW, the point of vantage for these two half bays was the promontory which divided them; I headed for that at once. And, as I walked along the hard sand which the surf had beaten down above the low water line I heard the screaming of the seabirds, the dull booming of the breakers on the granite rocks ahead of me; I noticed that the wreckage here was thicker than it had seemed to be on the other beach. The farther I went, the more I saw of it; and when I came to the beginning of the point, here was a whole section off the side of some superstructure of a vessel, lying jammed among the rocks.

But the important thing, so far as I was concerned just now, was the whereabouts of Valdez. I paid but little attention to these objects on the shoreline until I had climbed to the summit of the promontory at its landward end. It was a mass of granite, broken and worn by water and weather; and I didn't have any difficulty in finding cover for myself while I was taking my observations—which was a good thing, for here was the Professor heading southward on the other beach toward this same point, less than two hundred yards away.

I watched him for a few moments. He was bending forward as a man does when he is walking through heavy sand. And it was plain to see that he knew nothing of these beaches, for he had not the good sense to take the hard footing below the high-tide line but was keeping to the looser ground, inland. He was striving as one

who is in desperate haste, and the long black frock coat was unbuttoned, flapping in the sea-breeze behind him. It would seem that this same point which I was occupying was his destination.

Well, there were plenty of hiding-places here among the rocks, and the sun was getting low in the western sky; it would not be so long before it was dark. I made up my mind that I could afford to stay here and play hide-and-seek with him, the while I spied upon him to learn what he was after down here—what was his purpose.

THE tide was going out, nearing extreme low water; here along the southern flank of the point low ridges of granite showed sticking from the sand all gleaming with moisture and, farther to the seaward, these ridges became higher, until at the very head of the point, it was all split up, with one long finger of this rock hooked down to the southward. The seaweed clung to it and I noticed heaps of splintered wreckage all about the beach beneath me. Then I saw something else.

Sheltered by the hook of the promontory from the sea, as if it had been seeking a quiet spot among the troubled waters for its death, the wreck of a vessel was lying, cradled about with rocks. She must have gotten off her course—perhaps it was in a fog, perhaps some mishap had driven her there—and she must have struck at extreme low tide, for, now that the ebb was near, the last reluctant swells were still lapping at her stern. A dreary sight: her upperworks were gone; she had been stripped by the waves clean to her decks; and you could see where some big swell had lifted her up and let her down again—broken her clean in two, so that the forward parts of her were almost level and the after portion leaned away. The masts were gone, and the funnel was lying awash in a narrow trough among the rocks, still hanging by a single stay to the hull from which it had once towered erect. It was plain enough why we had not discovered it from the ocean; the bend of the point where it hooked to the southward at its end, had hidden it from our eyes.

I looked around for the Professor. He was climbing the rocks at the landward end of the point, so near that I could have tossed a pebble on him. This niche where I was crouching was sheltered on three sides; but I could see that, keeping to his course, he was to pass before the opening,

within plain sight. And I had waited too long; there was no opportunity to seek another hiding-place without a greater danger of discovery than I would run by keeping silent here. So I remained, only taking the time to place my hand on the butt of the revolver before I froze to immobility.

The slope by which he was mounting was easier than that by which I had come from the other side. But it was steep enough to keep a man breathing heavily. He was bending forward with an indescribable fierceness in the thrust of his head from his shoulders—that same cold, snaky intentness which I had noticed so many times before. I could see his chest rising and falling and it seemed to me as if I could hear the panting of his breath, but that was my imagination, for the uproar of the water among the rocks drowned all smaller sounds completely. So I stood in my narrow crevice and he passed within twenty feet of me. As he reached the summit something caught his attention off there ahead and he did not perceive me.

In the moment of his passing, the moment he made his discovery, I saw a look pass over his face—a sudden joy. And then he vanished among the boulders, moving swiftly toward the promontory's seaward point. I waited for some moments before I followed.

Here at the crest of the ridge the granite rose before me to a tall hump, beyond whose summit it sloped downward again. I climbed slowly, slipping from one bit of cover to another, waiting at times for some moments before the next brief advance. So I gained the top and thrust my head above the edge of a rough old boulder all plastered with some red fungus.

Directly under me they seemed to be, they were so close by—two men, swaying and twisting, locked in a deadly struggle.

CHAPTER VI

I WAS perhaps twenty feet above those fighters, looking straight down upon them. Where they were struggling, at the foot of the little peak which I had mounted, there was a bit of level, and beyond that, the brink of a cliff. I could see over its edge—a drop of more than fifty feet—into a narrow finger of the sea which almost cut the point in two. Its boiling waters chafed against the walls of granite, filling the air with a deep booming which did not seem

loud itself, but overwhelmed all other sounds, so that the pair who were trampling at the brink above it seemed to be moving in utter silence.

One of them was Valdez, and as the up-turned face of the other swung toward me, I recognized the swarthy features of the seaman who had flung the knife at Rhana the Great that night on the Bush Street hill, the same man whom the flash of the revolver had revealed to me in the darkness when the Professor and I were

the white teeth. The two swayed and swerved together; and now the thing came to an end, almost as abruptly as it had burst upon my sight.

The dark-skinned man was facing me; the back of Valdez was toward me.



I flung the whisky in the eyes of one man, seized the chair and brought it down on the man in front of me.

boarding the launch by the old house at the bay's edge.

It occurred to me then, as I caught that glimpse of him, that there was something strange in the look of him; a wildness in his eyes that was not born of ferocity, a crazed unseeing glare that was beyond common desperation. And even in the swiftly changing views that followed, I thought I perceived a tightness in the skin; it was as if there were no flesh beneath it and the man's lips were as black as coal. But those things were seen in the passing of the struggle, to the accompaniment of their shifting postures—they came back to me more plainly afterward when I thought it over. One fact was clear, almost from the beginning: the man was weak and growing weaker.

And I saw the face of Valdez, all twisted with ugly lines, the lips drawn back from

There was a swift rush to the brink—and after that a little pause. Their bodies tightened while you could fairly hear the back of that dark seaman cracking as it bent slowly. Then his arms relaxed and Valdez leaped away. The sailor-man vanished over the edge of the cliff.

The Professor stepped forward and stood there for some moments looking down into the swirling waters. What he saw was hidden from me; but as he turned, he was smiling. His wide-rimmed hat was gone. His beard was streaming, and the skirts of the black frock coat fluttered in the sea wind. And then I became conscious of another figure.

He had appeared from among the rocks above the head of the inlet, and he was staggering like a drunken man; his lips were black and parted, and no weapon was in his hand. So he came weaving on, and

Valdez drew his revolver, but the other did not seem to see it. He was within ten feet now. Valdez fired, and he fell sprawling over a granite rock.

The thing had come so unexpectedly, it was so unbelievable a deed, that it was done before I realized it—before I could raise a hand to stop it. The dead man lay there quite still, and the Professor passed him with hardly more than a look. Beyond the inner end of the steep-walled fjord, there was a spot where the slope was easier toward the beach. I saw him go down and cross the shingle where the seaweed clung to wet boulders. He was heading for the wreck—going without a backward look—as if the murder which he had just done were nothing, as if the stranded hull which lay out there, broken by the swells, were the only thing that mattered to him! I saw him climbing to the deck; then he vanished through an open hatchway, and I turned my mind to that seaman who had gone over the cliff's edge.

THERE he was below me in the boiling water, clinging to a granite rock, and looking upward. As his eyes met mine, it seemed to me that they were begging me. Probably that was my imagination, but I was on fire now with eagerness to act. I did not wait to take a second look. There was a good fifty feet of cliff between us, and I had to spend more precious time than I fancied seeking a way down. At last I scrambled to the foot and found myself knee-deep in water, which rose about my waist as I was taking the first step, then receded again to the ground-swell. He was less than twenty yards away, and I was a good swimmer, but I knew it was going to be a hard job if I ever got him ashore.

I stopped long enough to get rid of my shoes and coat, and I struck out for him; but before I had taken three strokes, I realized that the tide had turned and it was coming in. The rock to which he was clinging was growing smaller with the rush of every roller. How long it took, I do not know. It was a **fight** for every foot, with the tumult of surf, and always the danger of being banged against one of the boulders which were sticking up on all sides. But at last I made it, and I got him just as he was slipping from his hold.

He was unconscious when I seized him; I think he may have been in that condition for some minutes before, hanging on either by luck or by sheer dogged determination

which had remained after he had swooned. But his condition was to my advantage now. I did not have to fight him to save him as one has to do so often with drowning men; he was as a log of wood in my hands; and I let the current carry us inshore toward the inlet's head. When I finally dragged myself out upon the barnacle-covered rocks, I was almost as badly off as he was for strength; my hands and arms were bleeding in a dozen places.

WELL, I laid him down, and looked about. I suppose I had been ten or fifteen minutes or so about this business, although it seemed like hours. The sun was just setting, and there was a red light on the waters. The cliffs were enclosed; the inlet opened like a frame to show the wreck lying right in that bloody path made by the reflection of the sky's crimson glow.

And as I looked upon the wreck, a figure appeared. It was Professor Valdez coming from the hatchway through which he had vanished a quarter of an hour before. It may have been my fancy, for the deck where he was standing was all of fifty yards away from me, but it seemed to me that in his bowed head I read the message of a great disappointment.

So he stood looking down at the deck; his back was bent. His open coat streamed behind him in the wind. His beard lay close against his chest. And in a few moments he raised his head; his whole body straightened, as if hope came back to him, with a new determination.

In that moment, while he stiffened, before he had time to make another movement, I saw how a new element had entered into this affair—now the sea was about to take a hand and end things in its own way. For as I have already told you, the tide had turned. And the wreck was lying at extreme low-water mark. With the turning of the tide, the sea had risen. A mighty swell boarded the hulk and swept it from stern to bow. The figure of Valdez was hidden from my sight. The roller passed, and in the recession of the waters I saw him once more. He was clinging to a portion of the shattered superstructure, lying prone upon the planks. Now he struggled to his feet.

His legs were outspread. He braced himself to take a step. And another breaker swooped down upon him. He was again obliterated. And when the swell receded, he did not appear. I had seen the last of

the man who had once called himself Rhana the Great, whom I had known in his closing days as Professor Valdez.

CHAPTER VII

I HEARD a sound and looked about. The dark-skinned man whom I had dragged ashore was trying to rise. He fell back, and his lips were moving. I stepped to his side. That utterance was a ghastly thing to hear; a hoarse dry croaking, and the tongue was swollen, protruding from his mouth, a black and shapeless thing. This man who had just been so near to drowning was begging for a drop of water!

I helped him farther up among the rocks beyond the reach of the incoming tide and hurried to the place where I had left my own supplies; and when I got back to him the dusk was coming on. It was too late to signal the schooner now. And, in his hard case, to move him farther was impossible. His skin was drawn as tight as sundried rawhide over his bones; his lips were gashed with cracks; but no blood was flowing from these cuts; it had dried up in his veins for lack of drink.

I built a fire and, a little at a time—so little at first that it seemed like cruelty to me to deny him more—I doled him out his sups of water. I was at it for hours before he sank off into a kind of stupid sleep; but the hoarse noise of his breathing, which was like nothing I had ever heard before, was growing less horrible. The hours went by; midnight had come and passed, and the morning was approaching before he was able to speak as other men. The first intelligible thing he said was to ask me who I was; when I told him, he lay in silence for some moments, as if he were striving to understand it. At last he nodded.

"That's good," he said. "The luck is breaking right now." He had been badly hurt by his fall; as nearly as I could make out, there were three broken ribs, and his side was torn by the rocks. So he was in great pain at times, and I had much to do to make him comfortable. It was coming on toward dawn, and we had spoken more freely to one another—I, in particular, for I had told him without attempt at hiding any facts, the story of how I came to be here. And, when I had described to him the death of the man who called himself Professor Valdez, he had said quietly:

"Thank God!"

It was a heartfelt utterance; this man was never a religious fellow, but when he spoke those two words, he was devout; he meant them just as he said them, no doubt of that. He was a man of big frame; and when his flesh would come back, he would be a man of good muscle, well knit and active, somewhere in early middle age, getting gray about the temples, with curly hair and a dash of some dark race in his blood. In the growing light of the new morning he gave me the tale which I had been waiting for. I will tell it to you, in his own words, as nearly as I can recall:

ME, I am a Cape Verder, from the Islands; Louis Gomez is my name, and when I was only a boy I went with a whaler as so many of my people used to do. That is how I came to the port of San Francisco years ago and got to be a boat-steerer on the old *John & Winthrop*. It was aboard of her that I fell in with the two mates of mine—the ones you've seen dead by that man's doings.

Martin,—the one who died in San Francisco,—he'd been a seal-hunter for years out of that port, sailing with Alex MacLain and others, as good a man as ever walked; and Manuel, who lies dead up there, you say, among the rocks—he was an Azores man, a whaleman like myself. We'd been together two cruises in Bering and the Arctic, and we'd blown our money in each other's company when we came back to San Francisco. And on our last cruise, when the old *John & Winthrop* was smashing through the ice in Bering in the early summer, we had the news of Anvil Creek, which brought the great camp of Nome. Well, whaling is a hard life and there is little money; and we knew that we were far ahead of the rush that was going to come. A man could not get a better chance to make his stake than that.

So when the *John & Winthrop* was lying offshore, a matter of fifty miles from the land in Norton Sound, we deserted, and made our way across the ice to the coast. Easy enough to tell, but hard in the doing; and we were taking our own chances. For the ice might open any minute, and we might find ourselves afloat with the breaking of the pack. Once we were surrounded by the lanes of water, and though it was near to being the death of us, it saved us from those who were after us from the ship. That night the wind changed and the floe closed again and we got to land.



Valdez struggled to his feet. Another breaker swooped down upon him—and he did not reappear.

No need to make a long story longer by the little things. We starved and froze and nigh to killed ourselves with the hard traveling; but at last we got to the cape and found Anvil Creek back in the tundra where the discovery had been made. There'd been a winter rush downriver from Dawson, and the best claims were gone, but we got a good thing—a proposition to work on a lay in some of the richer ground. We dug like slaves in the slush and mud; and we had got down to bedrock. We had took out a good hundred thousand dollars, and the dirt was on the dump, ready to go through the sluice, when the law, which men make such a great talk about, dropped down upon us.

MAYBE you've heard of the big suit that came that summer, over the ownership of the first claims, and how the work on those claims was stopped and the whole business was put into the hands of the officers. None of our business, that lawsuit, but the sharks that were handling those things saw a good chance for getting rich, and they managed to pull nearly all the claims on the Creek into the dispute by some sort of thieving lawyers' papers. Then

the Government, if you'll remember, sent out men to take charge of the properties—a receivership is what they called it. Our rich pay dirt was tied up, the same as if we'd been in the quarrel and the receiver's men were running it through the sluices.

So here we were, as poor as ever after all our work, and that is how we ran afoul of this man you call Professor Valdez. A short-card man, one of the breed that's known as tinhorns, and gaunted like a she-wolf with pups, he was that hard put to for a living, for they had barred him from all the gambling-houses. But he had some friends, and they had other friends more powerful; he got a job with the receiver, as a shotgun guard over the sluice-boxes. The name we knew him by was Slade.

Us three were working for wages when he came to us one night—bending our backs for other men to raise the money to pay our lawyers, who were doing nothing! And ready to give the whole thing up. Well, he had a proposition for us. They cleaned up once a day. By stealing from the boxes between clean-ups, getting a little at a time, he could lay by a bunch of dust and carry it out for us. There were men to be paid—mates of his at the diggings—



and the time was short; there was the danger of discovery. But if we could figure a way to smuggle the dust out of the country, why, he could get us some fifty thousand dollars or so, and the idea would be, share and share alike, the four of us. That getting the dust away from Nome was the ticklish part of it—the reason why he had come to us; for the officials were watching everyone; they didn't figure on letting an ounce slip through their fingers.

I WILL not be spinning out my yarn too long, sir; and anyhow the words come hard to me, with this dryness of my mouth and tongue. But I schemed out a way. Vessels were forever short of crews departing that first summer; and we three—Martin, Manuel and me—could ship for Seattle before the mast. No cargoes went south: the holds were empty; and we could smuggle the gold below and hide it for the voyage. As for Slade, he could take passage in the cabin. And when we got to the States, we'd watch our chance and fetch the dust ashore.

That's what we tried. The boat was the old *Yukon*, a steam schooner; and I was the one that hid the dust. Over two hundred pounds of it, in four canvas bags. I stowed it in the forward hold, away up in the eyes of her, where there was no danger of any-

body running afoul of it. It had taken some time, all of this, and it was late in the season when we went out; one of the last ships to reach Dutch Harbor before the pack closed in behind for the winter and shut Nome off from the world. So here we were, us three at work with the other members of the crew, and this black-haired sallow-faced short-card man, in his stateroom as a passenger. And 'twas a good thing we'd been so careful in hiding the dust, for there was a sharp eye kept on all hands who were leaving by that boat.

Well, there wasn't anything happened during the passage to Seattle; and one fine day we saw the streets of the city on the hillsides beside Elliot Bay; and we thought our troubles were over. About twelve thousand five hundred dollars apiece; only a part of what really belonged to us, but better than nothing—enough to make a seafaring man happy. We were not crying over what we'd lost. I tell you port looked good that day; and the idea of easy times ahead of us kept us happy.

NOW, the agreement was that we were to meet in a waterfront saloon down near the foot of Jesler way, and that we were to go from there to the ship to fetch the dust. And each one of us knew where I'd hidden it. All this had been settled before we left

Nome, you see, and so when the gangplank went out the passengers walked to the dock and that evening us three went ashore to meet Slade at the time we'd named.

A queer thing happened just as we were about to go into that saloon. I had a feeling come over me; it was suspicious-like, as if I knew there was danger ahead of me inside that door; and I'd slowed up. And when my two mates stepped in, I looked over the swinging doors. Standing at the bar pointing his finger at them, was Slade; and a pair of big policemen started toward them. I got that in one look, and I knew what was in the wind. He had given us the double cross. I turned and ran, and I was around the corner before I was missed.

I went straight back to the dock. For I was sure that this fellow had that gold in mind and was going to waste no time about getting his hands on it. And I hadn't long to wait. Inside of an hour, here he came sliding along soft-footed as a cat, and I was on his back. It was my idea to kill him—I'll own up to that. And I was in a good way of doing it—I'd knocked him down and was putting the boots to him good and proper. But my bad luck was with me, and it happened that a policeman was coming by on his rounds. So I went to jail and Slade went to the hospital. And it was ten days before us three were out—Manuel and Martin with no charge against them, because Slade, who'd named them as having robbed him, had not turned up; and me because my victim, as they called him, had taken French leave of the hospital a night or two before and wasn't on hand to prosecute me. And the *Yukon*, lumber-laden, was on the high seas bound for Vladivostok!

THAT was three years ago, sir. And for those years us three hung together. We hung together following that vessel, half-way around the world; and sometimes it seemed as if we were just about to catch up with her. But we never did. When a man is working his way as a seaman, he has to bide his chances, as the saying goes; and our chances never did come out right. So at last we found ourselves again in San Francisco; and that was when Martin, the old sealer, clapped his eyes on the man that called himself Rhana the Great.

How he came to find him I do not know, or what passed between them. All that I do know is when we read of the body that was found in that hack, we went to the morgue and recognized it for our shipmate.

And after that we had no trouble locating the man who'd killed him, and would have squared that then and there if he had not jumped through his front window carrying half the sash away with him, just as we were about to lay our hands on him. As it was, I got him with my knife while he ran up the street; and I'll bet, if you could find that body out there in the surf, you'd see the scar between his shoulder-blades.

The months they went on by, and we were working ashore, the two of us, when Manuel brought me a clipping from the waterfront page of a daily paper. It said that the steam schooner *Yukon* had piled up on the coast of Lower California, bound to San Francisco, laden with nitrates from Chili. It gave the latitude and longitude and went on to say that the vessel was a complete wreck and breaking to pieces when the crew took leave of her.

So we got hold of a chart, and we examined it for the spot, and we found this little bay where me and you are at this very minute; and we made up our minds to have another try for our gold. Now, a seafaring man is never a saving soul, which is most likely because he never lays his hands on much of anything to put by, you see. But we had a little money between the two of us; counting the wages that was coming to us, it amounted to about seventy-five dollars. The *Curaçoa* had just sailed for the Mexican west coast ports, and it would be another month before she left San Francisco again. We put in that month longshoring, and we scraped a few more dollars together. The idea was—take steerage for Enseñada, buy a whaleboat there if we could get our hands on one, and sail for the wreck.

And while we were counting the days before the next sailing, I got a notion. I told it to Manuel. Says I:

"This fellow Slade, if he is on this here coast, will read that there news item about the old *Yukon*, and he will be in the race for the dust."

Well, we knew there was only the one way—the *Curaçoa* and a small boat from Enseñada—unless a man chartered a vessei for himself. And that last didn't seem likely. But just the same we kept our eyes open, and we took a look around; and we heard of the schooner *Dora* in Oakland Creek being outfitted for a voyage to Lower California on some sort of a mining proposition, which, men said, sounded like a swindling scheme. And I says to Manuel:

"This smells like Slade."

SO we took the ferry and we had a look at the *Dora* where she was laying in Oakland Creek. She'd just been overhauled, and she was taking on supplies. And while we were loafing around the old dock at the foot of First Street, who should come ashore from the schooner but Slade, he and his new black whiskers and that long-tailed coat and all; and perhaps we'd not have knowed him if we hadn't been on the watch for him; but as it was we did. And while we were looking at him, he got into a hack that was waiting for him by the dock. Just when he was about to close the door, he happened to let his eyes go to where us two were standing. We saw him turn white under those black whiskers. A second later the hack was swinging off with the horses on the dead jump.

That was the beginning of a game of hide-and-seek, sir; and it took us several more days before we picked him again, and this time we followed him to the house by the bay, where you ran afoul of us that night. It was our idea to see that he did not make the v'y'ge, and if it had not been for you, we'd have done it too.

There isn't much more to tell you. We had a chance. One bit of bad weather and the *Curaçoa* would pass the schooner. So we took passage, and when the sea began to kick up before a sou'west wind, we knew we were going to win our race, which we did. It was three days ago when we landed here, and coming on evening. And with the turn of the tide on the next morning, we got aboard the wreck.

There was still a lot of nitrate in the hold, and we could not get near the place where I had stowed our nuggets. We started at the nasty job of clearing it away. Hot weather, and it was close down there under the deck; only an hour or so to work during the turn of the tide. We tore into it, and the sea rolled off of us. Time came to knock off or else get drowned. We started for our camp where we'd beached our whaleboat, and had unshipped her mast so as she could not be sighted. We were in a hurry, for we were thirsty. That is to say, we thought we were thirsty; we found out later what thirst really did mean.

We had a keg of water in the whaleboat, and I was the first to get to it. It had rolled on its side and—I think it was the hot weather—something had made the wooden bung pop out. There wasn't a panikin of water left.

Well, sir, we talked it over. We knew

what laid ahead of us. But we swore we would stick. Come low tide, we went to work again. It would have been hard enough to lay around; it was the work that dried us up. When the swells begun to board the wreck and we had to leave it, we were nigh to dead. But we were in sight of that hiding-place.

I COULD go on, sir, and tell you about that night, and how our heads went back on us sometimes; and how we would tell each other to stick. And how the morning come. And we dragged ourself across this pint to sweat again in that close hold. There was the gold—four sacks, just as I'd left it. We packed it to the whaleboat and dumped it aboard. By that time my eyes were playing me queer tricks; the rocks seemed to be moving; and things close by would disappear as if they were not there. My tongue was getting like a piece of sun-dried rawhide. I heard Manuel croaking like a frog. He was p'inting seaward—and there was that cursed schooner.

Sail and be overhauled—or stay here and die! That was the question. But there was the chance this fellow Slade would come ashore alone to hunt the gold; knowing him as we did, it seemed most likely. And, if he did, why we could lay for him. And, when we killed him, then would be the time to show ourselves. If we could only stand it without going crazy. We said we would try.

That was the reason things turned out the way they did, sir. You see, when Slade came to where we was waiting for him, we was not exactly in our right minds, as they say. A long day and a hot sun and all of that suffering behind us. Me, I was seeing things. The sea, it was like melted brass; the mountains seemed to dance before my eyes. And, as for Manuel, he was out of his head, scooping up handfuls of pebbles, saying they was water. . . . That's all there is to tell. You know the rest.

CHAPTER VIII

I'LL not pretend he told it all as I have in the one recital. As a matter of fact, there were many things he added, answering my questions, during the run back to San Francisco. But that was the story in its entirety. And, when he had finished it—which was a slow affair too, for there were many pauses to moisten his reluctant

tongue with gulps of water—I signaled to the schooner.

We found the gold—four discolored canvas sacks, pleasantly heavy when you lifted them—lying between the thwarts of the whaleboat; and the empty keg, with its staves beginning to draw apart under the fierceness of the sun. And what is more to the point, we got this grizzled Louis Gomez on board the *Dora* in fairly good shape. In spite of his broken ribs and his torn side and his horrible ordeal of thirst, the man began to mend from the first day. He belonged to that breed who either get well or die, and waste no time about it.

THERE was a curious thing took place that morning—it was Captain Olson's manner of receiving my tidings. When I'd announced to him, in the privacy of the cabin, that Valdez was dead, he raised his hand and checked me.

"When we get ashore in San Francisco, I'll listen to that," says he, "but if I hear it now, it'll be my duty to log it. And maybe it would be better not to set it down." Which was wise, to my way of thinking, and we let the matter rest for the time being. And during the days of our homeward run, I got to liking Gomez. If I'd been in his place, I'd be proud to know I'd done as well as he had. That was the way it struck me.

How it was going to strike Judge Garretson was another question. Law is law, and lawyers are lawyers.

Well, we settled this on the day when we came to port. I sent for him and he came down to the schooner, which was lying off Meigg's wharf; and we had our talk together in the cabin, with Gomez lying in my stateroom, and the door closed between. When I'd finished, he sat there with his chin cupped in his hand.

"Remarkable fellow, that scoundrel that called himself Valdez," says he. "What do you think he'd done if he had found the gold without interruption?"

"Well," I told him, "I've thought that over a good deal and talked it over with Gomez. If I'd not been along, it would have been simple enough for him. But with me there,—and if he didn't succeed in getting rid of me,—I've come to the conclusion he'd most likely have cached the nuggets, taking maybe enough to pay his expenses; and he'd have gone back on board with some story about not being able

to find the ledge. And at the first port we touched, he'd slip ashore. Then he could go back and lift his plant. Anyhow, I'm sure of one thing: he'd have probably got away with it."

"I believe you're right," he said, and took up his hat as if he was about to leave. So then I spoke of Gomez and the gold.

"None of my business," he answered shortly. "And I'll confess I'd rather I hadn't known anything about it." I told him that Gomez didn't look at it in that way; he'd mentioned the matter to me that morning; it was his idea that Miss Kingston had lost a bunch of money and she had her own share of the nuggets coming to her. Judge Garretson smiled.

"What she has spent she'll never miss," he answered. "And she has no legal claim on any of that dust. As a matter of fact, I'd hesitate to say just who does have the best claim. How about yourself? Did he offer you any?"

I said that Gomez had wanted to do the handsome thing by me; but the rules of the agency were strict in such matters, if I'd wanted to accept his offer.

"So," he remarked as he was about to go, "I suppose he'll take it and drink himself to death."

Now, there was something like that in my own mind, and I acknowledged that I'd been puzzling over it, that I'd like his advice.

"A banker is the man you want to talk to," he replied and I could see that he was right. So it was a banker whom I sought out; and to make a long story short, between him and me Gomez didn't get a chance to make a fool of himself after the usual fashion of seafaring men on shore. In fact, during the years to come, he hung onto enough of the dust to go into business himself and his place became quite a famous resort for sailors.

I'VE left Miss Kingston for the last. On the afternoon of that first day in port I went to call on her; I sat there in her old-fashioned front room, with the mahogany furniture and the Chinese rugs, and I told her the tale, just as it happened. And as I looked at her fragile pink-and-white face during my narrative,—seeing how eagerly she was drinking in all that wild action in which she was a sort of silent partner.—I saw that she, for one, had gotten her money's worth out of the affair!

THE END.

REAL EXPERIENCES



Eight Days

Buried alive for over a week in a zinc-mine, Mr. Porter survives to tell you of his experience.

By W. R. Porter

I HAVE worked in mines and tunnels a good share of my life and have had some narrow escapes from death, one of which was most unnerving.

I was working in a zinc mine out West for one of the largest producers of zinc in the world. This mine also had what they called sand iron in it, deposits of loose, dry stuff in large pockets, that would run just like sand; hence the name "sand iron."

It was my first day in the mine and I felt very queer when we went in. I guess one thing that made me suspicious was that nearly all of the men were foreigners; in the part of the mine where I was put to work, there was only one miner I could talk with, and he was a Mexican. The walker boss must have noticed that zinc-mining was new to me, for he described to me just how to remove the ore in the easiest and quickest manner, and cautioned me about the sand iron, which might start leaking out of the roof for no apparent reason whatever, but would soon fill up the passageway and block us off from getting out of the mine.

Everything went well until about two o'clock, when I heard such a shout that I dropped my tools and ran down the tunnel toward where I heard the sounds. Here were the Mexican and three of the other foreigners all talking and jabbering like scared children, and it wasn't until I got real close that I found out the trouble. The mine was blocked with this treacherous sand iron, at least that part of the mine was. I ran back and got my shovel and motioned to the others to do as I did, and we dug into that pile of sand iron. But it just kept pouring in. It must have poured down the stope also, as the spot where it had us blocked was close to the stope.

When I realized this I knew it was no use for us to try to dig through. I sat down to decide just what chances we had of being rescued, and after I reasoned it out, there sure wasn't much hope, for we had come down a shaft to the fourth level, then back in a drift something like an eighth of a mile, then climbed up a stope probably three hundred feet. We were now in a drift about three hundred feet from

the stope. So the closest drift of any was approximately three hundred feet below us, and if to one side or the other, was farther away. Furthermore it was solid rock with a chance of a pocket of sand iron. We were penned up in a room four and a half feet wide, six and a half feet high, and two hundred and eighty or ninety feet long.

WE each had about a quart of water in the water-container of our dinner pails, and three of us had a sandwich apiece left from lunch. We all had carbide lamps, and by using only one at a time we could have a light for a long time. By the time I had all this figured out, the rest of the miners must have come to the conclusion they were lost for good, for they sure made a lot of racket and went through some awful actions. They prayed to the Lord to save them, and tore at their hair and clothing.

I tried to calm them down and told them we would be rescued right away. I put my ear against the rock wall and listened, pretending I already heard them at work rescuing us. Then I induced them to put out all lights but one and made signs for them to leave the dinner-pails alone. They seemed to understand and became more calm for a couple of hours. But after listening every few minutes for sounds of rescue work and failing to hear any by that time, some of them broke out again with their cries and calls for help, as if there were some one who might hear them.

I still remember the Mexican sitting with his head bowed, muttering in Spanish. I understood enough of it to know that he was worrying about his wife and their seven children. It was pitiful to think of the loved ones that were on the outside wondering if we were still alive and if there was any hope of rescuing us in time.

After waiting for what seemed like ages to us but which in reality was about five hours, we heard a dull report or explosion which made us all jump as if we were shot. We looked at each other, and two of the foreigners threw up their hands in despair, evidently thinking the whole mine had blown up or caved in. But I took the sound as a sort of message that they were trying to rescue us, and the other miners acted as if they thought so too, so the two soon calmed down to await results. A little later we heard two more smaller explosions and felt more cheerful. I took one of the sandwiches and cut it in five pieces, and we ate it and each took a sup of water.

I took a turn up and down our jail to see that no more sand iron had run in to make our air space smaller. Then I lay down and tried to sleep a little; but it was an awful night for all of us. Every once in a while I was awakened by one or all of the miners crying out for help, or one of them would come to me and want me to listen and see if I could hear the rescue work. We did hear several more shots, but they were so far away that I was afraid it was the regular work going on in some other part of the mine. When I did sleep, I had most terrifying dreams; once I remember I dreamed I had fallen in a well on a deserted place and knew no one would ever come along and find me. I woke up with a cold sweat standing out all over me.

Everything was in darkness, for the last of the carbide had been used up. I sat still for a while, thinking. I remembered many times when I had a job that I hated, and wished I had one of them now! At last I rolled a cigarette. When I lit it, the other miners all jumped up, some in fright and some thinking they were rescued. One of them threw his arms around my neck and kissed me before he realized his mistake. I tried to find out what time it was, but I was the only one that carried a watch, and I had let mine run down.

Along about what I thought was ten o'clock in the morning we divided another sandwich and drank more water. Then a couple of hours later I heard a peculiar sound; at first I couldn't recognize it. Then it came to me all at once, they were drilling through to us. I lit another match and motioned to the others to listen. They were all relieved to hear that drill.

FOR four days we listened—at least that is what I estimated it at, to that drill, hearing it coming closer all the time, until it finally came through the side wall about two feet above the level of the floor and fifty feet from the back end of the drift.

Well sir, the Mexican was the first one that found the drill. You see, we had to feel around in the dark, as we were out of matches and everything else by that time. The Mexican shook and shook the drill, and then it got away from him and we could hear it as they started to pull it back. After a while we heard something like a shout, so I cupped my hands over the drill-hole and yelled five times. Pretty soon I heard an answer, and believe me we were one tickled bunch of miners.

In about half an hour we heard a rattling sound in the drill-hole. It proved to be a small pipe pushed through, with a cloth tied over the end. After pulling this cloth off, water started to run out. You may guess that water tasted about the best of any we ever had! It only ran a short time; then after a bit some one must have hit the pipe at the other end with a hammer. Thinking it was a signal, I was just about to tap the pipe at our end, when I felt something warm and thick coming out of it. I tasted it, and to my delight it was soup they were pumping to us—the only kind of nourishment they could send.

It took them until the eighth day of our confinement to blast a hole through to let us out. I found out afterward that we

had only been there three days when the drill came through. The company had sent for an expert driller, and after looking at the map of the mine, he had started drilling just twenty hours after the cave-in happened. The company had first tried to move out the sand iron that had slid down the stope, but after putting out two hundred and fifty cars of it, decided to cut a new entrance through to us. . . .

It was a touching scene when those emotional foreigners got back to their families at the top, who had been waiting so long that they had almost given up hope. I slipped away from the crowd, thankful that no loved ones had awaited word of me through that week and a day of awful uncertainty.



Bank Robbers

By D. Brown

They went hunting down in the Ozarks—and were captured as bandits by a sheriff's posse.

LIFE was getting monotonous. "Let's take a hunting trip through the Ozarks," Jim Edwards suggested. And so we did. But if we'd known what was in store for us—

The old open car which I was driving lurched from side to side in the mud of the mountain road. Freezing rain was falling; and the ice coating the headlights and the windshield made driving almost impossible in the darkness. Both of us were miserably cold, though we were wrapped in our hunting-clothes.

With many groans and throbs the old car climbed to the top of a small rise, and

when we started downward, I let it coast. I was unfamiliar with the road and didn't know that we were at the top of one of the longest and most dangerous mountain trails in the Ozarks.

The car's speed increased considerably in spite of the deep mud which clung to the tires. I tried the foot-brake, but it refused to hold. Forgetting that the emergency was worn, I jerked at it excitedly while the car spun dizzily around a curve.

"Throw it in low," Jim yelled.

I did so, and the rear wheels skidded into the mud; the car swayed sidewise and seemed to drop into a ditch.

The motor died when we stopped; the headlights blinked out. Jim rummaged in his pack for his flashlight. We climbed out into the sticky mud.

We were hopelessly stuck. Our rear wheels were sunk to the axles in mud. The blackness outside the beam of the flashlight was so thick we could almost feel it. The freezing rain was falling harder.

With the aid of the light we discovered we were on the edge of a sharp precipice. Had we skidded to the left instead of the right, we would have fallen fifty feet into a rocky foaming stream.

"We can't stay here all night," I said, shivering. "We'd freeze to death."

"Let's pack our outfits on our backs and go on to the first house," Jim answered.

WE were soon ready to go, and with the mud sucking at our heavy boots, we started down the slippery road. As we walked on through the sleet and darkness, a feeling almost of fear began to creep over me.

We were high in the Ozarks, perhaps ten or fifteen miles from other humans. A rain that froze as it fell was covering our caps and coats in a sheet of ice. "You're not in such a bad shape," I told myself. "Other people have been in far worse trouble than you are and have pulled through." But a feeling of terror seemed to have taken possession of me, and though I whistled and joked with Jim as we stumbled on, I could not shake it off.

And so I uttered an involuntary cry when a horse and rider appeared suddenly in front of us in the road. The man was carrying a rifle and an oil lantern. The rifle was pointed at us.

"Go easy," the horseman ordered.

At the same moment another horse darted out from the side of the road and entered the circle of light. It was carrying a saddle but was riderless.

"Stick 'em up high!" some one barked from behind us. "And throw that flashlight on the ground."

Jim dropped his flashlight. I was not too frightened to turn my head. A man was approaching us slowly. In the dim light from the lantern his form seemed tremendous; the light glinted on the barrel of his rifle.

"You two walk on up the road," the man ordered. "Follow the horse."

There was nothing to do but walk. We followed the man ahead, who kept himself

seated sidewise in his saddle with gun ready.

The man behind us had picked up Jim's flashlight and was leading the other horse.

We had not gone far when I saw a light through the trees. Then the man on the horse turned off the road up a narrow crooked pathway, and we approached a small house.

Suddenly a door was thrown open; a tall figure loomed against the light.

"We got 'em, Jed," said the man ahead.

"Bring 'em in," gruffly replied the man in the house.

My heart was thumping terribly as I entered the door with Jim. Jed was also armed with a rifle. He had a gray beard of some length; he seemed to be very old; he had an ugly crooked nose; and his eyes gleamed yellow out of deep sockets.

An oil lamp lit up the room. It flickered and threw weird shadows against the bare walls.

"Air they the right ones, Bob?" the old man asked.

"I don't know," replied the one called Bob. "Charley's going to search 'em when he gets the horses hitched."

Jim and I stood in the middle of the room, the water dripping from our clothes and making a puddle on the floor. A red-hot sheet-iron stove in the corner of the room looked inviting, and I took a step toward it.

"Halt, you," Jed growled, "or I'll put a bullet into you." Trembling from cold and fear, I stopped dead still.

Then the man named Charley came in with Jim's flashlight in his hand.

"Hurry up and search 'em, Charley," Jed said. "I want to get 'em tied up."

While Bob and Jed kept us covered with their guns, Charley removed our camping bags from our backs and unstrapped them. He dumped everything out on the floor in a pile, while the other two watched with eager eyes.

When everything had been taken from the bags, Charley ordered us to take off our hunting coats. We did this; he searched the inside pockets carefully. Then he searched our other pockets, looked in my pocketbook, and counted the twenty-five dollars and some few cents that I had.

"This is all the money they have on 'em," declared Charley. To my surprise he put it back in my pocket.

"Well, I'll be dawgoned!" the old man

said. "They must've hid it somewheres along the road."

"I reckon so," Charley replied.

"We'd better tie 'em up," said Bob.

"**S**AY, what's this all about?" Jim demanded. I wondered how he'd managed to remain silent for so long a time.

"I reckon you know," Jed snapped.

Charley went over to the stove and brought back some ropes and started tying my arms. "Think this'll be all right, Hopper?" he asked, looking over at the man he had been calling Bob.

"Wait a minute," Hopper said. "I reckon the young fellows will want to sleep. You don't have but one bed, do you, Jed?"

"They can't have it," cried Jed in his shrill voice. "They can sleep in the loft."

"How'll they get up there when I get 'em tied?" asked Charlie.

"Tie 'em after they climb up."

"That be all right, Hopper?" Charley asked.

"Yeah, I suppose so. We can't just throw 'em in the corner. You and Jed go up with the lamp. I'll keep 'em covered while they climb up."

The only way to the loft of the little house was by way of a crude ladder. My fingers trembled so as I climbed that once or twice I almost fell.

We were tied up quickly by Charley, who seemed to be an expert at that sort of thing. He helped us remove our heavy boots and rolled us in a floor bed between mattresses that had been stuffed with corn-shucks. They smelled musty and old, but were warm. If I had not been so puzzled and a bit frightened over the mysterious events of the past half-hour, I probably would have slept.

"I can't figure it all out," Jim whispered.

"Neither can I. Do you think we can get out of these ropes?"

We struggled silently. After a time we gave it up.

"That Charley sure knows his business about tying people up," Jim grunted.

I TRIED to sleep. It was useless. The sleet rattled on the shingle roof. The three men below sat and talked in low voices. I could hear nothing that was said.

There was a crack in the floor of the loft near the edge of the mattress. I shifted over it and peeped through. The three sat hunched over the little stove, their rifles in their laps.

I became drowsy and closed my eyes, but never lost consciousness. Suddenly I heard horses' hoofs beating on the rock path that led from the road to the house. Somebody called out: "Hopper! Hopper!"

I was wide awake. I felt feverish and was suddenly aware of the pain caused by the tight ropes that bound me.

Somebody was knocking at the door. I peered through the crack. Jed was at the door, opening it.

"Is Deputy Sheriff Hopper here?" the one outside demanded.

Hopper jumped up and strode to the door. "Here I am."

"The bank robbers have been caught!" said the man loudly. "They took the Leadville road."

"Well, I'll be dawgoned!" said Jed. "Then we aint got 'em?"

Deputy Sheriff Hopper laughed. "We picked up a couple of young fellows; we were certain they were the robbers. They are tied up in the loft."

Still laughing, Hopper and Charley and the new arrival climbed the stairs, untied us and apologized. As it was only a few minutes past one o'clock, we asked Jed's permission to go to bed again, and I—well, I really did some sleeping.

THE sun shining through the cracks in the wall of the loft awoke me early in the morning. I heard a noise below.

I peered through the hole in the floor.

Jed was starting up the ladder. And he had a long, ugly knife in his mouth.

He came up slowly, slowly, as if trying to make the least noise possible. I stared in terror, imagining all sorts of things. Possibly he intended to murder us, rob us.

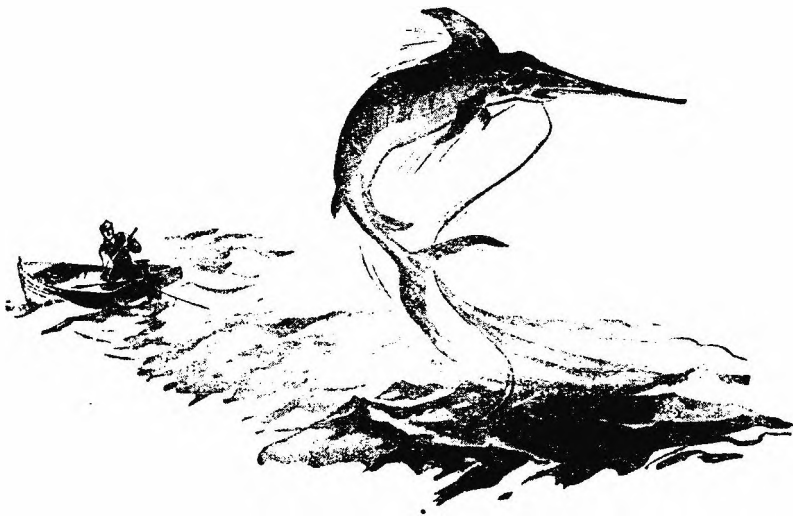
He stopped once, listening. I started to punch Jim, but was afraid he'd do something he should not. The old man climbed upward, passed out of my line of vision.

His head appeared at the edge of the loft floor. I stared at the gleaming knife in his mouth.

Catlike, he lifted himself to the top and crept closer to our bed. I was at the point of making a quick jump at his knees when he looked up suddenly.

He reached up with his long knife and cut from a rafter a large smoked ham. There were several others hanging beside it. Then he turned and tiptoed back to the ladder.

The fried ham that the old man served us for breakfast was very good indeed.



Yanked about for hours in a small boat by a monster fish—a day not soon to be forgotten.

Fighting a Swordfish

By **Lorin Hall**

HAVE you ever hooked a big swordfish from a small boat? If so, you know the danger connected with such a fight that must necessarily follow, but if you haven't, take a tip from me and don't tackle a broadbill unless you are in a larger boat than mine. It was during my holiday that I decided to make the trip from Terminal Island to Avalon Bay in a twelve-foot boat with an outboard motor for power. A foolish thing to attempt!

Raymond S. Spears, the novelist, loaned me his outboard for the trip. With fifteen gallons of gas, oil and fresh water, also a dozen sandwiches, I left the mainland early one September morning en route to Catalina Island about twenty-two miles westward. I went alone. I took a fishing outfit and a thirty-two caliber short-barreled rifle. It was a foggy morning; I had no compass or other means to mark the course, and depended entirely on my wits.

I planned on reaching Catalina before the afternoon trades sprang up, because my boat was hardly fit for a rough sea. My safety, I was sure, depended upon my reaching Avalon by noon, or by two P. M. at the latest. But something happened that upset all my plans.

About eight A.M. I ran into a great school of fish. The water was alive with dark, swift-moving forms. This was the great school still talked about in Southern California. I believe I discovered the fish first,

but during the next two months, four hundred fishing boats followed the great horde south to Cape San Lucas off the coast of Lower California and took thousands of tons of fish. It was estimated the school occupied a space in the sea sixty miles wide and one hundred miles long.

As my small boat drifted over the vast school, I assembled my outfit and hooked seventeen fish that weighed about thirty-five pounds each. It was great sport. During the excitement I forgot that I had started out for Catalina Island.

I drifted along with the tide; the fog rolled along in heavy banks often so thick I couldn't see fifty feet in any direction; then the sun would break through, and I was able to see the hordes of fish crashing down the coast.

I had no idea which way I was drifting. By ten A.M., when the fog cleared, I discovered I was too far south. Catalina I could dimly see to the northward, and it was a long, long way. However, I set my course for what I figured was Avalon Bay, and chugged along as fast as the little putt-putt was able to take me.

ABOUT half-past eleven I noticed that there were no more fish visible. I had passed over the edge of the school. The breeze began to rise, and the water curled up into waves that made the little boat rock and toss, but I kept on going full

speed. Of course, any sort of a breeze could do me a lot of damage. I had hoped to cross the Channel by noon, but now I knew it would take me most of the day.

Among the fish I kept were two Spanish mackerel. These fish made good bait for the broadbill. Of course I never dreamed of catching a swordfish. I had never seen one except in the outdoor magazines. Imagine my surprise, when looking ahead of the boat a short distance, I saw a great fin cutting the water. Something told me that fin belonged to a swordfish. My blood chilled in my veins at the thought of what the monster could do to my frail boat. And then, the craziest idea in the world gripped me! "Why don't you try him out with a bait?" The audacity of such a suggestion—but why not?

I had a good rod, a fine reel and about seven hundred feet of twenty-nine-thread line. I also had a roll of bronze wire for leaders and swivels to connect both hook and line. All the while I visualized my chances, the big fish cavorted on the surface and seemed to be having great sport playing about my boat. I worked fast—made a twelve-foot leader, connected a big steel hook I had used from the pier when trying for sharks, and finally secured one of the mackerel on the hook for bait.

I waited my chances, steering the boat with one hand and holding my pole with the other. The swordfish made a great circle, playfully came directly in my path, and when he was within casting distance, I let go the bait, sending it up and out so it fell with a splash directly in front of the monster.

It is well known that swordfish seldom take bait; but when they do—look out!

MY bait had scarcely hit the water when a great sworded head shot into the sunlight. How magnificent and how vicious! The great V-shaped mouth opened as the monster body twisted round. I was appalled by the size of him. I almost forgot I was trying to hook him. Suddenly I felt a terrific yank on the line. Immediately I released the drags and let the line play out freely. I had read somewhere this was the thing to do. After a few seconds—I struck!

I can never muster words to tell you what happened next; but listen, anyway. The water parted the instant the hook set in the monster's throat, and a great, glistening body shot into the air. How my

heart beat when I beheld his actual size! He looked like a young whale. The great sword, the thick tapering body, the length and breadth of him! And here I was fast to such a monster as this! I braced myself as best I could to withstand that first terrific rush. He turned toward the open sea, came up in another leap, stood straight up in the water with three-quarters of his body showing, and tried to vomit the hook. He shook his head so forcibly that the pole trembled like an electric vibrator. Then he crashed over and headed through the water as swift as fish ever travel, and my line went singing off the reel so fast it actually smoked!

ALL the stories of deep-sea fishing I had read flashed into my mind. For the moment I forgot the dangers, though I was surrounded with possible disaster.

There I was, on the open sea in a twelve-foot boat, fifteen miles from land, fast to a swordfish twice as heavy as my boat, motor and duffle and me in the bargain—and Mister, I was fast!

My little boat, the drags on the reel and the leather thumb-brake, were no hindrance whatever to this gamester's rush out to the unknown watery horizon. I held on with all my wits and strength. I was crazed with a longing to land the great fish. But in the face of it all, something kept saying to me: "Cut the line and let him go!" But I didn't obey. I just sat there like a man in a trance and let the powerful broadbill tow me wherever he wanted to. His speed, pulling me along behind him, was incredible. The spray doused me aplenty and I had to bail water whenever I could spare my right hand. My pole, a deep-sea hickory rod, was curved over from the strain. We circled; we twisted back; we shot ahead and we backtracked. My boat was jerked sidewise, endwise, almost swamping time and again. Mile after mile, hour after hour, the fight went on. . . .

After some three or four hours of this strength-sapping ordeal the swordfish faked a collapse. I regained most of my line and was ready with the carbine to finish him. There he was, wallowing on the surface, his big head above water and his eyes bulging. How excited I was! This seemed the finish. I had but a few yards more line to retrieve. Surely the fish was done for! But brother, what a great surprise awaited me!

Fighting a Swordfish

Just as I changed position in my boat and tried to get my rifle into action, the monster shot into the air, went over sideways and came for me like a torpedo. Believe me or not, that sworded head just missed the boat by a few inches. If that great sword had struck the sides of the boat, I'd now be down in Davy Jones' locker. I had figured the fight over—but it was just starting!

Away we went again, all my line tearing off the reel, as the monster set his course down the coast toward San Diego.

The breeze was now blowing strong and water kept coming over the sides. I had to bail with one hand and hold the pole with the other. It was a marvel how my boat ever stayed afloat, but it did. It was nearly sundown, too. Was I doomed for an all-night battle? How long could this great fish keep up the pace? I didn't know.

About dusk I sighted a fishing boat heading north. They came on and on toward me, but would they see my little boat bobbing through the waves? Maybe not. But I had hopes. With one hand I waved my cap—I shouted. But I was dizzy and couldn't see straight. I realized that if the broadbill wasn't done for, I was.

The boys in the fishing boat saw me. They veered their course and ran up and shouted to me:

"Hold on a little longer," a voice boomed across the water. "We'll circle and finish that baby for you."

I heard the words, but I don't know to this day what happened next. I guess I fainted, exhausted, for the fight had been going on for better than six hours.

NEXT day, however, over at Terminal Island, the boys came for me to go down to the pier and see the monster I had hooked. I couldn't believe the truth for a long time, but there was my hook still in its throat; my pole and line was there too. I tried to smile and show the boys I felt pretty good about it all. "You were done for when we come along," one of the boys said. "We gaffed this baby just in time to save you. Your boat was half full of water, and you were down and out."

A pair of scales were handy, and the boys trucked the monster to them and weighed him. He pulled down 492 pounds eighteen hours after he was out of the water.

If you think a swordfish cannot thrill you as never before, just you hook one from a small rowboat!

There's Always a Mistake

By

O. C. Siedle

I HAD been busy in my private office and was just about ready to go to lunch when the door flew open, and Todd, our chief salesman, burst into the room.

"One of our large diamond rings has been stolen!" he cried.

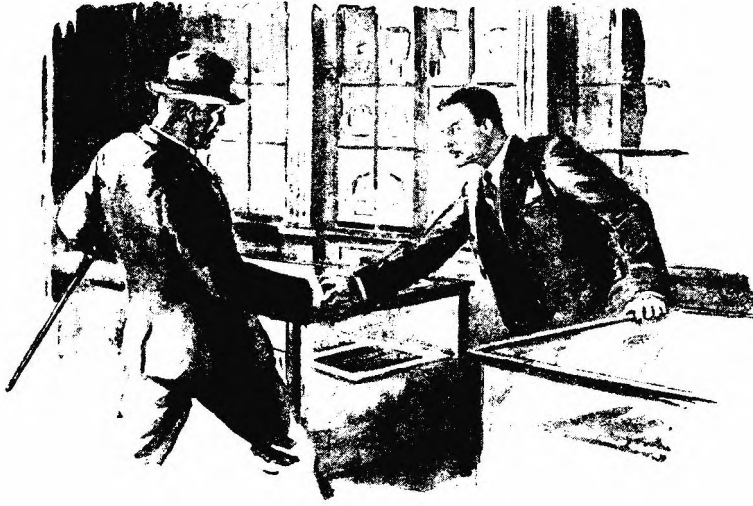
The man was greatly excited—and I was too, for that matter. The jewelry business was having a bad year; so a considerable loss just now was not to be hailed as an unalloyed joy. However, I finally got the story from Todd.

The day before, he had shown diamond rings to a well-dressed man of apparent refinement. He seemed much pleased with a seven-hundred-dollar ring and promised to return the next day and make the purchase. Sure enough, he had come in about half an hour ago, but as the finger-size of the ring required alteration, he was to call for it tomorrow. Since the man was a stranger to him, Todd had requested a small deposit as an evidence of good faith. The stranger willingly handed over fifty dollars and gave his name as John W. Ainsworth. Seemingly, everything had been very satisfactory.

However, as Todd reached for the tray to replace it in the showcase, he noticed that one of the rings appeared unfamiliar, and on examining it, he immediately saw that it was not of our stock. Evidently, a fine ring had been stolen and this strange one put in its place.

Todd could not believe that his very satisfactory customer was the thief; nevertheless, under our rules, he could not permit him to leave the store until I had been notified. This had been explained to Mr. Ainsworth, who, though at first he objected to being under suspicion, had finally yielded with a good grace.

Todd had quietly told one of the clerks



A diamond was cleverly stolen from this jeweler—but the detective put on the case was clever too.

to stand by the door and had come back to me.

"What sort of ring did the rascal leave us?" I asked Todd.

"A very good-looking one," he answered. "Worth, I should say, about five hundred dollars."

"Well, tell Simpson to check up the diamond-ring stock to find out what's missing and bring this Ainsworth in here to me," I directed.

PRESENTLY Todd ushered in a prosperous-looking man, aged about fifty, I should judge. As soon as I saw him, I had to agree with Todd—the man certainly had none of the ear-marks of a crook. Still, one never knew. But it's rather a serious matter to accuse anyone wrongly. Some one else may have done this thing earlier in the day. No doubt Todd had been interested in showing this man the ring he had formerly looked at, paying little attention to the others, so it was quite possible that the substitute ring was in the tray when he withdrew it from the show-case to show to Ainsworth. All things considered, it was good policy to go slow with accusations.

"Mr. Ainsworth," I began, "this is a very distressing occurrence, and probably means a large loss to us. Now, I want you to understand that it is not my intention to insult or embarrass you in any way. But at the same time we can hardly be expected to treat a matter of this kind lightly. I will say frankly, that it seems ridiculous to involve a man like you in this mess, but I'm hoping you will view our position fairly."

Ainsworth's face showed much relief.

"Well," he said, "I did feel rather indig-

nant at first—naturally so, of course. But I can see your side of this thing quite easily. So I will tell you a little about myself. I am an entire stranger here, and as I wanted to purchase a ring for my wife, whose birthday is tomorrow, I asked Mr. Bell, the clerk at my hotel, to direct me to a reliable jeweler. He told me about your house, saying that anything I purchased here could be depended upon. That's how I happened in here. However, I'm not satisfied to leave your store until you're convinced that I've had nothing to do with your loss. There's only one way to settle that beyond a doubt. If I've taken your ring, it must be now on my person. I'm willing, both for your sake and mine, to be searched immediately."

This suggestion struck me as more than fair and my opinion of him went up several points. The upshot of it was, Todd and I certainly gave him a thorough search. Ainsworth obligingly removed most of his clothing, but we didn't find the ring.

Naturally, I made profuse apologies.

JUST then, Simpson came into the office to report that a large, square-cut diamond ring was missing. Its value was thirty-five hundred dollars—the most valuable ring in the tray!

Ainsworth was ready to leave and as I saw him out at the street door, he said: "I'll be in later in the day. Perhaps you'll know more about this affair then. And I'll not go back on that purchase I made."

That was mighty decent of him, I thought.

Hurrying back to the office, I had Todd call up police headquarters to ask them to send in Detective Foster at once. I liked

that young man—we had had him on a case of ours, several months ago, and he had shown himself very efficient.

FOSTER breezed in within fifteen minutes. "Well,"—he grinned broadly,— "you can't keep out of trouble, eh?"

"This is nothing to be good-humored about," I replied testily. Then Todd and I gave him the detailed story. When I showed him the ring the thief had left with us, Foster exclaimed in surprise: "Gee, this crook was some artist! Usually they substitute a phony ring, but this is a fine one. He lifted this from some other jeweler, left it with you, and took a much more valuable one. Going up by degrees. Some idea! And he's got a price tag on it, too."

"Yes," said Todd, "and it's just like the ones we use."

"That bird certainly knows his game. Say, Mr. Todd, did you notice anything unusual about Ainsworth?"

"Not a thing; I considered him a cultured gentleman, although he did chew gum constantly."

"He wasn't chewing when I met him," I volunteered.

"Probably swallowed the wad during the excitement," laughed Foster. "Anyhow you didn't find the ring on him. That puts him out of the picture. There might be a gang working the town with this racket. These birds may figure you haven't discovered your loss, and try you again."

"Heaven forbid!" I exclaimed. "This has been quite enough."

"Well, put me on your floor as a salesman. That'll give me a chance to see what's going on here," suggested Foster. Then he phoned to headquarters, instructing them to keep a look-out at other stores.

Soon Foster was on the floor, to all appearance a salesman to the manner born. I noticed him standing around the diamond counter and keeping an eye on customers.

At about four-thirty, I heard a commotion in the front part of the store and immediately hurried forward.

There was Ainsworth at the diamond counter. Beside him was Foster. He had a strong grip on Ainsworth's right arm and was slowly forcing it up over the show-case. "Give that ring to Mr. Todd!" he barked, and as he gave Ainsworth's wrist a twist, a ring fell on the show-case.

Todd, who was standing behind the counter, pounced upon the ring and then, with a bewildered look at Foster, cried out:

"Why, this isn't our ring—it's the substitute!"

"Yes, I know; don't get excited," Foster rebuked, and withdrawing his hand from his pocket, he produced the missing ring. "Here's yours," he chuckled.

Ainsworth, all his assurance gone, was leaning weakly against the counter.

"But, Foster," I asked, "how in the world did you manage this?"

"Well," began Foster, "this bird had it all fixed. He came in yesterday, got the lay of the place, noticed the kind of price-tags you used and comes back this morning all primed. He lifts your ring and puts one in its place. If Mr. Todd hadn't spotted that substitute, this guy would have walked out with your ring. But as it was, it made it up to him to get your ring off his person. He was all prepared for a break like that. He takes the chewing-gum out of his mouth and uses it to fasten your ring under the show-case. It's easily done. Your show-case is just fine for this trick. Then he makes you search him and gets your confidence. That makes it easy to come back later to lift the ring."

"Good Lord!" I interrupted.

"Back in the office, when Mr. Todd mentioned this bird's chewing-gum habit and you said he wasn't chewing when you saw him, I got wise," Foster went on. "It was better for me to let you have the impression that Ainsworth was out of it. Several hours ago, I found your ring under the case and put it in my pocket. But there had to be a ring for this bird to lift, so I stuck his ring in the same place. No one saw me do it. Shows how easy it is. Then I waited for my man to show up. He did. I saw him put his hand under the case and I grabbed him."

DURING this explanation, Ainsworth had maintained an indifferent silence. But as Foster finished his tale, he evidently realized how badly a carefully laid plan had gone amiss.

"I thought," said he, "that it simply couldn't go wrong; yet I must have made some mistake."

"Chewing gum isn't so healthy for you," said Foster.

"Ah, yes," murmured Ainsworth, "there's always a mistake. Sometimes it gets you."

"You said it," observed Foster. "I think they'll want your picture for the rogues' gallery, if they haven't it already. Come on, let's go."



A soldier of fortune sets out to explore unknown South America and gets more than he bargained for.

Too Much Adventure

By **L. V. Cummings**

IN July, 1921, I left New Orleans by ship for Barranquilla, Colombia. From there I went up the Rio Magdalena, by boat and rail, then by boat again to Girardot, the river port of Bogota. A week later I left Bogota with three small pack-mules southward bound.

After about two hundred and fifty miles were passed, I turned east and working my way through the high-piled masses of the Cordilleras, passed out of civilization. Eventually, when the moon had waxed and waned twice, I got down into the foot-hills.

I came to a river which, flowing to the northeast, led into the Rio Guaviere which in turn flowed east to the Orinoco River. But before I arrived at the latter many months later, a lot of things happened.

When I reached this river—which, so far as I can determine, has no name—I floated my folding canoe, put my equipment in it and was off. My equipment consisted only of a silk tent, a light cooking outfit, some rice and salt, a few articles for trading with the natives, a rifle, pistol and ammunition.

AFTER some weeks I came to a few huts on the river-bank. At my approach the natives fled. I landed, collected wood

and built a fire. That afternoon I had shot a small jungle pig, which I now cut up. Taking a few pounds for myself, I carried the rest over to one of the four grass-thatched sheds, and put it down. Perhaps ten minutes later, two brown men in loin-cloths stepped from the bush in response to my gestures and hesitatingly approached. At last, convinced that I was peaceable, others came out. When I passed out a couple of fish-hooks to the men, their joy was complete.

That evening, as night fell, we sat by my fire and tried to talk. They knew no Spanish, so we talked by signs. As near as I could understand I was the first white man they had seen. They asked me where I was going, and I tried to show that I was going on, with the river. They looked at each other and burst into excited speech among themselves. Finally the men tried to make me understand, speaking slowly and carefully, and much pantomime. Eventually, I grasped that farther down, where the river was great, there lived more natives; that they were very bad fighters—cannibals and took heads.

In the morning, however, I went on. Days later, the river passed into a huge swamp and divided into several channels.

Frequently I would see a channel and follow it among the tall reeds which banked ten feet high over my head, only to run into a blind alley and have to back out again. I finally worked out of the maze to the open river. Early one afternoon, after days of paddling, I saw a faint track leading up from the bank. I paddled to it and beached my canoe. Picking up my rifle and pistol—I never went anywhere without them—I followed the track. Two hundred yards farther the path went around a curve. Seventy-five yards away was a high stockade and beyond rose four great maloccas, or tribal houses, nearly fifty feet high.

JUST as this caught my eye, a shrill wail rose. I flung myself sideways and a four-foot arrow passed through the space I'd just occupied. Behind and to my right, an Indian was fitting another arrow to his bow. I snapped out my pistol, and the impact of the .45 knocked him backward. From the stockade gate burst six or eight men. I fired twice at them, but missed. They scattered, and thinking to take a short cut to the canoe, I dived into the jungle. I went a dozen steps, struck an impenetrable barrier of vines, and rushed back into the path. A few jumps farther on I saw an opening; I leaped into it and came into a tiny glade. A thin sliver of wood trailing a wisp of tree-cotton flickered past—a poison dart from a blow-gun.

I fired again at another Indian. He dodged behind a tree. I turned to run. Another bobbed up, and fell as I fired. I ran toward him and he tried to raise his blowpipe. But I shot again at ten feet and he collapsed. I ran, came to the path and swerved across. As I did so, a long arrow clicked against the bushy branches.

My last three shots went wild.

From the river there came triumphant yells. Jamming the pistol in its holster, I fled to the river and saw three natives at the canoe trying to bring it out on shore. With the rifle I fired at one. He collapsed, but tried to crawl away. I snapped a hasty shot at one of the others as they dived into the bush. With the third shot I killed the crawling man.

I rushed to the canoe, pushed it off and dived head-foremost into it. There was a swish and a slight splash as an arrow passed. I sat up and pumped bullets at the jungle wall until my rifle was empty. At about one hundred yards a single arrow arched from the bush, but splashed harm-

lessly. Then I grabbed the paddle and dug deep into the water.

For an hour I continued to paddle. Then as a creek came in from the left I turned up into it a short distance, beached the canoe and returned to the river-bank where I settled in a bush so I could have a clear view. For a time I sat still. Then around a bend swept a great canoe, jammed with men. I should say there were eighteen or twenty. At about five hundred yards I opened fire, and the man in the stern pitched overboard. Shrill yells went up. I fired again. Another man stood up and collapsed into the water. Several were now erect in the canoe. At the next shot another went down, falling in the boat. The fourth shot seemed to miss, but the fifth dropped another. He sagged over the gunwale, arms trailing in the water. The boat was now making swiftly for the shore. I ran back to my canoe, jumped in and paddled hastily off down the river. After that I lived a peaceful life for some time.

THE river had many rapids and I had shot them all successfully so far, so I grew overconfident of my ability as a navigator—and this proved to be my undoing.

Late one morning there loomed ahead a broken range of hills, through which the river passed. I heard the roar of rapids but they didn't sound dangerous. On coming into the upper they did not look very bad, so I swung into the channel.

My canoe rose on a smooth green arc over a huge stone and flattened out. A black wall rose ahead and I whisked to the right. A few yards on, the water rose in a bank against a gigantic rock and turned again to the left. I swept around the corner. Then the water arced again over a stone and broke abruptly against another a few feet ahead. This looked like the finish, so I reached for the rifle and cartridge-belt and got them just as the canoe crashed into the stone. I flung myself to the left and the water, roaring terrifically, seized me. The downward rush from the rock hurled me to the bottom and abruptly tossed me out again. I came into the sunlight, gasped for air and went under. As I went down one hand touched bottom, the other went into the air. Bracing myself against the rush of the water I stood up, and waded to the shore a few yards distant, still carrying the rifle and cartridges, to which I had held instinctively. Staggering out, I sat down in the shade of a stone.

Presently I arose, took out my handkerchief and wrung it dry, placing it on a stone. Then, following the rapids, I walked downstream, but the only article I could find was my silk tent, which had caught on a log jammed in the rocks.

Going back to get the handkerchief, I tore it in pieces and carefully dried my rifle inside and out, then stripped off my wet clothes and placed them also to dry on the stones, while I took stock. In my belt were one hundred cartridges and my machete. Incidentally, a machete is a sort of glorified butcher-knife which hangs at the belt and is used both as a tool and weapon. In my pocket I had a knife and a waterproof case of matches. Luckily, I'd been wearing a light khaki coat for protection against the sun, and I had trousers, shirt, socks and shoes, the latter much worn. And here I was lost in the interior of South America, with the only other people murderous savages!

When my clothes were dry, I put them on, folded and threw the tent over my shoulder, wrapped my coat turbanwise around my head and set off. I tried to walk in the jungle, but the insects and dense undergrowth drove me out into the blazing heat of the sandy, stony river-bed.

LIFE now became a real problem—first, to secure enough food; second, to make any progress; third, to avoid sunstroke or sickness from the myriads of bloodthirsty tropical insects, and to avoid snakes in the day and jaguars or crocodiles at night. Lack of other food drove me once to kill and eat a small crocodile. I cannot recommend crocodile meat as a food!

I went on. Sometimes I would dig turtle eggs and roast them in hot coals; sometimes I was lucky enough to spear a fish with a sharpened cane pole, or knock over a bird or goose with a stone. After several trials I acquired the knack of making fire with a fire bow, rotating a sharpened hard stick. I killed a monkey and used the skin to make a bag which I converted to a pack and used to carry turtle eggs and meat which I had dried. Roots and fruit I had in small quantity and often in the swampy pools I found waterlilies and rushes with edible tuberous roots. These I boiled by lining a hole with banana or other large leaves and filling it with water into which I dropped red-hot stones. But

(Continued on following page)



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(Continued from previous page)

my health began to suffer from the terrific heat and the insufficient food.

When I got farther down the river I found four huts near the bank. I crouched in the bush and remained hidden until near dark. I carefully retreated, cut a long pole and with it returned to my post. Night fell, but I waited until all the noises had died away; then when I saw the faint glow of the rising moon, I crept along the river-bank. There drawn up to the sands were two dugout canoes, one a very large one, the second about fifteen feet long. I cut the bark ropes and pushed the largest off into the current. It floated away. Then I pushed off the smaller one, got in and drifted clear.

Poling myself along, I pushed down the river for days at a time. Naturally my progress was much faster, but by now I had lost much weight, and tired easily, and the bites of a singularly vicious mosquito called the "zancudo" caused me to have a dozen or more small festering sores.

For months now I had been driving along this river, from near its source far to the west in the Andes, to here, where even in the height of the dry season its waters were over half a mile wide. Shallows, sandbars and submerged, or partly submerged black boulders fretted and turned the stream hither and thither over its wide, reedy, and log-jammed course. Constant vigilance was necessary to save my cranky boat from disaster. Had I struck one of those submerged stones or sunken trees where the water swirled, the teetering craft would have capsized, and the crocodiles would have attacked me. Naturally I was very cautious.

Along the damp sand edging the water and in the reeds, waded and nested thousands of aquatic cranes, herons, geese, ducks and unfamiliar birds. And often I saw the broad serrated tracks of the great turtles which came ashore to deposit their leathery-shelled eggs. I had in the previous weeks, eaten hundreds of these oily eggs. I had also caught many of the turtles themselves, turned them on their backs and killed them with my machete. Then I roasted them in banana leaves or broiled them on sharpened reeds over coals. Many of the big birds I had killed by throwing stones or clubs, and despite the strong fishy taste, I had often eaten a whole large goose at a sitting. Many edible and even palatable things, I learned later from the Indians, grew in the jungle and swamps—but of these I heard too late.

I HAD learned by much practice, and many disappointments, how to make a fire by use of a small bow with a string of monkey-skin and a hardwood drill, thus conserving my precious matches. I learned to use a long cane spear to catch fish and kill birds and coypu rats. I baked my fish sometimes wrapped in banana leaves and sometimes wrapped in mud; so too with the birds and small beasts. My supply of cartridges I used sparingly and kept my rifle well lubricated with oil obtained by breaking turtle eggs in a hollow stone; the oil which rose to the surface I gathered in a section of cane with a wooden plug for a stopper.

Once or twice I had seen grass shacks on the banks in the distance, but had avoided them. Once there was a fire on the shore, with people near. I took the initiative and turned toward it, and the natives silently disappeared. Retreating to the opposite side of the river, I passed on, and coming at last to a creek, turned up it for a short distance. Here I beached my canoe, returned to the river-bank and remained two days, watching to see if there would be a pursuit—but there was none.

One evening later I used one of my precious cartridges to shoot a deer at forty yards' distance. That night, after eating all I could (for to satiate a hunger of months, five or six pounds of half-cooked unsalted meat is not uncommon) I hung the carcass by vines from a tree limb.

That night a jaguar came. Awaking ab-

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ruptly, warned by that sense of danger which all inhabitants of the wilds possess, I snapped into instant consciousness that all was not well. There was a short snarl, a rip and a thud; then by the thin moonlight and the glow of the fire I saw the great brute drag down my meat and insolently start to eat, not twenty yards from where I lay. This could obviously not be permitted; no jaguar could steal my meat with impunity! Regardless of the fact that a wounded jaguar is far more dangerous than a wounded lion and that my rifle was of such caliber as to be undependable, I aimed carefully by the inadequate light, sent a silent hope that the bullet would go true, and fired. The jaguar collapsed.

I watched for a moment, then rose and warily went forward. The animal was quite dead, my bullet having luckily struck and broke its neck. Taking my venison with me, I returned to the fire, piled on more wood and slept. The next morning I built a frame, and, cutting the deer into strips, smoked and fire-dried it all day. The jaguar I left where it had fallen. . . .

As time went on, I grew too weak to paddle, and merely floated on down the river. One morning as I drifted, watching ahead for obstructions, there came up the river a long canoe in which were about a dozen Indians; perhaps luckily for me, I could see women and children among them. They stopped, close inshore in the shallows. I pulled in my paddle, picked up the rifle, held it in plain sight and drifted past. Not a sign was made or a word was spoken.

Then one day I saw many banana plants. I landed and reconnoitered. There were no people, though the fruit was ripe. Here I stayed for several days, gorging on the bananas and fish. No one came and I can only conclude that it must have been taboo ground. Then I resumed my journey.

FINALLY, one morning sometime later, I found that I was too sick to go on. I took some cold roasted turtle eggs from my monkey-skin bag, but could not eat them. With difficulty I got to the river and with a great coiled leaf managed to get a drink.

Then I took my piece of tent and rifle and staggered to a tree for shade. Here I tore off a strip of tent, tied my foot to a bush with the strip so I could not wander off in case of delirium, and lay down on the rest of the tent.

Somehow the day dragged toward evening, while a fever raged in my veins. As

night fell I returned to where my fire yet sent up a thin curl of smoke. After much labor I managed to gather firewood. Through the night I shook and shivered. Day came again, and I forced myself to eat some eggs. Again I lay under the tree; now I felt a little better. During the day a great white goose alighted on the sand close by and I killed it with my rifle. After plastering the bird with black mud, it went into the fire; thoroughly baked—fishy and strong as it was—it put new energy into me. Next morning I started on.

Once more I fell ill, but after two days I again went on. Then came another attack. Half-delirious, I loaded my scant outfit and started out. That day passed, vague and dreamlike; I drank great quantities of river water. When night came, I landed, and used a match to set fire to a huge pile of driftwood, for I was not strong enough to use the fire bow. Morning came at last, and I was off again.

The sun rolled high and the whole world sweltered in a blaze of heat. Indifferent to all, I lay in the canoe under a palm-leaf awning and drifted aimlessly.

Out from the shore shot a great canoe, headed for me. It held a dozen or more Indians. I watched it come, and thrust the paddle over the stern to keep steady, tucked the shaft under my armpit, and picked up the rifle.

THEY were seventy-five yards distant now. I tossed up the rifle and steadied the muzzle.

The bowman in the other canoe rose and held up his hands, palm out.

"*Yo son un amigo!*" he cried ("I am friend") and added: "My *patrón* the Señor Arze, wishes much to see the señor."

They surged alongside; many hands gripped my boat, and soon we drew up to a cluster of shacks on the bank. I was helped up the steep path, where a ruffianly-looking person, nearly black, but with a white man's features and a kindly heart walked out to greet me, exclaim over me and put me in a hammock. Now that the need for will-power had passed, I succumbed to the fever. He treated and doctored me, until I was again well.

He told me that it was then near the middle of March, 1922. The last white man I'd seen was the previous September.

I had had enough of travel for a while, so I stayed on with Señor Arze for over a year, helping him with his trading.

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