BLUE BOOK

AUGUST MAGAZINE 25 Cents
30¢ IN CANADA

TARZAN and the Leopard Men
by Edgar Rice Burroughs

Henry C. Rowland, Beatrice Grimshaw *and many others*

Cash Prizes for Stories of Real Experiences

These Shall Not Die

The astounding story of a young 1932 Noah, a gallant and lovable girl—and of an ARK of the AIR

By EDWIN BALMER *and* PHILIP WYLIE

DO you recall the story of Noah and the Ark—a story which quite apart from any religious significance, is one of the most impressive in all literature? Our horizons have widened far since the shepherd simplicities of Noah's day—have been stretched to measure remote planets and to survey distant space. Our scientists envision calamities far more devastating than any flood; our inventors project a ship of salvation for a voyage more desperate and exciting than that of the Ark. So too our writers are able to give you a story which for novelty, imaginative brilliance and depth of interest surpasses most stories hitherto achieved.... Here is the narrative of Noah and the Ark:

"And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil. . . .

"And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them.

"But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. . . .

"And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth.

"Make thee an ark of gopher wood. . . .

"And behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; and everything that is in the earth shall die.

"But with thee will I establish my covenant; and thou shalt come into the ark, thou, and thy sons, and thy wife, and thy sons' wives with thee.

"And of every living thing of all flesh, two of every sort shalt thou bring into the ark.

"Of fowls after their kind, and of cattle after their kind, of every creeping thing of the earth after his kind, two of every sort shall come unto thee, to keep them alive."

Read next month what a daring idea, and the collaboration of two of America's ablest authors—of Edwin Balmer, who wrote "The Breath of Scandal," "That Royle Girl" and "Dangerous Business," and of Philip Wylie, author of "The Wild Wallaces" and other popular stories—have produced in "These Shall Not Die," a novel that really is novel.

Be sure to read this wholly fascinating story, in the next, the September, issue of—

The BLUE BOOK *Magazine*

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

The Pointing Bone

(Continued from page 119)

After a short conference, we decided to turn north and make for the river. We could dig our own water-holes there, and get all we needed before the blacks could get at it. The boy, who seemed to have lost all interest in our plight, thought the river was about two days away. We rested in the scanty shade of a mulga clump during the heat of the day. But when the sun got over to the west we made another start, though the walking had made Bill and me stiff and sore all over.

When we went to get the pack on the horse again, I tried to wake the half-caste, who apparently had gone to sleep leaning back against it. I was horrified when he slumped over in an inert heap. He had sat down, and quietly died. The pointing bone had done its work!

We made no attempt to bury him, for energy was too precious; and in any case the natives would be sure to uncover him to perpetrate the last horrible rites they were accustomed to. We estimated that we had sufficient water for two drinks each, and we expected to travel two nights. Not a very pleasant prospect! The horse was the most unfortunate; it was forty-eight hours since he had had a drink, and it would be another forty-eight before he would have a chance.

All Saturday night we pushed on through the scrub, wishing we had never left the river in the first place, especially since the one we had done it for was now beyond any vengeance the blacks wanted. The knowledge that we must not drink what little water we had, aggravated our thirst. Soon each movement called for a separate effort. Each leg dragged wearily through the loose sand as it came its turn to move.

To make things worse, the horse began to hang back, and we lost a lot of energy knocking him along. Soon he stopped, and refused to go any farther. With our tongues swelling up, and eyes smarting from the glare of the sun, and lack of sleep, we crept into the sparse shade of the mulga. We each had a drink; and to resist the temptation to empty the bag called for all the will-power of which I was capable.

The natives had appeared again, still

(Please turn to page 3)

Stories of Real Experience

IT has been said that there is material for a novel in every person's life. Whether this is true or not, we do believe that in the lives of most of us some experience has occurred sufficiently exciting to merit description in print. With this idea in mind we shall be pleased to receive and to print true stories of real experience, running from one thousand to four thousand words each. For each of the five best of these received each month we will pay, according to our appraisal of its length and strength, $50 or more. We hope in this way to present to our readers an even more attractive department, and to reward a little more fairly those readers who contribute their real experiences to us. The other conditions of our offer remain as before. To recapitulate:

In theme the stories may deal with adventure, mystery, sport, humor,—especially humor!—war or business. Sex is barred. Manuscripts should be addressed to the Real Experience Editor, the Blue Book Magazine, 230 Park Ave., New York, N. Y. Preferably but not necessarily they should be typewritten, and should be accompanied by a stamped and self-addressed envelope for use in case the story is unavailable. A pen name may be used if desired, but in all cases the writer's real name and permanent address should accompany the manuscript. Be sure to write your name and correct address in the upper left-hand corner of the first page of your story, and keep a copy as insurance against loss of the original; for while we handle manuscripts with great care, we cannot accept responsibility for their return. As this is a monthly contest, from one to two months may elapse before you receive a report on your story.

The BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

AUGUST, 1932 — Vol. 55, No. 4

Novels of Special Interest

A Mystery Novelette

Memorable Short Stories

Stories of Remarkable Real Experience

EDWIN BALMER

The fascinating story of a young 1932 Noah and

An Ark *of the* Air

By EDWIN BALMER

Who wrote "Dangerous Business," "That Royle Girl" and other noteworthy novels

and PHILIP WYLIE

Author of "The Wild Wallaces" and many other well-remembered stories

will be a feature of our next issue

PHILIP WYLIE

THE McCALL COMPANY, Publisher. The Blue Book Magazine

William B. Warner, *President and Treasurer* — John C. Sterling, *Vice-President* — Francis Hutter, *Secretary*

DONALD KENNICOTT, Editor

Published monthly, at McCall St., Dayton, Ohio. Subscription Offices—Dayton, Ohio. Editorial and Executive Offices—230 Park Ave., New York, N. Y. The BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE—August, 1932. Vol. LV, No. 4. Copyright, 1932, by The McCall Company, in the United States and Great Britain. Entered as second-class matter, November 12, 1930, at the Post Office at Dayton, Ohio, under the Act of March 3, 1879. Subscription Price, $2.00 per year. Canadian postage 50c; foreign postage $1.00. For change of address, give us four weeks' notice and send old address as well as new.

The Pointing Bone

(Continued from page 1)

too far off for us to reach them with either the sporting rifle, or the shotgun. If they had not been occupied with the body of the boy, they might have ambushed us during the night, while our attention was on the pack-horse.

We did not wait very long before making a move. We wanted to get out of the scrub, and into the sand-plain country of the river before dark, thus minimizing the blacks' opportunity to creep within boomerang range. But when it came to getting the horse on his feet we got another set-back. Gaunt and weak, he refused to make any effort. Blows or cajolery had no effect; we even tried vainly to lift him.

At last we had to give up. We put an end to his misery with a bullet; then, dividing the opal into two portions of even weight, and taking a bag of flour each, the water-bag, and some bacon, we headed for the river again. We kept a sharp lookout for an ambush, and just after dark were relieved to break into the open sand-plain.

Monday's dawn found us still plodding painfully on. The blacks were keeping closer now; I suppose they were expecting us to drop. Two or three times in the night we had heard suspicious sounds in the bush, and had let go with both rifles, and shotgun. But I don't think we did any damage.

My favorite mirage was a beautiful picture etched across the blue horizon, of a hundred or more fountains all flinging ice-cold water high into the air. Once it was foaming beer. Lucid moments were given over to cursing the "harmless" blacks.

Possibly the boy had welcomed the opportunity to break away from the tribe who ill-treated him, but that "pointing bone" had been too much for us. We could have protected him from tangible blacks, but not from something that was not there, and which no one could see.

We got to the bed of the river in the middle of the afternoon. In a spot which had been dug previously we found water about fifteen inches below the surface. The tribe had dropped behind; now that there was no chance of getting us helpless, they lost interest, and the Old Man had to forgo his revenge. After a slow journey along the river-bed we at length got to Oodnadatta, with only a handful of flour left.

While Tarzan strides vivid and victor through his own glamorous world, romance is not dead within us. Here again the magic of a great story-teller achieves for us the same enchantment that fairy-tales afforded our childhood.

TARZAN
And the Leopard Men

By EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

THE girl turned uneasily upon her cot. The fly, bellying in the rising wind, beat noisily against the roof of the tent. The guy-ropes creaked as they tugged against their stakes. The unfastened flaps of the tent whipped angrily. Yet, in the midst of this growing pandemonium, the sleeper did not fully awaken. The day had been a trying one. The long, monotonous march through the sweltering jungle had left her exhausted, as had each of the weary marches that had preceded it through the terrible, grueling days since she had left railhead in that dim past that seemed now a dull eternity of suffering.

Perhaps she was less exhausted physically, as she was gradually becoming inured to the hardships; but the nervous strain of the past few days had taken its toll of energy since she had become aware of the growing insubordination of the black men who were her only companions on this rashly conceived and ill-ordered *safari*. . . .

Young, slight of build, accustomed to no sustained physical effort more grueling than a round of golf, a few sets of tennis, or a morning canter on the back of a well-mannered mount, she had embarked upon this mad adventure without the slightest conception of the hardships and dangers it would impose. Though convinced almost from the first day that her endurance might not be equal to the heavy tax placed upon it, and urged by her better judgment to turn back before it became too late, she had sturdily, or perhaps stubbornly, pushed on deeper and deeper into the grim jungle from which she had long since practically given up hope of extricating herself. Physically frail she might be for such an adventure, but no paladin of the Round Table could have boasted a sturdier will.

How compelling must be the exigency that urged her on! What necessity drove her from the paths of luxury and ease into the primeval forest and this unaccustomed life of danger, exposure, and fatigue? What ungovernable urge denied her the right of self-preservation, now that she was convinced her only chance of survival lay in turning back? Why had she come? Not to hunt; she had killed only under the pressure of necessity for food. Not to photograph the wild life of the African hinterland; she possessed no camera. Not in the interests of scientific research; if she had ever had any scientific interest it had been directed principally upon cosmetics, but even that had expired in the face of the fierce equatorial sun and before an audience consisting exclusively of low-browed West African blacks. The riddle, then, remains a riddle—as unfathomable and inscrutable as the level gaze of her brave gray eyes. . . . .

The forest bent beneath the heavy hand of Usha the wind. Dark clouds obscured the heavens. The voices of the jungle were silenced. Not even the greatest of the savage beasts risked calling the attention of the mighty forces of Nature to their presence. Only the sudden flares of the windswept beast-fires illumined the camp in fitful

From the trees above the okapi, a creature launched itself onto the back of the terrified animal. Orando stood spellbound.

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

bursts that wrought grotesquely dancing shadow-shapes from the prosaic impedimenta of the *safari*, scattered upon the ground. A lone and sleepy *askari*, bracing his back against the growing gale, stood careless guard. The camp slept, except for him and one other—a great hulking black, who crept stealthily toward the tent of the sleeping girl.

Then the fury of the storm broke upon the crouching forest. Lightning flashed. Thunder boomed, and rolled, and boomed again. Rain fell, at first in great drops, then in solid, wind-sped sheets it enveloped the camp.

Even the sleep of utter exhaustion could not withstand this final assault of Nature. The girl awoke. In the vivid and almost incessant flashes of lightning she saw a man entering the tent. Instantly she recognized him—the great hulking figure of Golato the headman might not easily be mistaken for another.

The girl raised herself upon an elbow. "Is there something wrong, Golato?" she asked. "What do you want?"

"You, Kali Bwana," answered the man huskily.

So it had come at last! For two days she had been dreading it, her fears aroused by the changed attitude of this man toward her—a change that was reflected in the thinly veiled contempt of the other members of her party for her orders, in the growing familiarities of their speech and actions.

From a holster at the side of her cot she drew a revolver. "Get out of here," she said, "or I'll kill you!"

For answer the black leaped toward her. She fired.

MOVING from west to east, the storm cut a swath through the forest. In its wake lay a trail of twisted and torn branches—here and there an uprooted tree. It sped on, leaving the camp of the girl far behind.

In the dark a man crouched in the shelter of a great tree, protected from the full fury of the wind by its hoary bole. In the hollow of one of his arms something cuddled close to his naked hide for warmth. Occasionally he spoke to it and caressed it with his free hand. His gentle solicitude for it suggested that it might be a child; but it was not—it was a small, terrified, wholly miserable little monkey. Born into a world peopled by large and savage creatures with a predilection for tender monkey-meat, little Nkima had early developed, or perhaps inherited, an inferiority conviction that had reduced his activities to a series of screaming flights from dangers either real or imaginary.

His agility often imparted a certain appearance of reckless bravado in the presence of corporeal enemies from whom experience had taught him he could easily escape; but in the face of Usha the wind, Ara the lightning, and Pand the thunder, from whom none might escape, he was reduced to the nadir of trembling hopelessness. Not even the sanctuary of the mighty arms of his master Tarzan—from whose safe embrace he had often thrown insults into the face of Numa the lion—could impart more than a fleeting sense of security.

He cowered and whimpered at each new gust of wind, each flash of lightning, each stunning burst of thunder. Suddenly the fury of the storm rose to the pinnacle of its Titanic might; there was a sound of rending wood from the ancient fibers of the jungle patriarch at whose foot the two had sought shelter. From his squatting position, Tarzan leaped, catlike, to one side even as the great tree crashed to earth, carrying a half dozen of its neighbors with it. As he jumped he tossed the monkey from him, free of the branches of the fallen monarch. He himself was less fortunate—a far-spreading limb struck him heavily upon the head and as he fell, pinned him to the ground.

Whimpering, the little monkey crouched in an agony of terror while the tornado, seemingly having wrought its worst, trailed off slowly toward the east. Presently, sensing the departure of the storm, the little beast crept fearfully in search of Tarzan, calling to him plaintively

from time to time. It was dark; he could see nothing beyond a few feet from the end of his generous, sensitive nose. Tarzan did not answer; presently Nkima found his master beneath the fallen tree, silent and lifeless.

NYAMWEGI had been the life of the party in the little thatched village of Kibbu, where he had gone from his own village of Tumbai to court a dusky belle. His vanity was flattered by the apparent progress of his suit and by the evident impression his wit and personality had made upon the company of young people before whom he had capered and boasted, and he had ignored the passage of time, until the sudden fall of the equatorial night warned him that he had long overstayed the time allowed him by considerations of personal safety.

Several miles of grim and forbidding forest separated the villages of Kibbu and Tumbai. They were miles fraught by night with many dangers, not the least of which to Nyamwegi were the unreal, including as they did the ghosts of departed enemies and the countless demons that direct the destinies of human life, usually with malign intent.

He would have preferred to remain for the night in Kibbu as had been suggested by his inamorata; but there was a most excellent reason why he could not, a reason that transcended in potency even the soft blandishments of a sweetheart or the terrors of the jungle night. It was a taboo that had been placed upon him by the witch-doctor of Tumbai for some slight transgression when the latter had discovered that Nyamwegi would doubtless wish to spend many nights in Kibbu village. For a price the taboo might be lifted, a fact which doubtless had more to do with its imposition than the sin it purported to punish; but the tragedy lay in the fact that Nyamwegi did not have the price; and tragedy indeed it proved for poor Nyamwegi.

On silent feet the young warrior followed the familiar trail toward Tumbai. Lightly he carried his spear and shield; at his hip swung a heavy knife; but of what potency were such weapons, against the demons of the night? Much more efficacious was the amulet suspended about his neck, which he fingered often as he mumbled prayers to his *muzimo*, the protecting spirit of the ancestor for whom he had been named.

Kibbu village lay a mile behind Nyamwegi when the storm overtook him. At first his anxiety to reach Tumbai and his fear of the night urged him on, despite the buffetings of the gale; but at last he was forced to seek what shelter he could beneath a giant tree, where he remained until the greatest fury of the elements had subsided, though the lightning was still illuminating the forest as he pushed on. Thus the storm became his undoing, for where he might have passed unnoticed in the darkness, the lightning revealed his presence to whatever enemy might be lurking along the trail.

He was already congratulating himself that half the journey had been accomplished, when without warning he was seized from behind. He felt sharp talons sink into his flesh. With a scream of pain and terror he wheeled to extricate himself from the clutches of the thing that had seized him, a terrifying, voiceless thing that made no sound. For an instant he succeeded in breaking the hold upon his shoulders and as he turned, reaching for his knife, the lightning flashed—revealing to his horrified eyes a hideous human face surmounted by the head of a leopard.

Nyamwegi struck out blindly with his knife in the ensuing darkness; simultaneously he was seized again from behind by rending talons that sank into his chest and abdomen as the creature encircled him with hairy arms. Again vivid lightning brought into high relief the tragic scene. Nyamwegi could not see the creature that gripped him from behind; but he saw three others menacing him in front and on either side, and he abandoned hope as he recognized his assailants, from their leopard-skins and masks, as members of the feared secret order of Leopard Men. . . . . Thus died Nyamwegi the Utenga.

"Get out of here," she said, "or I'll kill you!" leaped toward her. Then she fired. . . . . Golato

CHAPTER II

The Hunter

THE dawn-light danced among the tree-tops above the grass-thatched huts of the village of Tumbai as the chief's son, Orando, arose from his crude pallet of straw and stepped out into the village street to make an offering to his *muzimo*, the spirit of the long-dead ancestor for whom he had been named, preparatory to setting out upon a day of hunting. In his outstretched palm he held an offering of fine meal as he stood like an ebony statue, his face upturned toward the heavens.

"My namesake, let us go to the hunt together." He spoke as one might who addresses a familiar but highly revered friend. "Bring the animals near to me and ward off from me all danger. Give me meat today, O hunter!"

The trail Orando followed as he set forth alone to hunt was for a couple of miles the same which led to Kibbu village. It was an old familiar trail; but the storm of the preceding night had wrought such havoc with it that in many places it was as unrecognizable as it was impassable. Several times fallen trees forced him to make detours into the heavy underbrush that often bordered the trail upon each side. It was upon such an occasion that his attention was caught by sight of a human leg protruding from beneath the foliage of a newly uprooted tree.

Orando halted in his tracks and drew back. There was a movement of the foliage where the man lay. The warrior poised his light hunting-spear, yet at the same time he was ready for instant flight. He had recognized the bronzed flesh as that of a white man—and Orando, the son of Lobongo the chief, knew no white man as friend. Again the foliage moved, and the head of a diminutive monkey was thrust through the tangled verdure.

As its frightened eyes discovered the black man the little

For answer the black voiced a cry of pain.

creature voiced a scream of fright and disappeared beneath the foliage of the fallen tree, only to reappear again a moment later upon the opposite side where it climbed up into the branches of a jungle giant that had successfully withstood the onslaughts of the storm. Here, far above the ground, in fancied security, the small one perched upon a swaying limb and loosed the vials of its wrath upon Orando.

But the hunter accorded it no further attention. Today he was not hunting little monkeys, and for the moment his interest was focused upon the suggestion of tragedy contained in that single, bronzed leg. Creeping cautiously forward, Orando stooped to look beneath the great mass of limbs and leaves that concealed the rest of the body from his view.

He saw a giant white man, naked but for a loin-cloth of leopard-skin, pinned to the ground by one of the branches of the fallen tree. From the face turned toward him two gray eyes surveyed him; the man was not dead.

Orando had seen but few white men, and those he had seen had worn strange, distinctive apparel. They had carried weapons that vomited smoke and flame and metal. This one was clothed as any native warrior might have been, nor were there visible any of those weapons that Orando hated and feared.

Nevertheless the stranger was white, and therefore an enemy. It was possible he might extricate himself from his predicament, and become a menace to the village of Tumbai. Naturally, therefore, there was but one thing for a warrior and the son of a chief to do. Orando fitted an arrow to his bow. The killing of this man meant no more to him than would have the killing of the little monkey.

"Come around to the other side," said the stranger. "Your arrow cannot reach my heart from that position."

Orando dropped the point of his missile and surveyed the speaker in surprise, which was engendered not so much by the nature of his command, as by the fact that he had spoken in Orando's dialect.

"You need not fear me," continued the white, noticing Orando's hesitation. "I am held fast by this branch and cannot harm you."

What sort of man was this? Had he no fear of death? Most men would have begged for their lives. Perhaps this one sought death!

"Are you badly injured?" demanded Orando.

"I think not. I feel no pain."

"Then why do you wish to die?"

"I do not wish to die."

"But you told me to come around and shoot you in the heart!"

"I know that you are going to kill me. I asked you, to make sure that your first arrow enters my heart. Why should I suffer pain needlessly?"

"And you are not afraid to die?"

"I do not know what you mean."

"You do not know what fear is?"

"I know the word, but what has it to do with death? All things die. Were you to tell me that I must live forever, then I might feel fear."

"How is it that you speak the language of the Utengas?" demanded Orando.

The man shook his head. "I do not know."

"Who are you?" Orando's perplexity was gradually becoming tinged with awe.

"I do not know," replied Tarzan—for the blow of the great limb had, for the time at least, destroyed his memory.

"From what country do you come?"

Again the man shook his head. "I do not know."

"What will you do if I release you?"

"And do not kill me?" queried the white.

"No, not kill you."

The man shrugged. "What is there to do? I shall hunt for food because I am hungry. Then I shall find a place to lie up and sleep."

"You will not kill me?"

"Why should I? If you do not try to kill me, I shall not try to kill you."

The black warrior wormed his way through the tangled branches of the fallen tree to the side of the pinioned white man, where he found that a single branch resting across the latter's body prevented the prisoner from getting his arms, equipped with giant muscles, into any position where he might use them effectively for his release. It proved, however, a comparatively easy matter for Orando to raise the limb the few inches necessary to permit the stranger to worm his body from beneath it, and a moment later the two men faced one another beside the fallen tree while a little monkey chattered and grimaced from the safety of the foliage above them.

Orando felt some doubt as to the wisdom of his rash act. He could not satisfactorily explain what had prompted him to such humane treatment of a stranger, yet despite his doubts something seemed to assure him he had acted wisely. However, he held his spear in readiness

and watched the white giant before him with a cautious eye.

From beneath the tree that had held him prisoner the man recovered his weapons, a bow and spear. Over one shoulder hung a quiver of arrows; across the other was coiled a long fiber rope. A knife swung in a sheath at his hip. His belongings recovered, he turned to Orando.

"Now we hunt," Orando proposed.

"Where?"

"I know where the pigs feed in the morning and where they lie up in the heat of the day," said Orando.

AS they spoke Orando appraised the stranger. He noted the clean-cut features, the magnificent physique. The flowing muscles that rolled beneath a skin sun-tanned almost to the hue of his own, impressed him by their suggestion of agility and speed combined with great strength. A shock of black hair partially framed a face of rugged masculine beauty from which steady gray eyes surveyed the world fearlessly. Over the left temple was a raw gash—a legacy of the storm's fury—from which blood had flowed, and dried in the man's hair and upon his cheek. In moments of silence his brows were drawn together in thought, and there was a puzzled expression in his eyes. At such times he impressed Orando as one who sought to recall something he had forgotten.

Orando led the way along the trail that still ran in the direction of Kibbu village. Behind him came his strange companion upon feet so silent that the black occasionally cast a backward glance to assure himself the white man had not deserted him. Close above them the little monkey swung through the trees, chattering and jabbering.

Presently Orando heard another voice directly behind him that sounded like another monkey speaking in lower tones than those of the little fellow above them. He turned his head to see where the other monkey, sounding so close, could be. To his astonishment he saw that the sounds issued from the throat of the man behind him. Orando laughed aloud. Never before had he seen a man who could mimic the chattering of monkeys so perfectly. Here indeed was an accomplished entertainer.

But Orando's hilarity was short-lived. It died when he saw the little monkey leap nimbly from an overhanging branch to the shoulder of the white man and heard the two chattering to one another, obviously carrying on a conversation.

What sort of man was this—who knew no fear, who could speak the language of the monkeys, yet who did not know who he was, nor where he came from? This question, which he could not answer, suggested another equally unanswerable, the mere consideration of which induced within Orando qualms of uneasiness. *Was this creature a mortal man?*

This world into which Orando had been born was peopled by many creatures, not the least important and powerful of which were those no man ever saw, but which exercised the greatest influence upon those one might see. There were demons so numerous that one might not count them all, and the spirits of the dead more often than not were directed by demons whose purposes, always malign, they carried out. These demons and sometimes the spirits of the dead occasionally took possession of the body of a living creature, controlling its thoughts, its actions and its speech. Why, right in the river that flowed past the village of Tumbai dwelt a demon to which for many years the villagers had made offerings of food! It had assumed the likeness of a crocodile, but that deceived no one, least of all the old witch-doctor who had recognized it immediately for what it was—after the chief had threatened him with death when his charms had failed to frighten it away, or his amulets to save villagers from its voracious jaws. It was easy, therefore, for Orando to harbor suspicions concerning this creature moving noiselessly at his heels.

A feeling of uneasiness pervaded the son of the chief. This was somewhat mitigated by the consciousness that he had treated the creature in a friendly way, and perhaps earned its approbation. How fortunate it was that he had reconsidered his first intention of loosing an arrow into its body! That would have been fatal—not for the creature, but for Orando. It was quite obvious now why the stranger had not feared death, knowing that, being a demon, it could not die. Slowly this was all becoming clear to the black hunter. But he did not know whether to be elated or terrified; to be the associate of a demon might be a distinction, but it also had its distressing aspects. One never knew what a demon might be contemplating, though it was reasonably certain to be nothing good.

Orando's further speculations along this line were rudely interrupted by a sight that met his horrified gaze at a turning of the trail. Before his eyes lay the dead and mutilated body of a warrior. The hunter required no second glance to recognize in the upturned face the features of his friend and comrade, Nyamwegi. But how had he come to his death?

The stranger came to Orando's side, the little monkey perched upon his shoulder. He stooped and examined the body of Nyamwegi, turning the corpse over upon its face, revealing the cruel marks of steel claws.

"The Leopard Men," he remarked briefly and without emotion, as one might utter the most ordinary commonplace.

But Orando was bursting with emotion. Immediately when he had seen the body of his friend he had thought of the Leopard Men—though he had scarcely dared to acknowledge his own thought, so fraught with terror was the very suggestion. Deeply implanted in his mind was fear of this dread secret society, the weird cannibalistic rites of which seemed doubly horrible because they could only be guessed at, no man outside their order ever having witnessed them and lived.

He saw the characteristic mutilation of the corpse—saw and shuddered; but, though he shuddered, in his heart was more of rage than of fear. Nyamwegi had been his friend; from infancy, they had grown to manhood together. Orando's soul cried out for vengeance against the fiends who had perpetrated this vile outrage. But what could one man do alone against many? The maze of footsteps in the soft earth about the corpse indicated that Nyamwegi had been overcome by numbers.

THE stranger, leaning on his spear, had been silently watching the black warrior, noting the signs of grief and rage reflected in the mobile features.

"You knew him?" he asked.

"He was my friend."

The stranger made no comment, but turned and followed a trail that ran toward the south. Orando hesitated. Perhaps the demon was leaving him. Well, in a way that would be a relief; but after all he had not been a bad demon, and certainly there was something about him that inspired confidence and a sense of security. Then too it was something to be able to fraternize with a demon, and perhaps to show him off in the village. Orando followed.

"Where are you going?" he called after the retreating figure of the giant white.

"To punish those who killed your friend."

"But they are many," remonstrated Orando. "They will kill us."

"They are four," replied the stranger. "*I* kill."

"How do you know there are but four?" Orando asked.

The other pointed to the trail at his feet. "One is old and limps," he said; "one is tall and thin; the other two are young warriors. They step lightly, although one of m is a large man."

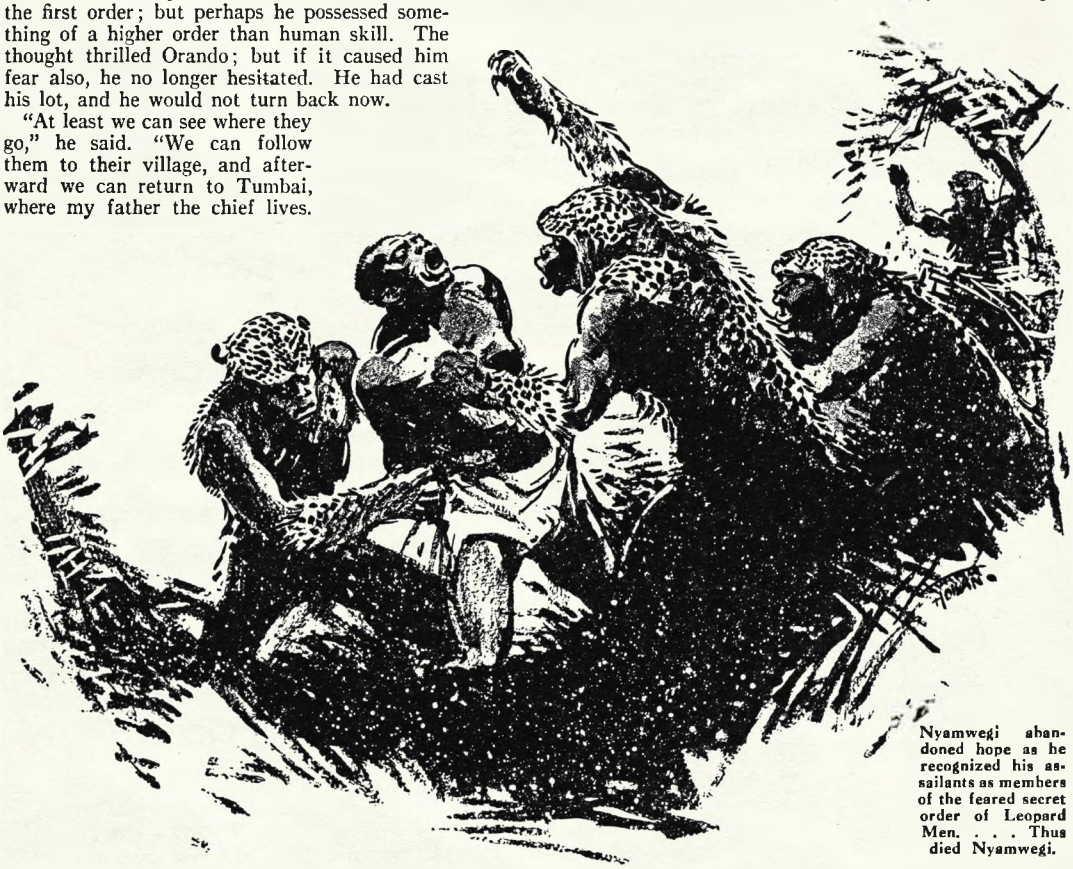
"You have seen them?"

"I have seen their spoor; that is enough."

Orando was impressed. Here indeed was a tracker of the first order; but perhaps he possessed something of a higher order than human skill. The thought thrilled Orando; but if it caused him fear also, he no longer hesitated. He had cast his lot, and he would not turn back now.

"At least we can see where they go," he said. "We can follow them to their village, and afterward we can return to Tumbai, where my father the chief lives.

aid he had invoked before setting out upon the hunt, whom he had propitiated with a handful of meal! Suddenly Orando regretted that the offering had not been larger. A handful of meal seemed quite inadequate to appease the hunger of the powerful creature trotting tirelessly ahead of him. But perhaps *muzimos* required less food than mortals. That seemed reasonable, since they were but spirits.



Nyamwegi abandoned hope as he recognized his assailants as members of the feared secret order of Leopard Men. . . . Thus died Nyamwegi.

He will send runners through the Watenga country, and the war drums will boom, summoning the Utenga warriors. Then will we go and make war upon the village of the Leopard Men, that Nyamwegi may be avenged in blood."

The stranger only grunted and trotted on. Sometimes Orando, who was rated a good tracker by his fellows, saw no spoor at all; but the white demon never paused, never hesitated. The black marveled and his admiration grew; likewise his awe. He had leisure to think now, and the more he thought the more convinced he was that this was no mortal who guided him through the jungle upon the trail of the Leopard Men. If it was indeed a demon, then it was a most remarkable demon, for by no word or sign had it indicated any malign purpose. It was then, engendered by this line of reasoning, that a new and brilliant thought illuminated the mind of Orando like a bright light bursting suddenly through darkness. This creature, being nothing mortal, must be the protecting spirit of that departed ancestor for whom Orando had been named—his *muzimo!*

Instantly all fear left the black warrior. Here was a friend and a protector; here was the very namesake whose

Yet Orando distinctly recalled that before he had released the creature from beneath the tree it had stated that it wished to hunt for food, as it was hungry. Perhaps there were many things concerning *muzimos* that Orando did not know; so why trouble his head about details? It was enough that this must be his *muzimo*. He wondered if the little monkey perched upon his *muzimo's* shoulder was also a spirit. Perhaps it was Nyamwegi's ghost. Were not the two very friendly, as he and Nyamwegi had been throughout their lives? The thought appealed to Orando, and henceforth he thought of the little monkey as Nyamwegi. Now it occurred to him to test his theory concerning the white giant.

"Muzimo!" he called.

The stranger turned his head and looked about. "Why did you call *'muzimo'?*" he demanded.

"I was calling you, Muzimo," replied Orando.

"Is that what you call me?"

"Yes."

"What do you want?"

Now Orando was convinced he had made no mistake. How fortunate he was—how his fellows would envy him!

"Why did you call to me?" insisted the other.

"Do you think we are close to the Leopard Men, Muzimo?" inquired Orando, for want of any better question to ask.

"We are gaining on them; but the wind is in the wrong direction. I do not like to track with the wind at my back, for then Usha can run ahead and tell those I am tracking that I am on their trail."

"What can we do about it?" demanded Orando. "The wind will not change for me, but perhaps you can make it blow in a different direction."

"No," replied the other; "but I can fool Usha the wind. That I often do. When I am hunting upwind I can remain on the ground in safety, for then Usha can only carry tales to those behind me, for whom I care nothing; but when I hunt downwind I travel through the trees, and Usha carries my scent-spoor above the head of my quarry. Or sometimes I move swiftly and circle the hunted one, and then Usha comes down to my nostrils and tells me where it is. Come!" The stranger swung lightly to the low-hanging branch of a great tree.

"Wait!" cried Orando. "I cannot travel through the trees!"

"Go upon the ground, then. I will go ahead through the trees and find the Leopard Men."

Orando would have argued the wisdom of this plan; but the white disappeared amidst the foliage, the little monkey clinging tightly to its perch upon his shoulder.

"That," thought Orando, "is the last that I shall see of my *muzimo*. When I tell this in the village they will not believe me. They will say that Orando is a great liar."

Plain before him now, lay the trail of the Leopard Men. It would be easy to follow; but what could one man hope to accomplish against four, other than his own death? Yet Orando did not think of turning back. Perhaps he could not, alone, wreak his vengeance upon the slayers of Nyamwegi; but he could at least track them to their village, and later lead the warriors of Lobongo the chief, his father, in battle against it.

The black warrior moved tirelessly in a rhythmic trot that consumed the miles with stubborn certainty, relieving the monotony by reviewing the adventures of the morning. Thoughts of his *muzimo* occupied his mind almost to the exclusion of other subjects. Such an adventure was without parallel in the experience of Orando, and he enjoyed dwelling upon every phase of it. He recalled, almost with the pride of personal possession, the prowess of this other self of his from the spirit world. Its every mannerism and expression was photographed indelibly upon his memory; but that which impressed him most was an indefinable something in the steel-gray eyes, a haunting yearning that suggested a constant effort to recall an illusive memory.

What was his *muzimo* trying to recall? Perhaps the details of his earthly existence. Perchance he sought to conjure once again the reactions of the flesh to worldly stimuli. Doubtless he regretted his spirit state and longed to live again.

WITH such thoughts as their accompaniment the miles retreated beneath Orando's pounding feet. With such thoughts his mind was occupied to the exclusion of matters which should have concerned him more. For instance, he did not note how fresh the spoor of his quarry had become. In puddles left by the rain of the previous night and roiled by the passage of feet the mud had not yet settled when Orando passed; in places the earth at the edges of footprints was still falling back into the depressions; but these things Orando failed to note, though he was accounted a good tracker. It is well that a man should keep his mind concentrated upon a single thing at a time, unless he has a far more elastic mind than Orando.

When Orando came suddenly into a small natural clearing he failed to notice a slight movement of the surrounding jungle foliage. Had he noticed, he would have gone more cautiously, and his jungle-craft would have suggested the truth, even though he could not have seen the four pairs of greedy, malevolent eyes that watched him from behind the concealing verdure; but when he reached the center of the clearing he saw all that he should have guessed before, as with savage cries, four hideously caparisoned warriors leaped into the open and sprang toward him.

Never before had Orando, the son of Lobongo, seen one of the feared and hated members of the dread society of Leopard Men; but as his eyes fell upon these four there was no room for doubt as to their identity. And then they closed upon him.

CHAPTER III

Dead Men Who Spoke

AS the girl fired, Golato voiced a cry of pain, wheeled and dashed from the tent, his left hand grasping his right arm above the elbow. Then Kali Bwana arose and dressed, strapping a cartridge-belt, with its holster and gun, about her hips. There could be no more thought of sleep that night, for even though Golato might be *hors de combat* there were others to be feared almost as much as he.

She lighted a lantern and, seated in a camp-chair with her rifle across her knees, prepared to spend the remainder of the night in wakeful watching; but if she anticipated any further molestation she was agreeably disappointed. The night dragged its interminable length, until outraged Nature could be no longer denied, and presently the girl dozed in her chair.

When she awoke the new sun was an hour old. The storm had passed, leaving only mud and soggy canvas in its wake to mark its passage across the camp. The girl stepped to the flap of her tent and called to her "boy" to prepare her bath and her breakfast. She saw the porters preparing the loads. She saw Golato, his arm roughly bandaged and supported in a crude sling. She saw her boy and called to him again, this time peremptorily; but he ignored her summons and went on with the roping of a pack. Then she crossed over to him, her eyes flashing.

"You heard me call you, Imba," she said. "Why did you not come and prepare my bath and my breakfast?"

The fellow, a middle-aged man of sullen demeanor, scowled and hung his head. Golato, surly and glowering, looked on. The other members of the *safari* had stopped their work and were watching. Among them all there was not a friendly eye.

"Answer me, Imba," commanded the girl. "Why do you refuse to obey me?"

"Golato is headman," was the surly rejoinder. "He gives orders. Imba obeys Golato."

"Imba obeys *me*," snapped Kali Bwana. "Golato is no longer headman." She drew her gun from its holster and let the muzzle drop on Imba. "Get my bath ready," she ordered. "Last night it was dark; I could not see well, so I only shot Golato in the arm. This morning I can see to shoot straighter. Now move!"

Imba cast an imploring glance in the direction of Golato, but the ex-headman gave him no encouragement. Here was a new Kali Bwana, bringing new conditions, to which Golato's slow mind had not yet adapted itself. Im-

ba moved sheepishly toward the tent of his mistress. The other blacks muttered in low tones among themselves.

Kali Bwana had found herself; but it was too late—the seeds of discontent and mutiny were too deeply sown; they had already germinated, and although she might wrest a fleeting victory the end could bring only defeat. She had the satisfaction, however, of seeing Imba prepare her bath and later her breakfast; but while she was eating the latter she saw her porters up-loading, preparatory to departure, although her own tent had not been struck, nor had she given any orders for marching.

"What is the meaning of this?" she demanded, walking quickly to where the men were gathered. She did not address Golato, but another who had been his lieutenant and whom she had intended appointing headman in his place.

"We are going back," replied the man.

"You cannot go back and leave me alone," she insisted.

"You may come with us," said the black. "But you will have to look after yourself," he added.

"You shall not do anything of the sort," cried the girl, thoroughly exasperated. "You agreed to accompany me wherever I went. Put down your loads, and wait until you get marching orders from me."

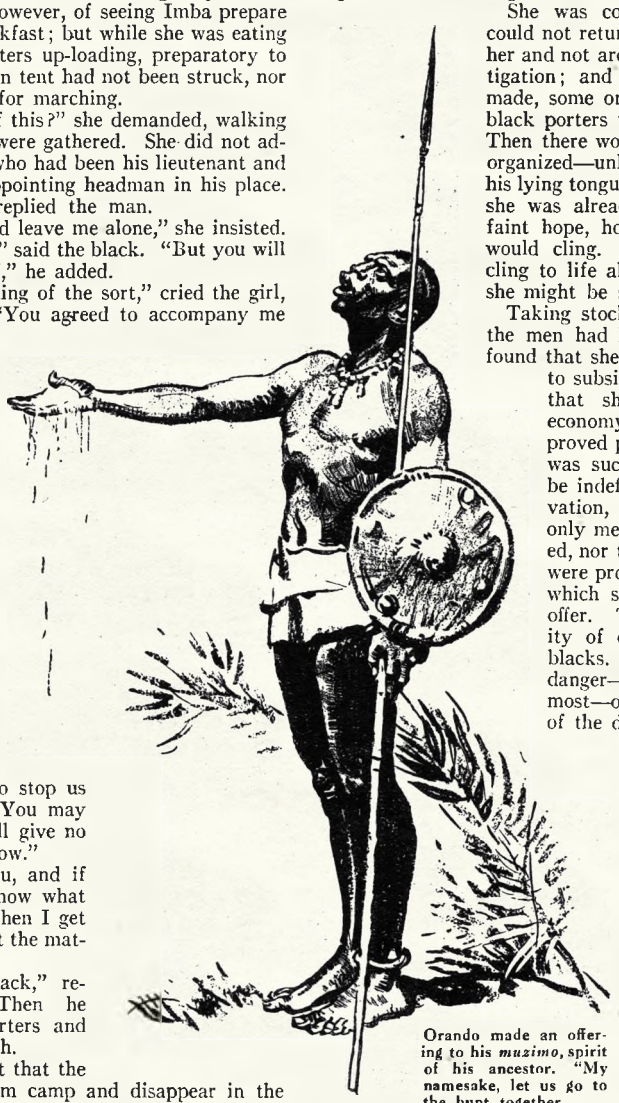
As the men hesitated she drew her revolver. It was then that Golato interfered. He approached her with the *askaris*, their rifles ready. "Shut up, white woman," he snarled, "and get back to your tent! We are going back to our own country. If you had been good to Golato this would not have happened; but you were not, and this is your punishment. If you try to stop us these men will kill you. You may come with us, but you will give no orders. Golato is master now."

"I shall not go with you, and if you desert me here you know what your punishment will be when I get back to rail-head and report the matter to the commissioner."

"You will never get back," replied Golato sullenly. Then he turned to the waiting porters and gave the command to march.

It was with sinking heart that the girl saw the party file from camp and disappear in the forest. She might have followed, but pride had a great deal to do with crystallizing her decision not to. Likewise, her judgment assured her that she would be far from safe with this sullen, mutinous band at whose head was as great a menace to her personal safety as she might find in all Africa. Again, there was the pertinacity of purpose that had kept her forging ahead upon her hopeless mission long after mature judgment had convinced her of its futility. Perhaps it was no more than ordinary stubbornness; but it held her to what she conceived to be her duty, even though that led to what she now knew must be almost certain death.

Wearily she turned back toward her tent and the single load of provisions they had left behind for her sustenance. What was she to do? She could not go on, and she would not go back. There was but a single alternative. She must remain here, establishing a permanent camp as best she could, and await the remotely possible relief party that might come after long months.



Orando made an offering to his *muzimo*, spirit of his ancestor. "My namesake, let us go to the hunt together. . . . Give me meat today, O hunter!"

She was confident that her *safari* could not return to civilization without her and not arouse comment and investigation; and when investigation was made, some one among those ignorant black porters would divulge the truth. Then there would be a searching-party organized—unless Golato succeeded with his lying tongue in convincing them that she was already dead. There was a faint hope, however, and to that she would cling. If perchance she could cling to life also during the long wait she might be saved at last.

Taking stock of the provisions that the men had left behind for her, she found that she had enough upon which to subsist for a month, provided that she exercised scrupulous economy in their use. If game proved plentiful and her hunting was successful, this time might be indefinitely prolonged. Starvation, however, was not the only menace that she apprehended, nor the most dreaded. There were prowling carnivores against which she had little defense to offer. There was the possibility of discovery by unfriendly blacks. There was always the danger—and this she dreaded most—of being stricken by one of the deadly jungle fevers.

She tried to put such thoughts from her mind, and to do so she occupied herself putting her camp in order, dragging everything perishable into her tent, and finally commencing the construction of a crude *boma* as a protection against the prowlers of the night. The work was fatiguing, necessitating frequent rests, during which she wrote in her diary, to which she confided nothing of the fears that assailed her, fears she dreaded admitting even to herself. Instead, she confined herself to a narration of the events of the past few days since she had last written. Thus she occupied her time as Fate marshaled the forces that were presently to drag her into a situation more horrible than any she could possibly have conceived. . . . .

As the four, clothed in the leopard-skins of their order, closed upon Orando there flashed to the mind of the son of the chief a vision of the mutilated corpse of Nyamwegi, and in that mental picture he saw a prophecy of his own

fate; but he did not flinch. He was a warrior, with a duty to perform. These were the murderers of his comrade, the enemies of his people. He would die, of that he was certain; but first he would avenge Nyamwegi. The enemy should feel the wrath of a Utenga fighting-man!

The four Leopard Men were almost upon him as he launched his spear. With a scream one of the foemen dropped, pierced by the sharp tip of the Utenga's weapon. Fortunate it was for Orando that the methods of the Leopard Men prescribed the use of their improvised steel claws as weapons in preference to spears or arrows, which they resorted to only in extremities, or when faced by superior numbers. The flesh for their unholy rites must die beneath their leopard-claws, or it was useless for religious purposes. Maddened by fanaticism, they risked death to secure the coveted trophies. To this Orando owed the slender chance he had to overcome his antagonists. But at best the respite from death could be but brief.

The remaining three pressed closer, preparing for the lethal charge in simulation of the carnivore they personified. Silence enveloped the jungle, as though Nature awaited with bated breath the consummation of this savage tragedy. Suddenly the quiet was shattered by the scream of a monkey in a tree overhanging the clearing. The sound came from behind Orando. He saw the two opponents facing him dart startled glances beyond his shoulder. He heard a scream that forced his attention rearward in a brief glance, and what he saw brought the sudden joy of an unexpected reprieve from death. In the grasp of the *muzimo,* the third of the surviving Leopard Men was struggling impotently against death.

Then Orando wheeled again to face his remaining enemies, while from behind him came savage growls that stiffened the hairs upon his scalp. What new force had been thus suddenly injected into the grim scene? He could not guess, nor could he again risk even a brief backward glance. His whole attention was now required by the hideous creatures sneaking toward him, their curved steel talons opened, clawlike, to seize him.

Action long in the telling occupied but a few seconds of actual time. A shriek mingled with the growls that Orando had heard. The Leopard Men leaped swiftly toward him. A figure brushed past him from the rear, and with a savage growl leaped upon the foremost Leopard Man. It was Orando's *muzimo.* The heart of the black warrior missed a beat as he realized that those beastlike sounds had issued from the throat of his namesake. But if the fact perturbed Orando it utterly demoralized the fourth antagonist, who had been advancing upon him—with the result that the fellow wheeled and bolted for the jungle, leaving the sole survivor of his companions to his fate.

Orando was free now to come to the aid of his *muzimo,* who was engaged with the larger of the two younger Leopard Men; but he quickly realized that his *muzimo* required no aid. In a grip of steel the bronzed giant held the two clawed hands, while his free hand grasped the throat of his antagonist. Slowly but as inexorably as Fate he was choking the life from the struggling black man. Gradually his victim's efforts grew weaker, until suddenly, with a convulsive shudder, the body went limp. Then the white cast it aside. For a moment he stood gazing at it, a puzzled expression upon his face; then, apparently mechanically, he advanced slowly to its side and placed a foot upon it. The reaction was instantaneous and remarkable. Doubt and hesitation were suddenly swept from the noble features of the giant, to be replaced by an expression of savage exultation as he lifted his face to the heavens and gave voice to a cry so awesome that Orando felt his knees tremble beneath him.

The Utenga had heard that cry before, far in the depths of the forest, and knew it for what it was—the victory cry of the bull-ape. But why was his *muzimo* voicing the cry of a beast? Here was something that puzzled Orando quite as much as had the materialization of this ancestral spirit. There were certain attributes that all men attributed to *muzimos,* but all these were human attributes. Never in his life had Orando heard it even vaguely hinted that *muzimos* growled like Simba the lion, or screamed as the bull-apes scream when they have made a kill. He was troubled and puzzled. Could it be that his *muzimo* was also the *muzimo* of some dead lion and some departed ape? And if such was the case might it not be possible that, when actuated by the spirit of the lion or the ape, instead of by that of Orando's ancestor, he would become a menace instead of a blessing?

Suspiciously now Orando watched his companion, noting with relief the transition of the savage facial expression to that of quiet dignity that normally marked the stranger's mien. He saw the little monkey that had fled to the trees during the battle return to the shoulder of the *muzimo,* and considering this an accurate gauge of the latter's temper he approached, though with some trepidation.

"Muzimo," he ventured timidly, "you came in time, and saved the life of Orando. It is yours."

The white was silent. He seemed to be considering this statement. The strange, half-bewildered expression returned to his eyes.

"Now I remember," he said presently. "You saved my life. That was a long time ago."

"It was this morning, Muzimo."

The white man shook his head and passed a palm across his brow.

"This morning," he repeated thoughtfully. "Yes, and we were going to hunt. I am hungry. Let us hunt."

"Shall we not follow the one who escaped?" demanded Orando. "We were going to track the Leopard Men to their village, that my father the chief might lead the Utengas against it."

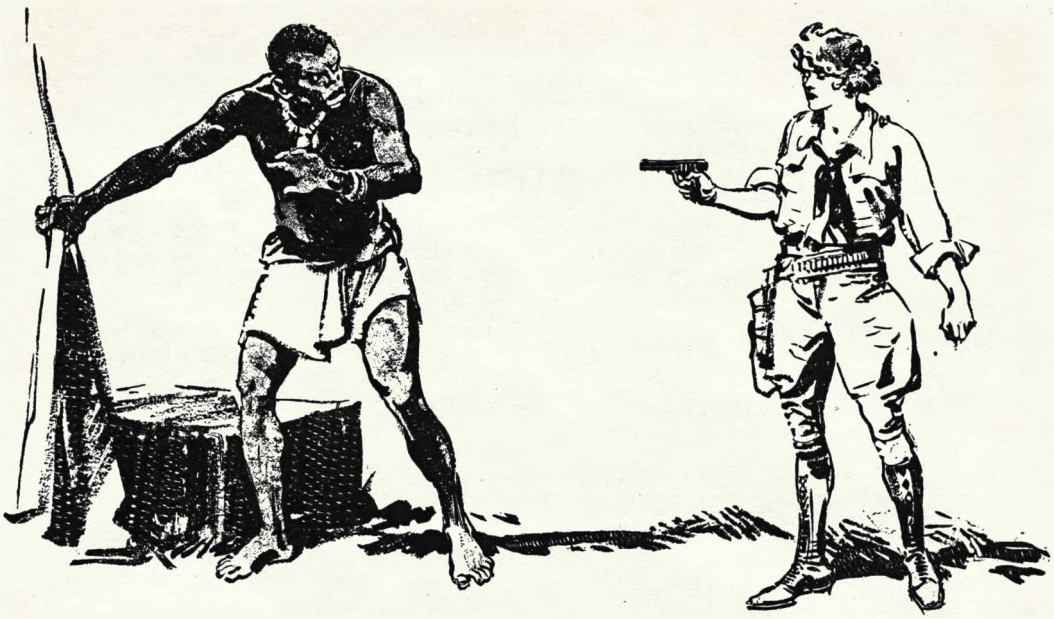
"First let us speak with the dead men," said Muzimo. "We shall see what they have to tell us."

"You can speak with the dead?" Orando's voice trembled with awe at the suggestion.

"The dead do not speak with words," explained Muzimo; "but nevertheless they often have stories to tell. We shall see. This one," he continued, after a brief inspection of the corpse of the man he had killed last, "is the larger of the two young men. There lies the tall thin man, and yonder, with your spear through his heart, is he who limped—an old man with a crippled leg. These three, then, have told us that he who escaped is the smaller of the two young men."

Now, more carefully, he examined each of the corpses, noting their weapons and their ornaments, dumping the contents of their pouches upon the ground. These he scanned carefully, with particular attention to the amulets.

"Surely there is no doubt but that these were the killers of Nyamwegi," said Orando.



"Last night it was dark; I could not see well, so I only shot Golato in the arm. This morning I can see to shoot straighter!"

"There was never any doubt," asserted Muzimo confidently. "Their filed teeth have told me that they are eaters of men; their amulets and the contents of their pouches have told me that their village lies upon the banks of a large river. They are fishermen; and they fear Gimla the crocodile more than they fear aught else. The hooks in their pouches tell me the one and their amulets the other. From their ornaments and weapons, and by the cicatrices upon their foreheads and chins, I know their tribe and the country it inhabits. I do not need to follow the young warrior; his friends have told me where he is going. Now we may hunt. Later we can go to the village of the Leopard Men."

"Even as I prayed today before setting out from the village, you have protected me from danger," observed Orando, "and now, if you bring the animals near to me and give me meat, all of my prayer will have been fulfilled."

"The animals go where they will," responded Muzimo. "I cannot lead them to you, but I can lead you to them; and when you are near, then perhaps I can frighten them toward you. Come."

He turned back, to the trail down which they had followed the Leopard Men, and fell into an easy trot, while Orando followed, his eyes upon the broad shoulders of his *muzimo,* with the spirit of Nyamwegi perched upon one of them. Thus they continued silently for a half hour, when Muzimo halted.

"Move forward slowly and cautiously," he directed. "The scent-spoor of Wappi the antelope has grown strong in my nostrils. I go ahead through the trees to get upon the other side of him. When he catches my scent he will move away from me toward you. Be ready."

Scarcely had Muzimo ceased speaking before he disappeared amidst the overhanging foliage of the forest, leaving Orando filled with wonder and admiration, with which was combined overweening pride in his possession of a *muzimo* such as no other man might boast. He hoped that the hunting would be quickly concluded that he might return to the village of Tumbai, and bask in the admiration and envy of his fellows as he nonchalantly paraded his new and wondrous acquisition before their eyes. It was something, of course, to be a chief's son, just as it was something to be a chief, or a witch-doctor; but to possess a *muzimo* that one might see, and talk to, and hunt with —ah, that was glory transcending any that might befall mortal man!

Suddenly Orando's gloating thoughts were interrupted by a slight sound of something approaching along the trail from the direction in which he was moving. Just the suggestion of a sound it was, but to the ears of the jungle hunter it was sufficient. You or I could not have heard it, nor, hearing it, could we have interpreted it; but to Orando it bore a message as clear to his ears as is the message of a printed page to our eyes. It told him that a hoofed animal was approaching him, walking quickly, though not yet in full flight. A turn in the trail just ahead of him concealed him from the view of the approaching animal. Orando grasped his spear more firmly, and stepped behind the bole of a small tree that partially hid him from sight of any creature coming toward him. There he stood, motionless as a bronze statue, knowing that motion and scent are the two most potent stimuli to fear in the lower orders. What wind there was moved from the unseen animal toward the man, precluding the possibility of his scent reaching the nostrils of the hunted; and as long as Orando did not move, the animal would approach fearlessly until it was close enough to catch his scent, which would be well within spear range.

A moment later there came into view one of those rarest of African animals, an okapi. Orando had never before seen one of them, for they ranged much farther to the west than the Watenga country. He noted the giraffe-like markings on the hindquarters and forelegs; but the short neck deceived him, and he still thought it was an antelope. He was all excitement now, for here was real meat and plenty of it, the animal being larger than an ordinary cow. The blood raced through the hunter's veins, but

outwardly he was calm. There must be no bungling now; every movement must be perfectly timed—a step out into the trail, and simultaneously the casting of the spear, the two motions blending into each other as though there was but one.

At that instant the okapi wheeled to flee. Orando had not moved; there had been no disturbing sound audible to the ears of the man; yet something had frightened the quarry just a fraction of a second too soon. Orando was disgusted. He leaped into the trail to cast his spear, in the futile hope that it might yet bring down his prey; but as he raised his arm he witnessed a scene that left him gaping in astonishment.

From the trees above the okapi, a creature launched itself onto the back of the terrified animal. It was Muzimo. From his throat rumbled a low growl.

Orando stood spellbound. He saw the okapi stumble and falter beneath the weight of the savage manbeast. Before it could recover itself a hand shot out and grasped it by the muzzle. Then steel thews wrenched the head suddenly about, so that the vertebræ of the neck snapped. An instant later a keen knife had severed the jugular, and as the blood gushed from the carcass Orando heard again the victory cry of the bull-ape. Faintly, from afar, came the answering challenge of a lion.

"Let us eat," said Muzimo, as he carved generous portions from the carcass of his kill. He grunted as he tossed a piece of the meat to the black. Then he squatted on his haunches and tore at his portion with his strong white teeth. Cooking-fires were for the effete, not for this savage jungle god whose *mores* harked back through the ages to the days before men had mastered the art of making fire.

Orando hesitated. He preferred his meat cooked, but he dreaded losing face in the presence of his *muzimo*. He deliberated for but a second; then he approached Muzimo with the intention of squatting down beside him to eat. The forest god looked up, his teeth buried in the flesh from which he was tearing a piece. A sudden savage light blazed in his eyes; a low growl rumbled warningly in his throat. Orando had seen lions disturbed at their kills. The analogy was perfect. . . . The black withdrew and squatted at a respectful distance.

CHAPTER IV

Sobito, the Witch-Doctor

TWO white men sat before a much-patched, weather-worn tent. They sat upon the ground, for they had no chairs. Their clothing was, if possible, more patched and weatherworn than their tent. Five blacks squatted about a cook-fire at a little distance from them. Another black was preparing food for the white men at a small fire near the tent.

"I'm sure fed up on this," remarked the older man.

"Then why don't you beat it?" demanded the other, a young man of twenty-one or twenty-two.

His companion shrugged. "Where? I'd be just another dirty bum, back in the States. Here, I at least have the satisfaction of servants, even though I know damn' well they don't respect me. It gives me a certain sense of class to be waited upon! But you—I can't see why you want to hang around this lousy God-forsaken country, fighting bugs and fever. You're young; you've got your whole life ahead of you and the whole world to carve it out of, any way you want."

"Hell!" exclaimed the younger man. "You talk as though you were a hundred. You aren't thirty yet."

"Thirty's old," observed the other. "A guy's got to get a start long before thirty. Why, take my dad, for instance—" He fell silent then, quite suddenly. The other urged no confidences.

"I guess we'd be a *couple* of bums back there," he chuckled.

"You wouldn't be a bum anywhere, Kid," remonstrated his companion. He broke into sudden laughter.

"What you laughing about?"

"I was thinking about the time we met; it's just about a year now. You tried to make me think you were a tough guy from the slums. You were a pretty good actor—while you were thinking about it."

The "Kid" grinned. "It was a hell of a strain on my histrionic abilities," he admitted; "but, say, Old-timer, you didn't fool anybody much, yourself. To listen to you talk

He fell into an easy trot down the trail, while Orando followed, his eyes upon the broad shoulders of his *muzimo*, with the spirit of Nyamwegi perched upon one of them.

one would have imagined you were born in the jungle and brought up by apes; but I tumbled to you in a hurry. I said to myself, 'Kid, it's either Yale or Princeton; more likely Yale.'"

"But you didn't ask any questions. That's what I liked about you."

"And *you* didn't ask any. Perhaps that's why we've got along together so well. People who ask questions should be taken gently but firmly by the hand, led out behind the barn, and shot. It would make this a better world to live in."

"Oke, Kid; but still it's rather odd, at that, that two fellows should pal together for a year, as we have, and not know the first damn' thing about one another—as though neither trusted the other."

"It isn't that with me," said the Kid; "but there are some things that a fellow just *can't* talk about."

"I know," agreed the man called "Old-timer." "The thing each of us can't talk about probably explains why he is here. It was a woman with me; that's why I hate 'em. These native Shebas fulfill all my requirements as far as women are concerned, but they offend my olfactories."

"Simple, wholesome, outdoor girls, with cow-dung and lice in their hair," supplemented the Kid. "Just lookin' at 'em would be enough to make me fall in love with the first white woman I saw—let alone smellin' 'em."

"Not me," said the Old-timer. "I hate the sight of a white woman. I hope to God I never see another one as long as I live."

"Hooey!" scoffed the younger man. "I'd bet you fall for the first skirt you see—if I had anything to bet."

"We won't have anything to eat, or anyone to cook it for us if we don't have a little luck *pronto*," observed the other. "It begins to look as if all the elephants in Africa had beat it for parts unknown."

"Old Bobolo swore we'd find 'em here—but I think old Bobolo is a liar."

"I have suspected that for some time!"

The Kid rolled a cigarette. "All he wanted was to get rid of us, or to state the matter more accurately, to get rid of you."

"Why *me?*"

"He didn't like the goo-goo eyes his lovely daughter was making at you. You've sure got a way with the women, Old-timer."

"It's because I haven't, that I'm here," said the other.

"Says you."

"Kid, I think *you* are the one who is girl-crazy. You can't get your mind off the subject! Forget 'em for a while, and let's get down to business. I tell you we've got to do something and do it damn' sudden. If these loyal retainers of ours don't see a little ivory around the diggings pretty soon they'll quit us. They know as well as we do that it's a case of no ivory, no pay."

"Well, what are we going to do about it—manufacture elephants?"

"Go out and find 'em. Thar's elephants in them thar hills, man; but they aren't going to come trotting into camp to be shot. The natives won't help us; so we've got to get out and scout for them ourselves. We'll each take a couple of men and a few days' rations; then we'll head in different directions, and if one of us doesn't find elephant-tracks, I'm a zebra."

"How much longer do you suppose we'll be able to work this racket without getting caught?" asked the Kid.

"I've been working it for two years, and I haven't been nabbed yet," replied Old-timer; "and, believe me, I don't want to be nabbed. Have you ever seen their lousy jail?"

"They wouldn't put white men in that, would they?"

"They might. Ivory-poachin' makes 'em sorer than Billy Hell."

"I don't blame 'em," said the Kid. "It's a lousy racket."

"Don't I know it?" Old-timer spat vehemently. "But a man's got to eat, hasn't he? If I knew a better way to eat I wouldn't be an ivory-poacher. Don't think for a minute that I'm stuck on the job, or proud of myself. I'm not. I just try not to think of the ethics of the thing, just like I try to forget that I was ever decent. I'm a bum, I tell you, a dirty, low-down bum; but even bums cling to life—though God only knows why. I've never dodged the chance of kicking off, but somehow I always manage to wiggle through. If I'd been any good on earth, or if anyone had cared whether I croaked or not, I'd have been dead long ago. It seems as though the devil watches over guys like me and protects them, so that they can suffer as long as possible in this life before he forks them into eternal hell-fire and brimstone in the next."

"Don't brag," advised the Kid. "I'm just as big a bum as you. Likewise, I have to eat. Let's forget ethics and get busy."

"We'll start tomorrow," agreed Old-timer.

MUZIMO—who had once been called Tarzan—stood with folded arms, the center of a chattering horde of natives in the village of Tumbai. Upon his shoulders squatted the spirit of Nyamwegi. He also chattered. It was fortunate, perhaps, that the villagers of Tumbai could not understand what the spirit of Nyamwegi said. He was hurling the vilest of jungle invective at them, nor was there in all the jungle another such master of diatribe.

Also, from the safety of Muzimo's shoulder, he challenged them loudly to battle.

If the villagers were not impressed by the spirit of Nyamwegi, the same is not true of the effect the presence of Muzimo had upon them after they had heard Orando's story, even after the first telling. By the seventh or eighth telling, their awe was prodigious; it kept them at a safe distance from this mysterious creature of another world.

There was one skeptic, however—the village witch-doctor, who doubtless felt it was not good business to admit too much credence in a miracle not of his own making.

The attention bestowed upon this stranger irked him; it also pushed him entirely out of the limelight. This nettled him greatly. Therefore, to call attention to himself, as well as to reestablish his importance, he strode boldly up to Muzimo—whereupon the spirit of Nyamwegi screamed shrilly and took refuge behind the back of his patron.

The attention of the villagers was now attracted to the witch-doctor, which was precisely what he desired. He swaggered before the spirit of Orando's ancestor. Then he addressed him in a loud tone.

"You say that you are the *muzimo* of Orando, the son of Lobongo; but how do we know that your words are true words? You say that the little monkey is the ghost of Nyamwegi. How do we know that either?"

"Who are you, old man, who asks me these questions?" demanded Muzimo.

"I am Sobito the witch-doctor."

"You say that you are Sobito the witch-doctor; but how do I know that your words are true words?"

"Every one knows that I am Sobito the witch-doctor." The old man was becoming excited. He discovered that he had been suddenly put upon the defensive. "Ask anyone! They all know me."

"Very well, then," said Muzimo; "ask Orando who I am. He alone knows me. I have not said that I am his *muzimo;* I have not said that the little monkey is the ghost of Nyamwegi. I have not said who I am—I have not said anything. It does not make any difference to me who you think I am; but if it makes any difference to you, ask Orando." Thereupon he turned about and walked away, leaving Sobito to feel that he had been made to appear ridiculous in the eyes of his clansmen.

Fanatical, egotistical, and unscrupulous, the old witch-doctor was a power in the village of Tumbai. For years he had exercised an influence, sometimes for good and sometimes for evil, upon the villagers. Even Lobongo the chief was not as powerful as Sobito, who played upon the superstitions and fears of his ignorant followers until they dared not disobey his slightest wish.

Tradition and affection bound them to Lobongo, their hereditary chief; fear held them in the power of Sobito, whom they hated. Inwardly they were pleased that Orando's *muzimo* had flaunted him; but when the witch-doctor came among them and spoke disparagingly of the *muzimo* they dared not express their belief in him.

Later, the warriors gathered before the hut of Lobongo to listen to the formal telling of the story of Orando. It was immaterial that they had heard it several times already. It must be told again in elaborate detail before a council of the chief and his warriors; and so once more Orando retold the oft-told tale. Even more courageous became the deeds of Orando, even more miraculous those of Muzimo; and when he closed his oration it was with an appeal to the chief and his warriors to gather the Utengas from all the villages of the tribe and go forth to avenge Nyamwegi. Muzimo, he told them, would lead them to the village of the Leopard Men.

How can Tarzan, aided only by these terrified blacks, wage war against the fearsome Leopard Men? Don't miss the thrilling episodes in the forthcoming September issue.

Orando realized that his *muzimo* required no aid; in a grip of steel the bronzed giant held the two clawed hands, while his free hand grasped the throat of his antagonist.

Up went the monster, half across the sky; it began to lurch and hirple. "Keep quiet," I whispered. "I don't think it'll touch us."

and began patiently to circle the whole place, resolving, literally, to leave no stone unturned in the search for something better than Rafferty's Luck. It takes longer to walk all round an island than you'd think, even if the island is no more than a mile or two across. I spent all day upon the job, eating a biscuit for dinner, and drinking, once or twice, from the little streams that ran out of the crevices. If any of them had tasted ill I should have been glad; but they were all fresh as milk, no tinge of metal in them.

Toward sunset I came upon something that I hadn't noticed before—a cave. It was at the foot of an immense wall of rock; you could not have seen it from above, and the only way of reaching it was the way by which I had come, a painful climb along the narrow glacis of stones on the windward side. The beach and the anchorage were of course on the lee side. Ships wouldn't, for their lives, come up to windward; I was therefore almost sure that nobody, save myself, had seen or visited the cave.

That pleased me—you know how it is. I was glad that I had brought my torch with me—a costly big five-cell, like a searchlight, that She had sent me when I sailed; she hadn't sixpence to rub against sixpence, but she would have given her head away—and so would I; that was why we both were poor, and likely to remain so. . . .

I had a good look at the cave. It was very high; seventy or eighty feet at least. It was not quite so wide, but it seemed to run a good way back. The cold stream of wind that came out of it had a curious smell; I could not describe it to myself, otherwise than by saying that the smell seemed very old. I stood in the archway, in that stream of slightly tainted wind, examining the rocks about the mouth of the cave. There was not much daylight left now, but I could see, plainly enough, that he was small hope of a better find. I kept the torch in r hand as I went on into the interior of the cave; t enough, I thought, to turn it on when I had to; there were no spare batteries on the island.

By and by I began to go backwards; that is, I went on a little way, and then turned to look at the ground I had passed, lit up by the stream of light from the entrance. Coral, old and crumbling underfoot; limestone; a vein of conglomerate. Nowhere any sign of what I sought. It was getting darker; the cave, arching high above me, seemed to veer a little to one side, and the long slip of blue daylight was almost gone. Now, with half-a-dozen steps, I lost it altogether; I stood in complete darkness, with the cool wind streaming about me, and that strange, aged smell, now decidedly stronger.

"Time for the light," I thought. Something made me swallow in my throat, made me press my foremost foot tight to the ground, because it seemed, oddly enough, to have developed a will of its own; it wanted to move back, and the backward foot wanted to swing on its toe and turn round. . . . I will swear I was not afraid—but somehow my feet were.

I snapped on the light, and swung it ahead. It showed a narrow range of rock wall on each side; a block of velvet darkness ahead, and in the midst of the darkness, low down, two circles of shining bluish green. Eyes—but what eyes! They were the size of dinner-plates! They did not move, they only looked; and I was entirely sure that they saw me. If they had been high up, I do not think I should have minded them—much. But they were, as I have said, low down, and that was somehow horrible. Lurking. Treacherous. . . .

I had shot crocodiles by night, discovering them exactly as I had discovered this unnamed monster, by the shine of their eyes in torchlight. But I had had a sporting-rifle to do it with, and knew what I was shooting at. Now I was totally unarmed; the futile shotgun I had brought with me for stray pot-hunting, was up at the bungalow. I had not the vaguest idea what this creature might be, but I knew what was the only thing to do under the circumstances, and I did it: I ran away.

Nothing stirred. Nothing followed me. When I reached the outer arch of the cave, all glorious with sea and sunset, there was not a sound anywhere but the lifting crash and send of the waves upon the broken beach. I stood for a moment looking at the magnificent sky that paled and darkened while one could quickly have counted a hundred. "I shall have to come back," was my thought, "with a charge of dynamite, and a bit of fuse. Shotgun just as much use as a pea-shooter." I told myself these things, but now that I was out of the cave, I could not for the life of me believe in what I had seen. "It wasn't the sort of smell it ought to have been," I said aloud weakly, and kicked the stones about aimlessly with my foot. Something rolled. I looked at it, and it was a skull.

"Peter Riordan," I said, "this is not your lucky day." And I picked up the skull. There were bones with it, all loose and lying about. "I can make a guess what happened to Mr. Bones!" I said, peering through swiftly falling twilight at the skull. It was like a shock of cold water to see that it was old beyond computing—almost fossilized, dark and mossy with the passage of incalculable time. As for the bones, they crackled like pie-crust when I put my foot on them. I could see where they had fallen out of the rock; they must have lain there buried, for a long time.

"I... 't understand," I thought. "Things don't fit together. This is a hell of an island." It seemed good to me to climb the cliff as fast as I could, making for the solid walls of the bungalow, and leaving behind me in the inhospitable twilight those queer bones now unburied, and the cave, and the immense green eyes that did not move.

The bungalow was a good way off; in order to reach it, I had to cross the empty rolling downs on the top of the island, with their long grass that never was still, and their heaps of hummocks of black stone. By this time it was so late that I could only see the stones as lumps of indefinite darkness. Some of them were big even by daylight; by night they looked immense. They were queerly shaped, too; once, when I paused to get breath (for I can assure you I was going hard) I noticed that the biggest one in sight looked exactly like the rounded hind-quarters of an elephant. Only no elephant ever was so big.

I leaned against a boulder, and mopped my face. There was a rather warm wind blowing; it brought with it the sort of scents that one expects by night—the dark-green smell of grass wet with dew, the curious singeing odor of baked stones gradually giving out their heat, little sharp smells of rat and iguana, out hunting. And something else. . . .

"Peter Riordan," I said, "you quit imagining things that aren't there. Rafferty did, and Wilder did." And I propped myself against the stone, and took out a cigarette.

It was never lighted. Just as I was feeling in my matchbox, I looked at the giant boulder again, and as I hope for heaven, I saw it walk away. That is, it did not walk—it hobbled, lurching against the sky.

FOR obvious reasons I didn't light the cigarette, but I put it into my mouth, and chewed it: that was better than nothing. "We aren't going to be stampeded," I said (but noiselessly, you may believe). "We are going to see this through." And, being as wise as I was brave—perhaps a little wiser—I got inside a sort of pill-box of loose stones, and peered out through the openings. By this time it was as dark as the inside of a cow; you could only see stars and stars, and the ink-black blots made against them by one thing and another. And the great black thing that wasn't a boulder, and wasn't an elephant, went lurching and lumbering, smashing through Orion, wiping Scorpio off the sky, putting out the Pointers where the Cross was waiting to come up; it seemed to swing all over the universe.

"It's chasing something," I thought.

It was. One could see it tack and turn with incredible swiftness, swinging behind it something that might have been legs and might have been a tail. Clearly, it was hunting, like the rats and the iguanas, and now I could see—or thought I could see—the thing it hunted: Something very small, compared with the enormous bulk of the beast; something that dodged in and out of the stones, running for its life. A little, upright thing with a round head, that scuttled madly, squeaked as it ran. . . .

Or had I fancied the squeak? The whole amazing drama was so silent that I could not be sure. It seemed to me that if there had been a cry, a queer thin cry, I had heard it inside my head, not outside. I can't explain more clearly, but there are those who will understand. At any rate, I was sure the thing had cried, and that it had cause. The end was approaching.

There was another frantic doubling, another swing round of the immense hobbling beast, and then the little creature simply was not—and the enormous shadow had swept to the edge of the cliff and over, and was gone.

I FELT my forehead wet. My breath was coming as quickly as if it had been I who had squeaked and doubled there, out among the night-black grasses and the stones... The shadow! They who died had seen shadows.

"But," I found myself saying argumentatively, to the silent stars, "I am real, and that wasn't. It's like things in a dream, when you know the railway engine can't run over you, because it isn't really there."

Something obscuredly answered: "Rafferty is dead, and Wilder is dead. Death is real."

I got out of the pill-box. "I shall say the multiplication table all the way home," I told myself. And I did. But when I had got home to the bungalow, I said something else—I said a prayer. "Perhaps *they* didn't," I thought. Then I went in, and cooked my supper. It was quite a good supper, and I slept very well.

Next morning nothing seemed more impossible than the things that, I was assured, had not happened last night. All the same, I decided to go and have another look at the cave, with plenty of dynamite, and the shotgun, for what that might be worth. I could not forget that Beth, who would give her head away—and who had given her heart—was waiting for that brick house, and that little car, and those Sunday mornings on the surf beaches. And I was resolved that she should not miss them.

It was now about ten days since I landed, and I began, for the first time, to count the days that remained. France would have to reach London, find a simpleton who would finance his venture (I knew he'd do it—he could have squeezed money out of a concrete pillar), return to Australia, and make his way to the island. Six weeks; three weeks; six weeks; three or four weeks. Nineteen in all. And I had at one week and a half behind me. There

remained seventeen and a half. Four months and a half. A hundred and twenty-two days, if I succeeded in keeping my senses. If I did not, it was a hundred and twenty-two minus *x*.

I could see the *x* in front of me; a black, threatening thing, big as a garage door. But I defied it. "You won't get *me*," I said. "I'm bound for Bondi and the brick bungalow." And, whistling "Barnacle Bill" to keep my spirits up, I began to cut lead piping into slugs. "Ought to have brought a rifle," I thought, "but never mind; I can do something with these and a bit of dynamite and a fuse."

It took me about fifteen minutes to cut up the slugs. When I raised my eyes from the table on which I was working, I saw, through the window of the cottage, a steamer—a small trading-boat with a black and white funnel. She was out in the roadstead, and she was just preparing to let go anchor.

I let off a shout; you should hear a Clare man do it!

"X, I've got you," I cried. "Dead as a doornail—stabbed with your own beastly minus!" And I sent the lead pipe flying across the floor. I just had to make a noise.

In the roadstead, the little steamer was making a terrible row with her roaring anchor-chains, and a whaleboat was rapidly being lowered. Within ten minutes, France and I were shaking hands.

"Never went to London at all," he told me at the top of his voice. "Got the whole lump of expenses right in Sydney, from two or three splendid chaps who were staying at my hotel. Loads of money. Country fellows."

"They would be," I thought, remembering France's local reputation.

"Brought the machinery up with me. Brought a geologist. Get a start, get a nice report, go down again and float the company."

"Leaving me in charge?"

"That's right."

"It isn't—not by a mile! France," I said, looking him straight in the eyes,—he had candid, jolly blue eyes, the little beggar, and he had a smile under his toothbrush mustache that would have wiled cash out of a New York customs-officer,—"France, I don't like this affair of yours any too well, and I'd prefer to be out of it." For I knew, now, that the little car and the Sundays in the surf would have to come by some other road.

"Got the wind up?" he asked, cocking his hat on one side of his head, and looking at me impertinently.

"I don't know about that," I said,—and indeed I did not know; it was a puzzling matter,—"but I do know that there isn't enough payable copper here to sheet a yacht."

"Oh, you're no expert," he said easily. "Let me introduce Mr. Rattray Smith, our geologist. Mr. Peter Riordan."

"Why not a mining engineer?" I asked curtly, glancing with some distaste at the academic-looking youth who had followed France out of the boat.

"Came too high," explained France with a charming smile. "Smith knows copper when he sees it."

"I reckon he knows which side his bread is buttered on," I commented, without troubling to lower my voice overmuch. I simply could not stand that geologist; he was such a half-baked looking creature, fairly smelling of chalk and blackboards.

"Quite," was France's answer. "And he's got all sorts of degrees; look lovely on a prospectus."

"Maybe," was all I answered. I heard afterwards that Smith's degrees were more showy than practical, from our point of view—B.Sc., F.G.S., and something else that I forget; palæontology was his special game, and he knew next to nothing about metals. France had got him cheap because he had been ill, and needed a change. France, it appeared, meant to make full use of Mr. Rattray Smith's shining degrees in the forthcoming prospectus; meantime, as he somewhat coarsely put it to me, he intended to "stuff the blighter up for all he was worth."

"You go and take him for a walk," he said to me now. "Show him the workings, and help him with his notes. I've got to see the machinery ashore."

I didn't want to see that machinery land; I knew only too well what it would be—old, tired stuff that had been dumped on half-a-dozen wharves, for the deluding of share-holders, in many places; stuff never meant to be used, only to be charged at four times its value in expense accounts. . . . I took Smith to the workings; showed him the ore, lowered him down the shaft, displayed the various tunnels. I said not a word. He could delude himself if he liked; I meant to have no hand in it.

Perhaps he was not such a fool as he looked; perhaps, I cynically told myself, he was more knave than fool. At all events, he said very little, and took only a few

Round the corner, we stopped. The eyes were there—low down, unmoving, unwinking in the ray of the torch. "Hold the torch," I whispered.

They were out of the pill-box, like rats breaking cover, and I after them. . . . The big shadow had turned toward us, suddenly rearing itself up until it stood a hundred feet high.

notes. I began to like him better, in spite of his horn-rimmed glasses and his academic bleat.

"Look here," I said, as we were returning to the house. "I've been all over the damned island, and I'll eat any payable stuff you find."

"*All* over?" he said, cocking one currant-colored eye at me through his glasses.

I began to think he might not be such a fool as he looked. Clearly he had sensed a certain reserve that lay behind my speech.

"Well," I said, not caring enough about him to mince words, "there's a warren of caves down on the wind'ard side of the island and I tried to investigate the biggest one the other day."

"What did you find? Any indications?" he squeaked.

"Couldn't tell you. I was stopped by a beast. Nightmare beast, with eyes as big as plates. Hadn't a gun with me, but I meant to have a go at it later on."

"But that's—but that's most—" he began to stammer eagerly.

France, who had gone to the house for a drink, looked out of the window, and interrupted me.

"What's this about beasts, and why are you making slugs for your silly old shotgun?" he demanded.

I told him.

"You've got 'em too," was his only comment.

This, for some reason or other, made me desperate.

"That's not the whole of it," I said. "Last night I saw a thing as big as six elephants chasing a little thing in the dark."

"You would," he said. "Have a hair of the dog that bit you, and take some bromide when you're going to bed."

"Look here—will you come down to the cave yourself?" I pleaded.

"With all that machinery to land, and the ship bound to clear before sundown? Not much."

"Very well. Will you come for a walk on the top of the island after dark?"

"Oh, yes," he said, casually. "Never saw anything when I was here for a fortnight, and don't expect to now. But I'll come."

"Was it moonlight when you were here?" I shouted after him as he started for the beach.

"What's that to— Yes, I reckon it was."

Rattray Smith began deliberately: "The influence of light on all these phenomena—"

"What d'ye mean?" I asked. "Are you a spiritualist? Surely you couldn't be."

"In the excellent company of Sir William Crookes and Sir Oliver Lodge, I certainly could," he answered. "I suppose you think that the modern man of science is necessarily skeptic, like his—his—"

"I think he believes either a darn' sight too little, or a devilish sight too much, if you ask me," I said. "But wait till tonight."

We waited. And after dark, we all went up to the top of the island and posted ourselves in the "pill-box." There was an enormous sky of stars above us; all round us the faintly smelling, feebly rustling grasses, and standing up among them, big as cottages and railway cars, were the silhouetted shapes of gigantic rocks.

I HAD thought we might have hours to wait, and after all might see nothing; but I was wrong. We had not been in the pill-box ten minutes, before a whole mass of stars before us went suddenly black. It was just over the biggest of the cottage-sized rocks, and I had a nasty idea tnat the rock itself—or what we had thought to be rock—was part of the rising mass.

Have you ever seen an innocent stick turn into a serpent, a log in a river show sudden crocodile-eyes and swim away?

If you have, then you will know how I felt.

Up went the monster, half across the sky; and now it began to lurch and hirple with that strange movement I had noted before, covering immense areas of ground with every lurch. I heard Rattray Smith draw in his breath with a sort of whistling noise.

"I don't think it'll touch us," I whispered, with my lips on his ear. "Keep quiet."

"Man," he said. "Oh, man!" and seemed to choke.

France kept quite still.

I smelled the queer smell of it, not the sort of smell it should have been; strangely old and non-pungent. I saw a small shadow, round-headed, come out of nowhere and scuttle away. I saw the great shadow hunting it. Smith saw too; for some extraordinary reason, he was crying, in broken, half-suppressed sobs.

"I don't reckon it can—" I began, in a cautious whisper. He interrupted.

"Man," he said, "you—you—don't know. I've seen discarnate spirits; I've seen— I— No matter. This is beyond everything one ever— *Woop!*"

THEY were out of the pill-box, like rats breaking cover, and I after them, going I didn't know where. I had seen what they had—and even though I didn't believe it, I ran. The big shadow had turned toward us, suddenly rearing itself up, up, until it stood a hundred feet high among the stars. It leaned a little forward, like something listening; it was semi-erect, and in its enormous forepaws it held a small dark thing that kicked and then was still.

"I—I—" stuttered Rattray Smith as we ran. "Discarnate dinosaur—spirits if they get angry— Where's the house?"

"Wrong way," I panted, seizing his elbow. I had caught a pale gray glimmer in front of us, and realized we were heading for the sea. We stopped and looked back. Something immense rocked heavily against the stars, coming up with appalling swiftness. I saw that it was between us and the bungalow. Not that that mattered; by its size, it could have cracked the bungalow like a nut—and that it meant, for sport or for spite, to drive us over the cliff. I knew—I don't know how—that it was powerless to treat us as it had treated the little black ghost of prehistoric man, in that strange reproduction of an age-old drama, but that it was an evil thing, and would harm us all it could. And I knew too, in the same swift enlightening moment, why one man of the two who died had fallen over the cliff, and why another had slain himself. The last had not been able to endure this terrible rending of the veil. . . .

"Smith," I panted, "stand your ground; you'll break your neck. It can't harm us. It's only the fear."

"Discarnate spirits—" he babbled. I did not heed him. I was busy doing what the soldier did for Joan of Arc, in her evil moment—making a Cross of two sticks, with a stem of grass twisted round them. I held it in my hand, and I said—no matter what. Those who know will know.

By ever so little, the giant shadow missed us, lurched forward and with one toppling leap, went down the cliff.

"Come on," I shouted to Smith and France, though I could not see the latter. "I've got my torch and a plug of dynamite; we'll see the whole thing through."

"What are you going to do?" squeaked Rattray Smith.

"Put out those eyes in the cave," I shouted. "I was exhilarated, above myself—as one used to be in the war. I scrambled down the cliff in the transparent dark, feeling my way; slightly surprised, but not much, to hear Smith coming after, I found the cave.

We stood for a minute gaining breath, and looking about us. There was nothing to be seen anywhere; nothing to be heard but the steady slapping of waves on the beach.

"I'm with you," declared Smith squeakily. "As a palæontologist—"

"A which?" I said. "Don't trip over those bones, and don't stop to pick them up now!"—for he was stooping down and fumbling. I added, without quite knowing what I meant, "The dinosaur's ghost didn't have eyes." But he seemed to know; he said: "That makes it all the more—" I did not hear the rest; we were too busy picking our way.

Round the corner, we stopped. The eyes were there. Low down, unmoving, unwinking in the ray of the torch as I threw it on. Big as plates; blue-green, glittering—

"Hold the torch while I fix this," I whispered. Smith took it; his hand was unsteady, but I could not blame him for that. I bit off my fuse as short as I dared; lit it, and tossed the plug. . . .

There was a boom that almost cracked our ear-drums; immediately after, stones and dirt came smashing down in such quantity that we found ourselves staggering wildly, bruised and cut, beneath a hundred blows.

"Are you hurt?" I called to Smith.

"Bring your damned torch here," was his only reply.

I came forward, and found him on hands and knees in the midst of an amazing raffle of half-fossilized bones; some of them were as big as the masts of a ship, though partly smashed by the explosion. Almost falling loose from the cliff above our heads was the most astounding skull I had ever dreamed of, a thing far bigger than an elephant's, with huge eye-sockets set well forward, and the tusky jaws of a tiger. Behind the eye-sockets, as I waved the torch, shone a mass of something vivid, greenish blue.

"Oh, God," cried Smith,—who didn't believe in God,—"you've broken up the finest dinosaur skeleton in the world!"

I was too busy to trouble about him. I had climbed a little way up, and was scraping at the mass of iridescent, green-blue crystals in which the skull was set; which, through uncounted ages, had sifted down through various openings, filling the huge orbits of the eyes, so that they gleamed in the light as if alive.

"I'd break up my grandmother's skeleton," I told him joyously, "if it was bedded in copper pyrites. We've found the paying stuff at last!" It was not the dark roof of the cave that I saw, as I said that; not the glittering pyrites, or the amazing great bones, or the scrambling, complaining figure of Smith on the floor of the cave. It was St. Mary's in Sydney, on a summer morning, with a white figure coming up the aisle "on her father's arm"—to me!

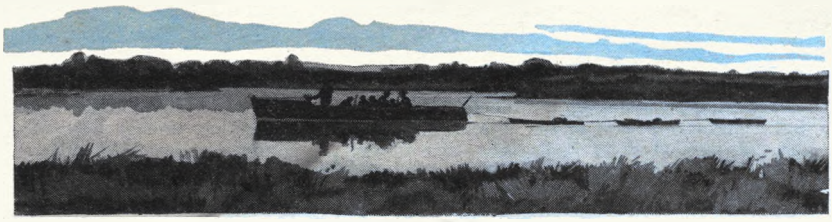
RATTRAY SMITH, I understand, has written a great deal for different scientific magazines about the curious happenings on Cave Island. In one, he told the story of the great skeleton; how it was found, and where, and how put together again. He doesn't say what he got for it, but I believe that was something to write home about; good dinosaurs come high, with or without incredible ghost stories attached. The spiritualistic magazines simply ate up his account of the prehistoric ghost and its sinister activities. Especially did they seem to like his conclusions about the skeleton acting as a sort of medium, or jumping-off point, for the apparition. He may have been right or wrong there; at all events, it is certain that after the removal of the bones, no one engaged in working the mines ever saw or heard anything remarkable.

France? We found him in the bungalow, drunk, and under a bed. He says, and maintains, that we were all in the same condition. A man must save his face.

Murder on the Eastern Shore

A distinctly unusual mystery story, told in a novel fashion by one of the ablest of American writing-men.

By HENRY C. ROWLAND



ABOUT the time I was beginning to get round again, nearly stone deaf and subject to brief lapses of memory, Marcus Trucy came in to see me. We had rowed on the same crew the year I entered and he graduated from the Academy, and I had not seen him since then. I knew of course that he had resigned from the Navy and gone business man.

My crash when I had fouled the pylon and knocked off a wing had left me hopelessly crocked and retired on a stipend. Naturally I was feeling pretty low and sometimes wished that I had been killed outright, instead of only half. No bones had been broken except in my head, but that was plenty. I had to watch my temper to keep from being pronounced unsafe to roam at large, and stuck under guard.

After a casual sort of greeting I liked better than the sympathy I was all fed up on, Marcus picked up a pad and pencil that I preferred to my clumsy ear-phones, and wrote: *"I've come to offer you a job in my advertising and publicity business."*

"What's that?" I asked.

"He jotted down: *"Writing ads and rustling contracts. Your social and family connections ought to make you worth $100 a week to me."*

"You see how it is," I said. "I'm deaf as a lamp-post."

"Some lamp-posts aren't," he wrote. *"They have phones installed, and all of them shine. My present staff is mostly dumb. That's worse."*

"Your advertising prospects couldn't talk to me," I said. *"They can all write. The novelty is refreshing. There's too much talking anyhow. Why not try it?"*

Of course I took him on, and did pretty well with it, even when advertising, like most other business, was getting it on the chin. Marcus had made a success from the start. He would, being that kind. He was one of the few forehanded out-smarters who had stepped from under just before the market top-hammer came down onto the decks.

After I had been with him a few weeks, one of his reasons for signing on a crock like myself became more clear. He wanted to widen his social acquaintanceship with the sort of people I had always known. Then one day he wrote:

"Could you get me a bid as house-guest to the wedding of your cousin Doris Claiborn, without straining? I knew the twins my last year at the Academy."

"Can do," I answered. There was nothing against Marcus that I knew about, and I felt that I owed him quite a lot. My family and friends felt that way about it too.

The Claiborn twins, Doris and Darthea, were my distant cousins, and I had always been fonder of Darthea than of any girl I knew. She was in fact most of the reasons why my crash had left me so bitter. I was hope-

Illustrated by
J. G. Chenoweth

lessly out of the class she ran in, now. Besides being deaf and unstable of temper, I had been subject to lapses of self-awareness, a sort of amnesia. These were getting less frequent, but still occurred at long intervals.

As youngsters, the twins had made a silly pact not to marry until both were ready to sign up. But now Doris had weakened—whether she was so much in love, or because Darthea urged her to carry on. She was to marry Shelton Randolph on New Year's Day, at their old homestead down on the Eastern Shore. That was good, because Shelton was an ace and one of our crowd, and he had a brother-in-law who was K. O. of several acres of cigarette-factory that made the brand much of the coughing world favors. Shelton was due to step into a high-salaried job as chief of staff.

WE ran down in Marcus' gorgeous car and found the household in gala rig, though the show was not big, quantitatively. Marcus was surprised, I think, to find the old place so barren of costly modern accessories. In summer the gardens were beautiful, and the place was on the show list; but now in the dead of winter it looked a bit bleak, almost shabby.

There was nothing of that sort about Darthea. Some savant has explained why twins are apt to be beautiful; I forget the reason, but this case helped to prove it. She was lovely, fairly tall, slender-bodied but full-limbed. Her face was a little on the boyish side, with big well-spaced gray eyes that gathered in the slack of what she saw and held it, and there was a sort of tug-of-war going on between her frivolous nose and wide firm mouth. Some horsy person had described the twins' coloring as "chestnut-bay," and it fitted.

The Judge and Cousin Mary, who was fragile and dainty, received Marcus cordially. I could see that he made a good impression. It had not needed the standing Act of Congress to make him a gentlemen, so far as could be discovered, and his business activities of the past five or six years seemed to have put a fine edge to his Navy training instead of blunting it.

Marcus had always been keen and one-idea-ed, about success. I don't think he had ever cared much about his credits of student or athlete or officer. Abstract ideas like patriotism and glory, *esprit de corps* and authority of rank probably left him indifferent. He was a constitutional go-getter in a cool, efficient way. This had kept us from becoming very clubby.

Darthea said to me later: "He's still nearly the best-looking male human being I ever saw. What's his soft spot?"

"They're all hard ones, I should say. Business first, and good."

"Well, anybody who can make it pay to advertise these days has got to be super-good. Can't you get him to give me a job too?"

"What do you want of a job?"

"The pay-envelope. This family is hard aground. All the assets are in sight."

"No money?"

"What did you call that stuff? It's so long since I've seen any that I forget the name. We were cracking on under full canvas and got caught aback and lost our sails. I've been thinking of the old spinning-wheel."

"Is it really so bad?"

"Dick, it's terrible. Unless something happens, and I can't see what, we shall have to start house-wrecking. Sell a picture or tapestry, or drag out some of the box-hedges."

"No good, Darty. Nobody's got any money to spend on those merely decorative things."

She was talking into the ear-phone I hated to use, and seldom did, a contraption like a doctor's stethoscope with a loud-speaker to holler into. I got some of it and guessed the rest. Marcus was in the big hall talking to some people. Darthea could see him from our alcove. She kept looking his way.

"Why hasn't that paragon married?" she asked. "He must be about thirty-four."

"Too busy making money. Or perhaps he has been waiting for a chance to marry you. I've been wondering."

"Would you approve, Dick?"

"Not enthusiastically."

"Why not?"

"You need a multi-mil who'd think of you, first, and business afterward."

"Then his business might get taken away from him."

"So might you," I told her. . . .

All hands were mustered a little later, and the wedding went off with a whang. Nancy Carter, beside me, caught the bride's bouquet. The sighting was too high, so that Nancy had to jump for it and lost her balance, and I caught her. We went over in a heap.

"Looks like a portent," I said.

She answered something I couldn't hear, then wrote it on my pad:

"I'm game to fly with you. Ask me."

"Not until I can hear the answer."

"You must learn lip-reading."

"That's no good in the dark," I said.

"It would be with me," she wrote.

MARCUS and I were stopping on for a couple of days, as I knew he loved duck-shooting, and had promised to fill the depleted commissary with wild game. The estate included a big acreage of marsh, and there was a shabby but comfortable old four-room shooting cabin out on a low island, and a local couple named Sanders who lived on a shore farm and were subject to detail for a shooting party.

When stopping here, my quarters had always been a room over the boathouse, with a stove and two beds. That night, after Marcus and I had gone over and were having a final smoke, he wrote:

"Have I your endorsement to try to marry your cousin Darthea?"

It was a contact fuse, but not entirely unexpected. I rallied enough to say: "Why not? If you can think of any reason, please tell me."

He wrote: *"Wasn't sure about yourself. I want to shoot square."*

"You would and are," I said. He had always been direct. "If I ever had any such fond dream, my smack against the pylon woke me up. I'm out. Disqualified for deafness, dangerous temper, biting, kicking, and worst if not worser, lack of funds. That being the last reason, the first few can go to hell. I am not only out, but down. Like a sub that is no longer in the picture, because on bottom."

"Not so deep," he wrote.

I waved this away. "Why the sudden ambition—or isn't it?"

His hand was rapid. I looked over his shoulder and took the communication as it came through. *"The first time I met Darthea was graduation week of my class. The first time I danced with her, I made up my mind to try to marry her, some day."*

"That's no great distinction," I said. "Every man that ever danced with her came to the same decision before all hands stopped to encore, whether he happened to be married or engaged or merely entangled."

He wrote more slowly in his square print: *"My own decision was endorsed more practically four years later. My lawyer drew a will by which she became my sole legatee. This leaves her at present heiress to about three million dollars."*

I had to call this one a center-hit. Just as an unknown poet lover might leave a sonnet to his inamorata, Marcus, a business man, had left Darthea three million dollars.

"Why the romantic gesture?" I asked.

"It's not," he wrote. *"I'm alone in the world. Why leave my hard-earned fortune to somebody I don't like?"*

"That's so. Or why leave it to a Society for the Welfare of Our Alien Enemies? What if she turns you down?"

He wrote rapidly: *"The will would stand until she married. I sha'n't want to marry anybody else. Darthea is perfect, mind and body. I want to endow her, the way you might endow an art gallery, or a garden."*

"I seem to have missed quite a lot about you, Marcus," I said. "You make the average artistic-temperament nut look like a negro painting his flivver purple. Better lose no time in drawing nigh."

He tore a sheet from my little pad, dropped it beside the decanter on the table and wrote: *"Now is my chance. It would have been no good before her twin broke their marriage pact."*

So this was why he had practically made me my job in his concern, I reflected. There had probably been not one grain of the kindness and *esprit de corps* for which Marcus had got a load of credit from others, and gratitude from myself.

There came at this moment a heavy rapping on the door, and Alton Cowrie came in. His family were neighbors, also early dwellers on the land. I had known him off and on from boyhood, and had no use for him, especially after he went in for local politics and got himself elected District Attorney.

His voice was thick and heavy, and I had always to choke back my temper at his bawling and a silly language he seemed to think smart, or else that he put on to irritate me. The sort of signs one might make to a Congo cannibal! He started it now, going through the gestures of putting on a coat and going somewhere.

Marcus said curtly something that might have been: "Cut out the clown stuff, Cowrie," then wrote on the pad: *"Cowrie wants a bunch of us to drive over to his house and dance. Darthea advises going, to leave the house quiet for the older guests to sleep."*

It was a little after midnight. We put on our coats and started. I was last to go out, and about to close the door when Cowrie grinned and pointed at the decanter of corn, then made one of his silly gestures of taking a drink.

"Help yourself," I said, and followed Marcus down the stairs. Darthea and some of the others were waiting outside. Cowrie joined us, and we took three or four cars and drove over to his house, another fine old one about three miles away.

It was a jolly crowd, and during the course of the dance Darthea and I went into a glassed porch that was a winter hothouse for house-plants. As we were alone and I never felt constrained with Darthea, I rigged my bungling earphones so that we could talk.

"I keep looking round for Doris," she said.

"It's tough on you," I agreed. "There's a swarm of flies in my amber too, and all of them are Alton Cowrie. He jams in my hatch and blocks the gangway to content."

"He's not so bad, Dick. You must be friends with him—because—" She hesitated.

"Because why?" I asked sharply.

"I've about made up my mind to marry him."

"Don't sink me without warning, Darthea. Oh, my stricken country! Why?"

"That's one reason. I'm stricken too. Feel cut in half. Alton's got quite a lot, when you know how to take him."

"I never shall, and you simply mustn't." I must have groaned. She pressed her lips against the hard rubber trumpet and asked:

"What do you care, Dick?"

"Everything. In fact, your happiness is all I really care anything about."

"Then why haven't you done anything about it?"

"I have. I'm doing it. Now that I'm all cracked up beyond repair, deaf and all my wires down and dependent on a job I'm apt to chuck any day, it would be too rotten for me to flash you an S. O. S. I've got something better to offer you."

"What?"

"Marcus Trucy. He's got it all over Cowrie, mentally, physically and financially. He's a comer. He's been in love with you since you were a kid. Not both of you, but *you.*"

She was silent a moment, then said: "For the first time it looks to me a little as if your brains were slightly scrambled, Dick dear."

"Wait a minute!" I told her all about it: how Marcus was not entirely the cold-blooded instrument of precision he appeared, but her patient, practical and determined suitor, even if he had kept it to himself. I really put him in a strong spot. Now that I'd learned that Cowrie was so close aboard, all set to grapple, it seemed better to tell her everything.

Darthea stared at me dumfounded, then said: "Dicky darling, your poor old head can't be right."

"Of course it's not, or I wouldn't be doing this John Alden act. But it's right about Marcus. He spelled it all out on my pad. You've been his sole heiress for the past two years."

She laid her fingers on my lips. Like most deaf persons, I was apt to forget, and shout, when all steamed up. Then she asked:

"Why should he have done a thing like that?"

"Because he has been in love with you from first sight. It's not unrecorded for a self-contained man to fall in love with a sweet kid and hold it back until she grows up—and he has more to offer. As for his will, he said he wanted to endow you, as one might a rare collection or a beautiful garden."

"It's preposterous. . . . Why did he tell you, and when?"

"Tonight, just before Cowrie butted in. I got him invited here, and I'm your distant relative. He shot square in telling me. He asked me straight if I objected."

"Do you?"

"Not with Cowrie a favored candidate—and myself a hopeless mess."

"Dick, you're not. You'll come back."

I pulled the trumpet from her lips. "That's out. The doctors have no hope for my hearing, and my wires are all down and jangled so that I get mad easily and sometimes forget who I am, and don't know what everything's about. Any day I'm apt to have a row with Marcus and lose my job."

She grabbed the trumpet. "You're getting better. If you love me, really—"

"Ring off. You're a darling, but I'm out. Don't think of me that way, Darthea—nor of Cowrie. He's terrible. He was stuck in office by the worst crew in this county—"

"Sh'h'h!" It was a warning, but I didn't get it. I took it for a protest in Cowrie's defense, and raised my voice that was already loud enough. "Give me a few days and I'll show you that he's just another dirty politician. I know where to get a line on him."

The look of her face warned me, then. I was sitting with my back against a long French window that was partly open, for the greenery was hot. Somebody was moving away, just outside. I caught a glimpse of a white shirt-front through the aperture as I swung round.

"Who was that?" I asked.

Her lips shaped "Alton." She put them to the trumpet. "He was dancing when we came here. I haven't seen him go past since."

"Oh, well," I said, "everybody knows I sometimes get violent."

"That's the trouble, Dick."

"Don't I know? One bad break, and I'd land in the nuttery. Let's go in and see if he's there now."

Cowrie had beat us back, and was dancing. He passed us with a sort of blank grin, but I noticed that one of his shoes looked as if he'd been cleaning a horse-stall, and I thought of what they put on flower-beds outside of windows.

IT was nearly three A. M., and the party breaking up. Marcus drove Darthea home, and must have taken her for a short blow, for I was bedded down when he came in. His face was hard, and his light eyes brighter than usual.

He picked up the pad and scrawled: *"Why not have warned me that Darthea is in love with you?"*

"She is not," I said. "It's pity. They work alike. Anyhow, it doesn't matter. I'm scrapped."

"Not sure," he wrote, *"unless you start something and land up in Matteawan."*

That was rough. Darthea must have told him quite a lot. I said:

"You're a grateful guy, Marcus. I'd have kept out of it if Darthea hadn't told me that she was blue and desperate and had about decided to marry Cowrie. The bloke is rich. It wouldn't surprise me if he had the weather gauge on my relatives. Got 'em mortgaged to the masthead, maybe."

He wrote in a sneering way: *"Surprised to find the cream of the Old Dominion soured by gay nineties melodrama. Haven't they a racehorse?"*

"What's the matter with the boy that made good?" I retorted. "The brilliant Naval officer that sacrificed his career to stack up the jack? Get yourself another mine-sweeper. I'm through trying to clear the channel for you."

"O. K.," he wrote. *"Better let me sound my own way in."*

"You can just do that thing, damn you!" I shouted. "You can sound your way to hell, for all I care."

He stared at me, frowning. Then his face relaxed. *"I'm sorry, Dick,"* he wrote. *"You're right, I'm rotten ungrateful. Please rule it off."*

"Oh, all right, all right. Look on the table, will you, and see if that pad-sheet with what you wrote about want-

ing to marry her and making her your beneficiary is there." I suddenly remembered how Cowrie had come in when Marcus was writing, and then stopped to get a drink when we were leaving the room.

Marcus rummaged about. "Nothing here," he seemed to say, as if to himself. He stood for a moment thinking, then wrote: *"It doesn't matter. She knows—and she's not so pleased about it."*

WHEN I woke next morning the weather looked as if a north-easter was starting in. That meant good duck-shooting. The birds would be flying. We were to go down to the shooting-cabin late in the afternoon, for a couple of days, if things were right.

Marcus had got up and dressed and gone out without waking me. I rolled over for another nap, as we would be breaking out at about three next morning. While I was dozing, he came in softly, changed and went out again. I saw his riding-things lying about when I got up, and assumed that he had been out for a canter with Darthea.

Soon after two o'clock dinner we took the old family station-car and drove down to the landing. The party was composed of Darthea, Nancy, Constance Blythe, who was a youngish widow and obsolescent chaperon, Lanier Poindexter, Marcus and myself. Cowrie had said he would come down next afternoon, to shoot the day following.

Sanders, the keeper, was waiting with a launch to take us over to the island. The cabin had been a watch-house for the oyster-beds when the Judge cultivated the bottom. It had since been enlarged, with a covered porch tacked on.

After a good supper everybody got sleepy, but we sat up awhile. Until now, Marcus had not come to the fore but stuck on the line of his earlier Navy training: a sort of formality that was not stiff; entirely in the picture, but a flanking background.

Now, for some reason, he stepped into the spot-light and began to talk like a volunteer parlor entertainer. That was all right enough, as it had turned into one of those glue-eyed sluggish parties where everybody is too sleepy to stay up and too tired to go to bed. The member with energy enough to carry on was a sort of benefactor, and the rest content and rather grateful to blink at him and listen.

Of course I couldn't hear his patter, but he seemed for some obscure reason to be in splendid form. Constance was tucked up on a palleted locker, using Lanier for its best upholstery. He was big enough to cushion the wall for half a dozen girls. Nancy was at the other end, wedged into a corner against some boat-cushions, sitting schoolgirl on one leg, the other shapely member hanging down.

Darthea and I were on a swinging couch. There was a camp light that gave a strong white light behind and above us. She had my writing-pad and jotted down something now and then to keep me *au courant*. The wind was rising, and its flaws buffeted the old shack as if somebody outside were hitting it wallops with a bolster.

Marcus was sitting tilted back beside the center table, orating like a candy-drummer in a country store. "What's it all about?" I muttered to Darthea.

She wrote: *"Knocking, principally. Everything in the country from the President up. Depression stuff, and hot."*

He was a good talker, wit and satirist, and in demand for business men's banquets and things. What puzzled me was his choosing this time to orate. He had been under higher pressure than all of us but Darthea. Yet here he was going it like an automatic riveter. His gen-

Marcus was not with them. They looked more puzzled than worried when I reported him disappeared.

eral look was curious, too: eyes bright and glistening, face a little pale, and a general air of nervous exhilaration.

Darthea wrote: *"He's making a finished job of it. Going for the bankers, now."*

"More power to him!" I said. "Most of us owe those birds more than we can ever repay."

But I felt uneasy. There was something about this phase of Marcus that was new to me, and I couldn't get it. He hadn't been drinking. Perhaps he was nervously overtired, and it hit him this way. Or he might have caught a little cold and be feverish, as his narrow nostrils contracted now and then with a sniff. He made me feel like that, hot in the nose.

Then Marcus stopped as suddenly as he had started. He gave a short laugh, glanced at his watch and seemed to apologize for having kept us up. The girls uncoiled and crawled off to their room. Poindexter heaved his big bulk off the locker, took a small drink, shed his outer clothes and flopped onto the locker with a blanket. Marcus and I were swankier and put on pajamas. He laid his pocket gear on a shelf beside the bunk where he was to sleep, then slipped on a dressing-gown and went out onto the covered porch.

I filled a glass of water and put it beside my slung couch, then while at it performed the same service for Marcus. As I set down the glass, I noticed a small vial with his stuff on the chest. It had the label of a coryza-powder, and to play safe if catching a cold, I spilled some into the palm of my hand and sniffed it up, then got on my couch. Marcus came in, said something that might have been about the weather, and doused the light.

Presently I began to feel a sort of gummy tingling that crept over me. I knew what it was. After my crash, when they were scraping and fitting my cranial bones, they used cocaine. The effect was hateful to me and got on my nerves, so that finally I told them to carry on without it.

Marcus' pet kitty had slipped out of the bag! That stuff might be coryza-powder; but if so, it was well dosed with cocaine. I had got a stiff shot, and I was not unused to it. This explained Marcus' flare-up of animation. More than that, I remembered similar blazings that had puzzled me, because he drank seldom and sparingly.

So this was the sort of snowbird I was backing to marry the girl with whom I was hopelessly in love! The discovery did not help or alter my own case, because that was hopeless. But something had to be done about letting Marcus go any farther. I would not tell Darthea what was the matter with him. But if the worst came to the worst—well, I decided not to think about that just now. . . .

Sanders roused us out at three. Hot coffee, and ham and eggs put the spring back into us. The weather was bad enough to make the best of duck-shooting. Our gear was stowed in the sneak-boats that Sanders was to tow to our separate stations with the launch. We paired off; Darthea and Nancy, Constance and Poindexter (she wanted to marry the big lawyer, but never would while Nancy was alive and unwed), and Marcus and myself.

We two were the last placed; on the point of a ten-acre marsh island that was cut up by narrow creeks. It was the best spot for the best shots, as most of the birds would be high-flyers making a passage down the shore. The trouble was retrieving fallen birds, which were apt to go a long way before landing on the island or in the river. When I was a boy the Claiborn boys—one had been killed in the war and the other badly wounded and still invalid out West—had a kennel of Chesapeake Bay retrievers; big yellow woolly dogs that could crouch in the blind all day, sheathed in ice, then dart out and bring in a winged goose.

We had good shooting from the start, and found that by rising to let the birds see us before we fired, they were apt to shift course and fall out in the open water. It was easier to go after them in the boat than to walk over the boggy island.

Late in the afternoon one that I killed did the latter. The speed of its flight, and the strong wind behind it, carried the bird a long way. As the light was failing, it was some time before I found a fine red-head, on the farther edge of the marsh island.

When I got back to the blind, Marcus was nowhere in sight. The sneak-boat was in its niche of stakes crusted with oysters, just as I had left it. There seemed to be no place for Marcus to get, where I could not see him. As it was about time for Sanders to come after us all, I decided that he had reversed the usual order and come round our side of the island first. As I was far over on the other side hunting for my duck, Marcus might have gone with him to get the others. I knew that he was tired and had got enough shooting for one day.

IT was almost dark when the launch loomed up out of the wrack of wind and driving mist. The others were aboard her and their boats in tow, but Marcus was not with them. They looked more puzzled than worried when I reported him disappeared. Poindexter gave an order to Sanders, who made the launch fast alongside, and they all clambered ashore across my boat. The idea was, I saw, to search the island.

Until this moment I had not realized how odd my ignorance must look, about the vanishing of the man with me from a place that one could see practically all over. It was the look on Sanders' face as he leaned close to me to catch a turn of the painter that told me where I stood. Sanders and I had often shot together, and were good friends. I liked that sort of capable quiet bay-man, with his patience and weather-wisdom and deep fund of knowledge about the bay and its shores.

But now the bleak, hard set of his features, and the way his eyes seemed to accuse me for a brief instant and thereafter avoid me, made me realize my position. Sanders knew the practical impossibility of a man's vanishing from the blind. If one had a stroke and fell overboard, the body could not drift away. The others had not yet realized this. Poindexter was probably thinking of quicksand.

It got too dark to search. We went back to the cabin, where we found Alton Cowrie, come down for the next morning's shooting. As District Attorney, he was quite within his right to examine me closely about what had happened Marcus, but I resented his doing it *in camera*, as if I were a murder suspect he wanted to spare, if possible. And that, I immediately discovered, was precisely the case. Fortunately, this made me wary, instead of rousing my rage. I knew he had me.

His first written question showed me what I was up against, and that I must mind my step. It was: *"Can you think of any way that Trucy might have disappeared without your knowledge?"*

"No," I answered. There were ways I could think of, like quicksand or a passing boat when I had been away across the island. But I wanted to draw Cowrie's fire.

"Then how do you explain it?" he wrote.

"I don't."

He wrote: *"When I drove some of them back from the party at my house, Trucy had taken Darthea for a spin. When he went to your room in the boathouse, you quarreled. You told him to 'sound his way to hell.'"*

I nodded, wondering how he knew that. Afterward Nancy told me that they had gone down to see the phase of the tide at three A. M., and heard me through the open upper window.

His next question was: *"Did you not introduce Trucy here as a possible suitor for Darthea, and then decide he would not do?"*

"That's near enough," I said.

Then came a surprise. *"Darthea believes that Trucy disappeared while under the influence of a drug, cocaine. Her brother got the habit from months of painful surgical dressings of his wounds, so that Darthea knows the symptoms backward. She says that Trucy was full of it last night. Did you know that?"*

"Yes," I said. It looked as if Darthea, trying to shield me, had made things worse. I saw what he was getting at.

He next wrote: *"You must realize your position. I do not imply any sordid motive, such as marrying Darthea and sharing the millions left her in Marcus Trucy's will. On the contrary, I believe you were prepared to sacrifice yourself and advise her to marry Marcus, until you discovered his failing."*

"You seem to have got it all," I said, "what with stealing the pad-sheets Marcus had just written, then eavesdropping. So you believe I killed Trucy and hid his body?"

"I am obliged to. I don't think it was murder, but the result of a sudden quarrel. You could plead that and self-defense, or even a shooting accident."

"And my hiding the body?" I asked.

"It may have floated away. We all know that since your flying crash you have been subject to sudden violent angers, and to lapses of memory. The utmost penalty to be imposed upon you if you were to admit a homicide would be commitment to an institution."

"For the criminal insane," I said. "Well, I did not commit homicide, and there was no shooting accident, and I have not any knowledge whatever about the disappearance of Marcus Trucy, whether dead or alive."

He shook his head, then rose. We went back into the big room where the others were sitting gloomily. Darthea asked Cowrie something, to which he evidently answered that there was nothing more to be said for the moment. The girls were ready to leave, and Sanders was waiting to take us over in the launch.

Darthea scribbled on my pad: *"The men are going to stay here and search the island tomorrow morning. You are to come home with us. Leave it to Poiny"* (Lanier Poindexter). *"He will clear it up."*

But for the life of me, I couldn't see how.

SANDERS landed us, and went back to the shooting cabin. We had left the family car standing in the lee of an old tobacco-shed, and got in and started for home, stopping to let Mrs. Sanders out. What had happened—or more likely not knowing just what had happened—had got on her nerves. She did not want to be at the cabin if Marcus' body was brought in. Nobody could blame her.

On arriving, Darthea went into the Judge's study. I don't know what was said, but when he came out, he patted me on the shoulder and said something meant to be reassuring. Darthea did not want me to sleep in the boathouse that night, but I insisted, and went over early.

Undressed and lying on my bed with the light burning, trying to study out the problem, I heard somebody come up the stairs. Then a light rap. "Come in," I called, and was surprised to see Nancy Carter.

"Indiscreet," I protested.

"The bunk!" She took my earphones off the table and seated herself against me on the bed, like a doctor with his stethoscope. "Move over," she said; then: "Alton is out to get you put away where you'll be making toy airplanes for a long hitch, Dicky."

"He has got to find Marcus first," I told her. "The *corpus delicti*."

"All right, D. A.," I said, "I've earned enough cigarette-money to last me through the death-cell."

Nancy said into my ear-phone: "He says he's got a warrant for you, but doesn't want to serve it."

"He got him first," she said decidedly. "I've known Alton Cowrie since he was a rotten tricky kid. He has framed you, Dick."

"Maybe. But I can't see how."

"Easily. He is dictator down here, and that stretch of shore is the rummiest between Eastport and Key West. They were making the stuff when Volstead took his in a nursing bottle. . . . It was nearly dark, and you were across the island, and you are deaf."

"It's possible," I admitted, "and that's about all."

"Alton is mad for Darthea. He knew that she was tottery, what with Doris walking out on her, and the family war-chest clean. Then here comes Marcus with bells on, and you backing him."

"Well, I'm not saying that Cowrie may not have felt like putting him on the spot."

She interrupted: "Either one of you, that could be got alone. He could hang it on the other. If it had been you, he'd have charged that Marcus believed you were double-crossing him with Darthea."

Nancy had an ingenious case, if not one so plausible. It would have been possible for somebody to slip across the river in a boat and get Marcus, unobserved. I could not have heard the shot, what with distance, deafness and the rush of wind. But with all my dislike of Cowrie, I did not believe him capable of such an act, nor if he were, that he would take so much risk of detection. I said:

"Alton might not be above it, but he'd think up some-

thing safer. He knew it was about time for Sanders to be starting after us."

"That's just it. Sanders always goes round the marsh island the other way, and it takes some time to pick up the decoys. They might have watched for him to shove off."

"How could they know that one of us would be over on the island looking for a shot bird?"

"They could have seen that too. Alton knew that you were sore with Marcus. After we came back from his house at about three A. M., he said to me: "Let's go down and see how the tide will be when you put off for the blinds tomorrow morning about this time—"

I interrupted: "And you heard me cussing out Marcus. He told me about that. He has plenty on me, I know; but all the same I don't think he staged any murder."

Nancy persisted: "Darthea told me that he was listening outside the window and heard you tell her that given a little time you could show her that he was a dirty politician."

"Yes, he heard a lot. Enough to put me in deep," I admitted.

"All he wants is Darthea. He counts on her gratitude to him for dropping his case against you."

"I get all that. Love stronger than his D. A. duties."

She said earnestly: "He is clever as sin. No jury is going to return a murder verdict against a man who hit a pylon in a race to keep from crashing a shipmate that jammed him out of his proper place. Alton knows that. The worst of it is that Darthea doesn't think him so bad. I know him better."

"Let's wait and see what Lanier Poindexter thinks about it," I said.

"All right. But I wouldn't put any dirt beyond Alton. He's really not our sort. His family are old-timers and all that, but his grandmother had some Eastern Shore Virginia Guinea blood, and he's a throwback."

NANCY signed off then, and said good-night. I was dead tired and slept through. When I got over to the house next morning, the old butler told me that the Judge had left for Annapolis in his little car. The ladies were not yet up.

"They ought to sleep the clock round," I said. "We got up yesterday morning at three, and the day before, Miss Darthea went to ride early with Mr. Trucy."

"No seh, Lieutenant," said he, in my trumpet. "Misteh Trucy, he done ride alone. I see him sta't."

This was a surprise, as I had taken it for granted that Marcus had ridden with Darthea. There seemed no object in his riding alone. He was not so keen for horse or other exercise as all that, and he had got to bed after three A. M., and knew that we would be breaking out at about that time the next morning.

I had some breakfast and hung around for another hour, when Darthea and Nancy came down. They collected something at the sideboard and then Nancy suggested that we drive down to the landing to learn if there was anything new.

We acted on this suggestion, and as we drew near the landing, saw the launch coming from the island. Lanier Poindexter and Cowrie came ashore. The latter paused to say something to Sanders. Lanier walked in his deliberate unruffled way to where we had stopped.

"Nothing," he said calmly. "We've been all over the ground with a houn'-dog that Sanders got hold of last night. Been searching since daylight."

"Find any quicksand?" I asked.

He shook his head. "There are some soft spots, but scarcely where he could have bogged down entirely if after a crippler in a drain. Besides, the tide was up."

Cowrie had little to say, but he was decent enough to offer me an apology of sorts. "I'm terribly sorry if I appeared to take too much for granted, Dick," he said to all of us, and Nancy repeated him in my phones.

"It did look a bit on that side to me," I told him.

"Well, it's baffling—and I had my official duty to perform," he said, with an apologetic air.

I nodded briefly, and he said something to the others, then got into his handsome car and drove away.

When we got home, Poindexter put me through a thorough questionnaire with pad and pencil. As a lawyer, he was able to make this comprehensive and succinct, without being burdensome. It went as follows:

"How long were you on the far side of the island, looking for your duck?"

"I was out of sight of the blind for at least half an hour."

"Why so long?"

"Tired of shooting. Getting a gun-bruise. Then I had to hunt round in the rushes on the edge for the bird."

"Do you remember looking back at the blind after leaving it?"

"No. I don't believe I did. Couldn't have seen it anyway after I got about a hundred feet from the top of the bank."

"From where you were, across the island, how much of the river could you see?"

"None of it, opposite the island. My angle of visibility cut the bank of the farther shore, or a little higher, perhaps."

"When you got back and found Trucy gone, did you notice anything, particularly, about the boat or blind or water alongside?"

"No, and I looked everything over. The light was getting dim."

"Could your sneak-boat have been moved?"

"It hadn't been. I'd thrown a rolling hitch round one of the stakes to keep the skiff from edging out, and it was the same hitch."

"Of course you could have heard a shot?"

"Not possibly."

Lanier shook his big head. He was baffled. I asked him what Cowrie had to say, and to tell me everything. He wrote:

"You'd better know. He believes you quarreled with Trucy and lost your head and shot him, then shoved off and slid his body overboard, or hid it on the farther shore. He claims you're not entirely responsible for your impulses."

"He would. What do you think about that?"

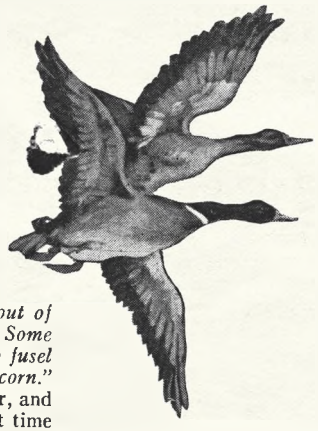
"You're as sane as I am, and you never murdered anybody or killed him accidentally. But I'm stumped."

"Thanks, Poiny. But it does look bad. No boat could have got round that island without somebody seeing it. You and Constance were on the point across river at the island's east end. Darthea and Nancy were in the point-o'-woods battery across the river on the island's south side. The shooting-cabin is on the west end. That covers the waterways all the way round."

Lanier nodded: *"That's the hell of it,"* he wrote.

"What about Sanders?" I asked. "Had he anything to offer?"

"Nothing at all. His wife was starting to get supper ready when he shoved off to collect us. The lamps were lighted, so she couldn't see outside after that."



I asked: "Last night after supper, when Trucy was putting up such a line of talk, did it occur to you that he might be a bit off?"

"Only that he must have had a nip out of his own private stock. Some sports that are used to fusel oil don't like our old corn."

"He wasn't a drinker, and last night was the first time I ever saw him up in the air. Why should he have chosen that time of all others—when we were all cooped up so that he could scarcely help giving himself away? And Darthea present?"

Lanier shook his big handsome head. *"Overtired, maybe. Or he may have felt that it was up to him to entertain a little. He had been keeping in the background up to then."*

"That's not Marcus," I said.

"Perhaps Darthea inspired him," Lanier wrote.

"She'd have inspired him to keep quiet and saw wood. No, it was something else. I'm wondering where he went for that early horseback ride all by his lone."

Lanier pricked up his ears. It was the first he had heard about that, and wanted to know all about it. But there was nothing I could tell him, so for the moment we let it lie.

TO take our minds off the beastly riddle for a little while, we started a game of bridge. The game was going on cheerfully enough in the library when the telephone on a desk behind me began to ring. I reached round for it. Like most deaf people whose hearing isn't altogether gone, I could get most phone messages.

A woman's voice said:

"Mr. Cowrie's secretary speaking. Can Mr. Cowrie speak to Mr. Dick Claiborn?"

"No, he can't. I'm Dick Claiborn."

There was a second's pause, then: "It's highly important."

I interrupted harshly: "My compliments to the District Attorney, and if he wants to speak to me officially, which is the only way I shall ever again talk to him at all, he will have to summons me. Otherwise I have nothing to say to him, now or ever."

Darthea muttered: "Go easy, Dick." I could lip-read that.

"That scum can never square himself with me," I told her.

My head was merely turned a little, so that Cowrie's secretary heard me, as I meant she should. This time her voice was icy—sharp and cold:

"It's not that, Mr. Claiborn. We have just issued a warrant for your arrest."

I hung her up, swung round and asked Lanier Poindexter: "How can Cowrie get out a warrant for my arrest on a charge of murder before he's got proof that there's been any murder?"

Lanier's answer was relayed by Nancy, through the tube. She yelped: "He says the District Attorney can do what he damned well likes, when he's Cowrie; but the chances are he has cooked up something."

"Then let him go ahead and serve it," I said, and picked up my cards.

The game went on. Nancy and I had won about eleven dollars—a lot of money nowadays for some of the old families of the Old Dominion. Then, through the window, we saw Cowrie's swanky car rolling in.

"Finish the hand," I said. "Mine's good."

Darthea's pretty lips framed something that looked like: "So's mine." We played out the hand, and Darthea won. As Lanier was totting up, Cowrie came in. He looked embarrassed but dogged.

"All right, D. A.," I said. "Slobber your trough-full. I've earned enough cigarette-money to last me through the death-cell."

He mumbled something to the others. Nancy said into my ear-phone: "He says he's got a warrant for you but doesn't want to serve it."

"Then he's a liar on a fresh count," I said.

"He wants to talk to you alone," she hailed.

"He never will again. However, since he's infesting us on official business, he can talk through my counsel, Mr. Poindexter. Let's go to the boathouse."

We three adjourned to my room. Cowrie had the same sullen dogged look, and Poindexter had put on his poker face. When we were seated at the table, Cowrie wrote:

"The analysis of cloths with which I sponged out bottom of your sneak-boat shows large quantity of human blood-corpuscles."

Here was a jolt. It looked bad for poor Marcus, and none too good for myself. Cowrie got busy with the pencil again:

"In view of your airplane accident and the mental condition in which it has left you, I am willing to strain my official responsibilities to the State. My offer of yesterday is repeated. You may present (1) a plea of gunshot accident (2) a plea of sudden violent quarrel and shooting in self-defense, with (3) your hiding the body rather than face the court. My prosecution would be no more than perfunctory."

We read this slip; then Cowrie put it into his pocket. He wrote again: *"All I should ask would be for commitment to an institution. But I must insist that you reveal the disposition of the body. As your counsel must be aware, I have enough already on which to indict."*

Poindexter, next me, wrote—so that I could follow, of course: *"I do not admit that you have enough on which to indict. We have evidence to prove that Trucy was under influence of a drug. He might have shot himself by accident or design, and fallen overboard. Or he may have met his death at the hands of some person or persons unknown, in a passing boat. The visibility was very low at the time of his disappearance."*

Cowrie wrote: *"Neither plea is worth consideration. The water is shallow, with no current against the bank. Any boat which might have passed could not have escaped observation by the Sanders couple or others of the party."*

He did not pocket this slip, I noticed. It looked bleak for me. What he said was true. I was the only living

person who knew positively that I had not killed Marcus. And then, with a sort of uncanny acumen, Cowrie covered this very point. He wrote:

"It is known to your doctors and close friends that since your accident you have been subject at intervals to the lapses of self-awareness known as amnesia. It is possible that you may have committed an act that you truthfully deny having any recollection of."

His damned cunning had fastened on one of the very points that he had overheard me tell Darthea must prevent our marrying. I looked at Lanier. His face was composed, but he did not immediately answer this infernal hypothesis.

A horrible doubt gripped me. What if this had really happened? What if I had actually killed Marcus in a brief interlude of amnesia? In a quarter of an hour, a half-hour of a condition like somnambulism? I had been angry and disgusted with him, and with myself for bringing him here. Perhaps emotion, fatigue, the dose of cocaine I had got accidentally the night before, and the repeated concussions of my duck-gun with heavy charges, had done something to my crocked brain.

It was evident that the same doubt was passing through Poindexter's mind. He frowned, drummed on the table with his fingers, then wrote:

"If your last suggestion is correct, which I do not admit, how can you expect my client to comply with your demands?"

Cowrie wrote: *"I can't. It would be enough for you, his counsel, to accept that solution of the case."*

It looked to me as if I was out of the running—come a cropper while the hunt hallooed on. Not so good! I thought of the long years of incarceration in some institution, for the criminal or other insane. It did not matter which. Making toys in a workshop, as Nancy had mentioned.

Though I felt dripping wet, I managed to say calmly enough: "I don't think an amnesia victim would commit a murder unless he was actually a murderer at heart."

Cowrie wrote: *"Perhaps you were that for a short period of time. You were angry and revolted at Trucy. You had realized that you were in love with Darthea. You did not mean that he should marry her, at any cost. Your own welfare said nothing to you. However, that is for the psychopathic specialists to decide."*

GOOD old Lanier must have known what the strain was doing to me. He started to write something, but I interrupted: "Wait a minute. You had me flat aback for a few seconds, Cowrie; but now I come to think, I can remember clearly every moment of the elapsed time from my leaving the blind and crossing the meadow to hunt for that red-head until I got back to the blind and found Marcus gone. I can describe the way I went, and all about it."

"You may think so," he wrote.

"I know so, damn you! I remember getting the duck. It was the only red-head in the bag."

He raised his bushy eyebrows and looked at Lanier as if to say: "About enough, for now. He is getting violent." But my friend and counsel gave him no small change. He wrote quickly: *"Strikes me the point is damned well taken."*

"You bet it's well taken," I said quietly enough, before he had finished. "All the points are going to be taken that way as they arise. We shall fight this thing to a finish, Cowrie, and we don't want any odds from you at all. Go ahead. Do your dirtiest—and that's pretty foul. Make a capital criminal case of it, starting now. Cut out the justice-with-mercy stuff. I don't want it. I don't need it—and I wouldn't take it from you to save my neck. You filthy window-listener! Sneaking back in to dance with the horse-manure from that flower-bed on your splay feet!"

I jumped to my feet. I'd have smashed him if big Lanier hadn't bulged in between. He didn't try to hold or calm me, but merely got in the way. Then he said to Cowrie—if ever I got the motion of a man's lips right:

"Serve your warrant—or get to hell out of here."

Cowrie chose the latter, why I don't know. Perhaps he hadn't any warrant. After all, he lived down there and may have figured quickly that the complete social ostracism a crowd like ours knows how to lay down was too high a price for a rubber-neck gum-shoe triumph that his own stuffed courthouse might throw out on its ear.

ANYWAY, he mumbled something and shifted out. I sat down feeling a bit limp. Lanier tilted me out a shot of corn, then wrote:

"Your round, Dicky. But oh, boy, he had me worried for a minute or two."

"So he had me. Who the hell could have killed Marcus, Poiny?"

"I wish I had the makings of a guess. Some of Cowrie's rum crowd, maybe. There's quite a bunch down here he could send up or across most any time he wanted."

"Nancy's been stringing you," I said. "Nothing in it. Cowrie's neither wolf nor shark nor tiger, but just a big ape that's peered and pried and fingered round until he's found something."

"What?" asked Lanier.

"I don't know! Get on over to the house, Poiny, and see that he doesn't spew up any of his shot-buzzard slime round the girls."

He did that, and I flopped to rest and think. It's Navy habit not to lie down dressed, unless drunk, as you don't want to crumple your uniform, and besides, it's tight. I was in my shorts when somebody knocked. Pulling a bight of the spread over me, I sang out "Come in, sweety!" And one did. It was Darthea. "Smart service," I said. "Here's a beautiful day-nurse just when the patient is pretty low. Come alongside."

She did, seating herself on the side of the bed, as Nancy had done. I took the inverted stethoscope and hung it in my lugs, being tired of reading manuscript. "All set," I said. "Carry on. Got a new one?"

"Only a hunch. I believe with Nancy that Alton knows who killed Marcus Trucy. But I don't believe that Alton ordered it."

"Nor I. He hasn't the nerve. But he sees a hell-sent chance to hang it on me. What's your hunch, Darty?"

"Call it feminine intuition."

"The most horrible thing about a *femme*—for her husband."

"Tell me, Dicky—when Marcus was in the Academy did he have many drags?"

"Much less. Nary woman. His last year, which was the only one where I made contact with Marcus, they called him 'the cadet that walks alone.' Could that have been because of you?"

"Scarcely. I was just seventeen when I first danced with him at his grad' prom. Did you ever hear of his having a girl anywhere?"

"No," I said. "Girls were not on his equipment-list. Outside the day's work, all that interested him was shooting and fishing. He never flocked off with the liberty parties. Every hour of his leave was spent somewhere along the shore—ducks and snipe and sea-trout and things. He used to go to Solomon's Island, I believe."

"That where Sanders came from when Papa engaged

him to look after the oyster-beds. When he married a little later, Papa let them use the farm."

"The old watch-house stuck out there on stilts wasn't such a hot place to take a bride," I said. "And I remember she was mighty pretty."

DARTHEA got up and went to the window. It was almost dark—midwinter and about five o'clock. I said, ironically: "Perhaps some early and ill-used sweetheart of Marcus' learned of his ambition to marry you, and tracked him here and swam over and dragged him out of the boat while I was hunting my dead bird."

She turned round and stared at me, and her lips seemed to form the word, "Perhaps." I wondered if Sanders had any theory that he had kept to himself. He was a typical bay-man—taciturn, but pleasant-spoken when he had anything to say; about forty years old, I thought. His wife looked ten years younger and was still rather pretty, but the way hard-working women get—strong and lean, with face a bit weathered.

Then I remembered how grim Sanders had been when he nosed the launch up to the blind and I had reported Marcus' disappearance. He had only said a few words, that I couldn't hear, of course; but his face had been hard, and with a sort of relentless look. It had suddenly reminded me of my responsibility as the only person with Marcus.

I beckoned Darthea over, and asked her: "Have you any idea what Sanders testified, night before last?"

"No. I don't think Alton questioned him, except to ask if he had seen any boat. Why?"

"Nothing—only that he gave me such a tight look when I said that Marcus seemed to have disappeared. His wife looked all washed out when we came over."

"She did seem sunk. It was pretty bad." Darthea rose and went to the window again. She stood so long staring out into the deepening dark that I got restless.

"What are you trying to study out?" I asked.

She switched on the light, and instead of coming over to use the speaking-tube, wrote something on the pad. This order read:

"Come over to the garage in half an hour. We're going for a ride."

"Where?"

"You'll see," she wrote. *"This is a shot in the dark. Keep it that way."* Before I could ask any more, she went out.

HALF an hour later we slipped out the back way in Marcus' big car. It was dark as pitch, and as thick —fog coming in. Darthea drove, and the car crept out like a stalking tiger, or elephant, gurgling in its throat. The lights were dimmed, and she kept them that way. I felt not only deaf, but dumb and blind.

We crawled slowly along the road to the landing. About half a mile this side, Darthea turned off the road and stopped. We got out and walked back to where a private road put in. Turning down this we saw presently a dim light ahead. I located it as coming from Sanders' house, and did not like it. There was nothing to ask. If he or his wife had seen a boat go up the river, Sanders did not strike me as the sort of man to be scared into silence by Cowrie.

Then, as we drew near the little shore farmhouse, I saw that Nancy meant first to reconnoiter. We passed round to the rear. They had no dog. It was so dark that we had to paw our way along. The only light was coming out of a side kitchen window with the shade half drawn. We crept up to it and looked in.

There was a curious tableau. Mrs. Sanders was sitting with her back to us, leaning on the kitchen table, her forehead on her bare folded arms. Now and then her shoulders twitched. Across the room sat Sanders in an old armchair. He looked like a stone figure in an old Egyptian temple. His face was rather a fine one in its weathered features, and now it was terrible. Drab and drawn in deep gashes, and his eyes sunk back in his head.

It seemed as if we peered in there for several minutes—seconds actually, I suppose. Neither of them spoke or stirred, except that Mrs. Sanders' shoulders heaved from time to time—and I could see that Sanders gripped the arms of the chair with the same spasmodic timing, so the cords of his big hands stood out. His grippings were synchronized with his wife's long-spaced sobs.

Nancy clasped my wrist and led me to the kitchen door. She did not knock, but swung it open and walked straight in, I at her elbow. Sanders sprang to his feet, as an electrocuted man might do if not secured when the jolt hit him. His face contorted as if from the same lethal shock.

Mrs. Sanders squirmed round and stared at us, especially at me, with a terrified look. Her lips opened slightly, as if she gave a sort of moan; then she collapsed. I forged ahead and caught her as she slid out of her chair, then carried her over and laid her on a window settle. The kitchen was old-fashioned, part living-room.

RIGHT here, I shall have to reconstruct all the sounds in the action that followed. Months later, when by a sort of miracle I got my hearing back, Darthea repeated it verbatim, as nearly as she could.

Sanders stood there glowering and swallowing, the way men do when sudden shock makes their throats dry. Darthea asked in her soft but authoritative voice:

"Sanders, why did you kill Marcus Trucy?"

He croaked out:

"Miss Darthea, it was in self-defense."

He had on a mackinaw coat that was too big for him. He tugged it away from his shoulder, then ripped open his shirt and pulled it away from his neck. He was bandaged with a piece of sheet or something. Then he went to a closet under the stairs and hauled out a sheepskin coat that I had once given him. Between the neck and shoulder there was a jagged tear, and black marks from powder-grains.

Sanders said: "When it come time to go after you-all, I remembered how the Lieutenant had been ailin' since his accident, and thought he might be tired settin' in the blind. So contrary to what's customary, I went there first. The launch is muffled down so she runs quiet, and it was blowin' fresh. As I nosed in, I see that Mr. Trucy was alone, and he seemed to have fell asleep. As I drifted her in close, he woke up sudden, and seemed to go plumb off his head. He jumped up in the boat with his gun and swung her onto me and onhooked her. On'y my duckin' down a mite saved my gettin' it smack in the chest. As 'twas, the charge grazed me, like. Jes' brushed me."

"And then you fired back?"

"Miss Darthea, ma'am, I was 'bliged to. I always carry my gun to kill any cripplers I run onto. It was right to hand. Mr. Trucy had sprung up so quick he wasn't balanced good, and the shot teetered the boat a mite, him standin'. He was tryin' to steady himself to give me the other barr'l. I see that, and let him have it."

"Why did he want to kill you?" Darthea asked.

Sanders answered doggedly: "Reckon he woke up sudden an' confused-like, and his idee was I'd come to fix him."

"What for?" Darthea demanded.

The man's eyes turned to his wife, who was coming round. Then he looked squarely at Darthea. "I had reason, Miss Darthea—if ever man had."

She said quietly: "I think I understand. He had known your wife—before you came here."

"Yes, ma'am, and made her plenty mis'able. When I found it out, I went lookin' for him, but he was graduated and gone to sea."

Darthea asked: "Does Mr. Cowrie know anything about all this?"

Sanders looked surprised. "Co'se not, Miss Darthea, or he would have me in jail, and not pesterin' the Lieutenant. He says to me: 'Sanders, it's plain enough what's happened. Since his flyin' accident, the Lieutenant has been subject to fits of violence, and last night he lost his temper with Trucy. He ought to be in St. Elizabeth's,' says he, 'and that's all I'll ask for. Better for him and eve'ybody else.'"

Darthea nodded. "You were certainly tempted, Sanders."

He said with the same passionate earnestness: "If there was on'y me, I'd gone straight to the Jedge and told eve'ything. But I couldn't a-bear havin' pore Lila dragged through the dirt."

"She needn't be," Darthea told him, "if you both keep your mouths shut and act naturally."

He looked puzzled. "But the Lieutenant—"

"I'll answer for him," Darthea said. "He'd want you to keep quiet, on several counts."

"But what if Mr. Cowrie sh'u'd try to come down on him hard?"

"He is not going to. I've an idea that Mr. Cowrie knows a lot more than you think. Or suspects! He isn't honing to face a charge of abuse-of-office and accessory-after-the-fact to pay off a grudge and help interests of his own. Mr. Poindexter will silence him."

I COULD see that Darthea was in great form even if unable to hear what she said. She was not the daughter of a distinguished jurist for nothing. Before the Judge retired from the bench, Darthea loved to go over his cases with him. She knew the language.

Sanders' gaunt tense body relaxed. He went over to where his youngish wife was lying and took her hand. "You hear, Lila honey? Miss Darthea says it's goin' to be all right."

Blindness seemed to be one of my fresh troubles too. Darthea looked like a swimming shape, and a mighty pretty one. But I could see that she was a little unsteady too. I took hold of her wrist and drew her toward the door. "Come on, Darty," I said. That was her kid nickname. "We've got what we came after—and then some."

"Wait," she said, and looked round at Sanders, who was still leaning over his wife. "What did you do with—it?"

He straightened up. "I sunk it out in the deep water, Miss Darthea. Wired to a hundred-weight moorin' that was up on the sho'."

"Right away after?"

"Yes ma'am. Then I sort of wadded up my shoulder so's it wouldn't bleed and went on roun' the island t'other way to get you-all."

"When did you get Mr. Cowrie?"

"I didn't. He rowed over in a skiff I left for him, case'n I got started before he come down."

Darthea nodded. "He let us believe that you went over in the launch to get him."

Sanders muttered: "Wonder why? It wouldn't ha' made no difference."

"Well, keep absolutely still about everything," Darthea said decisively. "Nothing is going to come of it. Nobody is going to suffer. Call it fate, retribution—and quick shooting. It's going to be all right, so don't worry. Good night."

BACK in my room, all four of us summed up. Old Poiny looked as if somebody had died and left him a skyscraper with a penthouse on the top deck, for Nancy and himself to live in. He had been trying to make her see things that way for a good while, and now it was plain enough she thought well of it.

He wrote: *"We've got Cowrie thrown and hog-tied, and hog-tied is right. The Sanders testimony and ours would get him in bad. Holding out on his preliminary examination. But it's a little tough on Dick to suppress the facts of Marcus' fade-out."*

"That be blowed!" I said. "Anybody that wants to believe I would shoot a friend and hide his body is nobody, with me. And what nobody believes is nothing."

"You sound like Epictetus," Darthea wrote. . . .

So that was about all there was to that. Lanier had it out with Cowrie, and told him plenty. Intimated that he believed Cowrie knew a whole lot more than he let on, and that it wasn't about me. The way things had broken, the D. A. was backed up an alley, because he had tried to wring a statement of guilt out of me through my counsel, without stating that he himself had been at large, in a boat and with a shotgun, at about the time of Marcus' disappearance. So that if any suspicion was to be directed toward Sanders, or if he were to confess, Cowrie's action would have been plain enough.

He was glad to drop the case, and call it one of disappearance through unknown accident or self-destruction in a moment of irrationality due to a drug. We found that Marcus' addiction was known to his doctor, and suspected by others. The disappearance would not sound so strange to those in ignorance of the inner workings, and the physical features of the place.

Darling—I mean Darthea—claims that I was born to be hanged, or else a darling of the gods; because not long afterward a car-smash tilted me out on my head and banged it right again—like rapping a watch to set it ticking. They found a tiny spike of bone in the cogs, and that must have accounted for a lot. My hearing came back gradually afterward.

Of course Darthea would not touch Marcus' money, when in time he may be declared officially dead. We don't need it, anyhow, as Doris' husband got me a good job in his cigarette-factory. Chemistry was always my long suit, and I mean to work out a cigarette made with denatured tobacco and containing Vitamin X, for the schoolchildren trade.

WE learned too where Marcus had been on his early ride. He had of course heard us speak of the guide as "Sanders," and had made a reconnaissance to check up. It had not got him anywhere, as Sanders' wife had gone over to the cabin the day before, to clean it up. So Marcus had evidently taken a chance on its being some other Sanders; and then—to get out there and be served by the woman he had treated badly, must have given him an awful jolt. No wonder he was all nerved up!

Judge Claiborn had suspected something close to the truth the moment Darthea had described all that had happened. He knew Mrs. Sanders' history in part, though ignorant of the identity of the man who had let her down. The Judge had driven over to Solomon's Island and found out what he needed, then sat back and waited to see what Cowrie was going to do.

Perhaps Cowrie had all the facts too—and I don't think it was maybe.

Recent discoveries have again demonstrated that the ancient tombs and ruins of Mexico are no less interesting and important than those of Egypt. Here is an intensely dramatic story of an archæological expedition that encounters a great adventure in Yucatan.

By RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS

Illustrated by A. E. Briggs

"The Lord of Death! Must be his temple!" Slinging his machete at his belt, Mr. Jones started back.

Maya Magic

THROUGH the dripping, unending wall of the Yucatan jungle four weary white men, five impassive copper-skinned Indians and nine tick-tormented mules drove a narrow, wavering trail. Fever had taken one white man of the company, and a yellow-jawed snake had killed an Indian, but the survivors thrust painfully ahead.

The rains had come down on that small company a month before schedule, as Yucatan rains sometimes do. The black, viscous mud opened like water to descending hoofs but clung like a steel trap to withdrawing legs. And the two Indians ahead, swinging machete and axe, made slow work of slashing a breach in the steaming green network of vines, lianas, bull-thorn and brush. Tall trees, mahogany, royal palm, ceiba, sapote and gimbolimbo, hung over them, but the shadows were not thick enough to kill the clinging spiny underbrush. Every step was an agony and an achievement.

The last man in the column, the only one who wore a pistol holster, was young, of medium height, muscled like a welterweight, with a powerful, firm-set jaw. Though he wore no spectacles Clive Blythe was a full professor of archæology in a New England college. Professors, like other things, have changed. This one was wary and tight-lipped.

Of these nine men only one, Mr. Jones, stringy and mahogany-colored, who rode just ahead of Clive Blythe, was speaking. Jones was an ex-mate of a Caribbean schooner and a veteran of the bush as well. His faded blue eyes were singularly alert; they switched constantly from the walls of the jungle to a younger white man on the mule ahead. There was an anxious glint in Mr. Jones' eyes as he surveyed the swaying, bowed figure before him, but no trace of worry was revealed in his voice.

"It's men, living men, I'm telling you," Mr. Jones assured the bent, weary back of the youthful radio operator of the expedition. "That's what counts, Pete Haley. Men!"

He waved a contemptuous hand toward the green prison that surrounded them and rambled on:

"The junk of a thousand civilizations like this Maya stuff is scattered around the world—covered over with jungles and dust and sand—but as long as there's men left—the right kind—we'll have better civilizations on top of 'em. What do the old ones matter?"

From ahead there came no response to this question. But the malignant mule bearing Pete Haley suddenly swung to the left and scraped his burden against the bole of a palm tree. The man hung for an instant on the verge of a fall.

Mr. Jones, with a tremendous smack, energized his own stunted mount. The animal leaped ahead, alongside the other on the narrow trail. But before Jones could lay a hand on Haley the radio operator had straightened himself up, and his eyes, bright, burning, in a flushed, unnatural countenance, stared into Mr. Jones' face as he grinned slowly.

"Jus' kidding you, Mister," he muttered. "I'm all right—jus' kidding you."

"Of course you're all right," Mister Jones snapped. "This damn' mule o' mine took a notion—"

"No control, Mister," mumbled Pete, still managing to grin. "You b'long back on deck—no use in a jungle—no good hunting ruins."

Mr. Jones dropped behind. He was scowling as he looked over-shoulder an instant at Clive Blythe.

Pete Haley was close to death; and Mr. Jones had a way of siding with the under-dog. It did him no good with his superiors; frequently it did the under-dog no good. But Haley possessed nerve and brains and it annoyed Mr. Jones to watch him being killed by lack of a little quinine and rest. "Wasteful; that's what it is," Mr. Jones murmured.

Then his wandering eyes, sweeping across the jungle wall on the left of the trail, abruptly spotted and focused upon a faded, gray-colored spotch in the greenness of the bush.

"Whoa, Spitfire!" he said to his meanly fleshed mount. "'Vast heavin'!"

He amplified and explained his command by swinging off onto his long legs and barring the muddy trail with lean arms. The mule, baring yellow, predatory teeth, halted perforce.

Mr. Jones took another quick look at his find—the dust-colored rent in the jungle. Undoubtedly it was a weathered slab of limestone showing on the side of a sort of hillock.

Clive Blythe shouted ahead an order to halt. Then he rode forward to the lanky seaman's side. The stocky, broad-shouldered Indians making trail had instantly ceased their slashing; the first mule stopped promptly and the others froze in their boggy tracks. The Carson-Blythe Maya expedition came to a complete halt.

From the leading saddle-mule another white man slid into the mud and plodded back to join the others.

"Now what, Mr. Jones?" demanded Clive Blythe belligerently. "Is it Haley again? He's quite fit to travel."

"What's blockin' the traffic here?" The voice of Jim Carson sounded aggrieved as he floundered to the side of his associate leader. Fat and clumsy on his feet, Carson bulked twice as large as Blythe. As he spoke he darted a resentful glance at the swaying figure of the radio operator. "Is Haley playing dead again?"

"Haley's better than either of ye, Captain," Mr. Jones said, his voice curtly equivocal, as he looked fixedly between the two leaders. "But since the object of this expedition is finding ruins, I was wondering why ye didn't find—*that!*"

His arm darted out with startling suddenness, jerking the men's eyes toward the dingy slab of stone that showed so indistinctly in the vine-clad knoll at the side of the trail. The top of the abruptly rising hillock was quite concealed by a screen of dense, virescent tropical foliage. Clive Blythe, with a sudden cry, plunged toward it. "Pyramid!" he shouted over his shoulder and with a hoarse yell Carson crashed after him in the squelching mud.

"Since the object of this expedition is finding ruins, I was wondering why ye didn't find—*that!*" His arm darted toward the dingy slab of stone.

Mr. Jones did not follow. He unlashed a hammock from one of the pack-mules, slung it with brisk efficiency between two trees, gently lifted Haley down onto it and covered him with a poncho.

The Indians of the party, in response to commands from the leaders, left the mules to one man and with machetes and axes started toward the mound.

Mr. Jones retrieved a canvas camp-chair from a pack, removed himself from the fore-and-aft armament of the nearer mules and sat down. With the aid of a compass slung around his neck he proceeded to prick out on a map of Yucatan the position to which misfortune had called him, as he made it by dead reckoning.

The party was in Quintana Roo, in the dense jungle near the line of British Honduras, and the map was almost as blank as a chart of the ocean. No human settlements were here and no humans save an occasional timber-cruiser hunting mahogany, or native *chicleros* ranging the bush for the gum of the sapote tree.

After a few moments Haley stirred in his hammock and wearily heaved himself up on his elbow. He peered with red-rimmed eyes into the bush.

"Found something at last—that dirty bit of stone?" he mumbled.

Mr. Jones tucked his chart out of the rain.

"That's part o' the remains of *un ciudad real*, like they call it—a royal city," he said with severity. "When your ancestors was still painted blue, these Maya people lived in big limestone palaces and worshiped in temples built on top o' pyramids and wrote on rocks in a language so blasted high-toned we aint got the hang o' it yet. They knew more astronomy than Einstein. When Cortes landed they put up such a shindig that he quit an' conquered the rest o' Mexico instead."

He jerked a hand toward the disappearing machete-men. "That's what's left of 'em—those little yella Indians that make a living collectin' gum for typewriter girls to chew, up in the States. An' we're alive, and—the great builders—they're dead."

Haley sat up with a great effort. The intermittent attack of fever was passing. "Know a lot about it, don't you?"

"Too much!" Mr. Jones retorted bitterly. "I been ruin-chasing through the Yucatan bush many a time—when berths at sea were scarce. I know too much about this Maya country to be under-dog in a two-headed party like this—an' both heads never been south o' New Orleans before."

Haley got to his feet. He was too weak to stand without the help of a tree-trunk. Soon he would be shivering.

"If we've discovered something I'd better be setting up that transmitter," he muttered. "Carson will be wanting to tell the world tonight."

Mr. Jones gathered up the shaking figure of the radio man and stowed him in the hammock again.

"You wait for orders," he commanded. "We'll see what we got first. A plain ruin here is no more than a flyin' fish in the Caribbean, and you're going to the coast soon, son. Rest now."

He picked up his own machete and turned off the narrow trail toward the steep green hillock.

UNDER the slashing attack of Indians and white men the covering of foliage had been torn aside in several places, revealing plainly that the sloping walls of the mound were made of hewn limestone, finely carved on one side of the pyramid in a series of steps.

In the path of the others Mr. Jones ascended. He was panting before he reached the top. The pyramid rose a good sixty feet above the level of the jungle and the ex-seaman reckoned the base was over two hundred feet long and almost as wide. Wherever he ripped away the brush and the vegetable mold that nourished it he found beneath it gray, carved stone—the facing that ancient man had wrought with stone tools to make this pyramid a smooth white shimmering thing of beauty.

At the top Mr. Jones found Blythe and Carson, their feud forgotten, talking and laughing together, as they slashed like madmen. With the Indians they were cutting away the green meshwork that covered a long, narrow building occupying most of the flat summit of the mound. The bite of the axes gradually disclosed a small rectangular orifice that was a door or window of the temple. A grayish light came from it, revealing that some of the flat stones of the roof had fallen in.

Mr. Jones contemplated the co-leaders in silence, quite unobserved. With his own machete going he circled the temple and finally attacked it at one corner. His swinging blows laid bare a pillar and above it a carved, grinning mask.

With growing dislike Mr. Jones stared at that stone head. The ancient craftsman who had fashioned it had been both bold and cunning. The thing was a fleshless skull with cranial sutures, truncated nose, snarling teeth and bony, projecting lower jaw.

Mr. Jones had seen that skull, with minor variations in carving, on other Maya temples and he liked it little.

"Old Ahpuch himself, the Lord of Death!" he muttered, with a scowl. He tried another corner of the building and again found himself confronting the cavernous grin of Ahpuch. "Must be his temple!" he muttered.

Mr. Jones had assisted at the uncovering of more than one jungle-hidden city of ancient days. The sight of Ahpuch's snarl of welcome robbed this one of its savor. Slinging his machete at his belt, he started back to where Blythe and Carson still worked.

THE scientific head of the party was standing on the bent backs of two stolid, golden-skinned Indians, while he hacked away at the covering of the lintel. This was Clive Blythe's first temple; his previous studies of the Maya had been in museums and books. Now he was in a white heat of excitement; he gasped as he swung his axe and his eyes blazed. A sudden thrust of his weapon sent a matted mass of vines hissing to the ground. The archæologist found himself confronted by the same grinning, carved thing of stone that Mr. Jones had discovered.

"It's the God of Death!" he cried. "Ahpuch! Ahpuch!"

"Yup!" said the ex-mate dryly. "Old Barebones himself. I'd rather run up against Kukulcan myself. He's no looker, the Feathered Serpent aint, but at that he's a better sight than this one."

Blythe did not answer. He leaped from the backs of the Indians to the low roof of the temple.

"Clear the doorway!" he commanded the machete-men. Eagerly he peered between two capstones that still topped the narrow building.

"Put some pep into it!" rasped Jim Carson.

The Indians resumed work. There was no trace of dread or superstitious terror on their faces; merely the blank apathy that any labor inspired. To them these temples and the gods within, the work of *los antiguos*, the old ones, were matters of indifference; the jungles of Yucatan teemed with them.

Blythe climbed down from the roof and impatiently urged on the impassive Mayas. Jim Carson stood back a step or two from the long temple to stare fixedly at it.

"We'll make a big play on this thing," he confided, laying a heavy hand on his co-leader's shoulder. "Temple unique in Mayan research work—bigger than Grant's tomb—certain to reveal key to secrets long impregnable—found in heart of jungle never before penetrated by white men. Good stuff!"

Clive Blythe shrugged Carson's hand off his shoulder.

"The temple is not unique—it is merely typical," he said curtly. "You will send by radio the actual measurements—not mere conjecture."

Jim Carson swung around. "Now listen!" he said harshly. "You're doing the scientific patter—words and music—for your college. But I'm handling the syndicate stuff—and it's the syndicate stuff that's paying the way. Don't forget that!"

Blythe laughed shortly. "You don't seem to realize that this temple is not an isolated structure," he said with scathing contempt. "Unless I am quite in error we have round about us in this jungle the remains of a vast ancient city—perhaps a second Chichen Itza. But we will explore before we draw conclusions."

"I start hitting the typewriter right now!" Carson snapped. "This is plenty to make a first installment! Try and stop me!"

Mr. Jones descended the side of the pyramid. He had listened to too much bickering between the co-leaders of the expedition. Carson and Blythe had agreed only in a ruthless determination to keep going despite the crucial sickness of two men. That determination had cost an unfortunate photographer his life and seemed likely to kill the radio operator, too. With the rainy season on them, the mules exhausted, and the supply of drugs and antitoxins depleted, it seemed to Mr. Jones that the expedition was headed for certain disaster.

"They don't know the tropics—an' they won't learn 'em, until too late," the ex-mate grumbled.

Near the base of the pyramid he consulted his compass. The huge structure was accurately orientated. The longer sides ran north and south. He clambered around to the south side and inspected the floor of the jungle beyond the edge of the pyramid. He found that it was raised some six or eight feet.

He cut a path out from the pyramid along this elevated level and ascertained that it fell away abruptly but in a straight line on either side. He scraped away at the vegetable mold beneath his feet until he came to a broad flat stone.

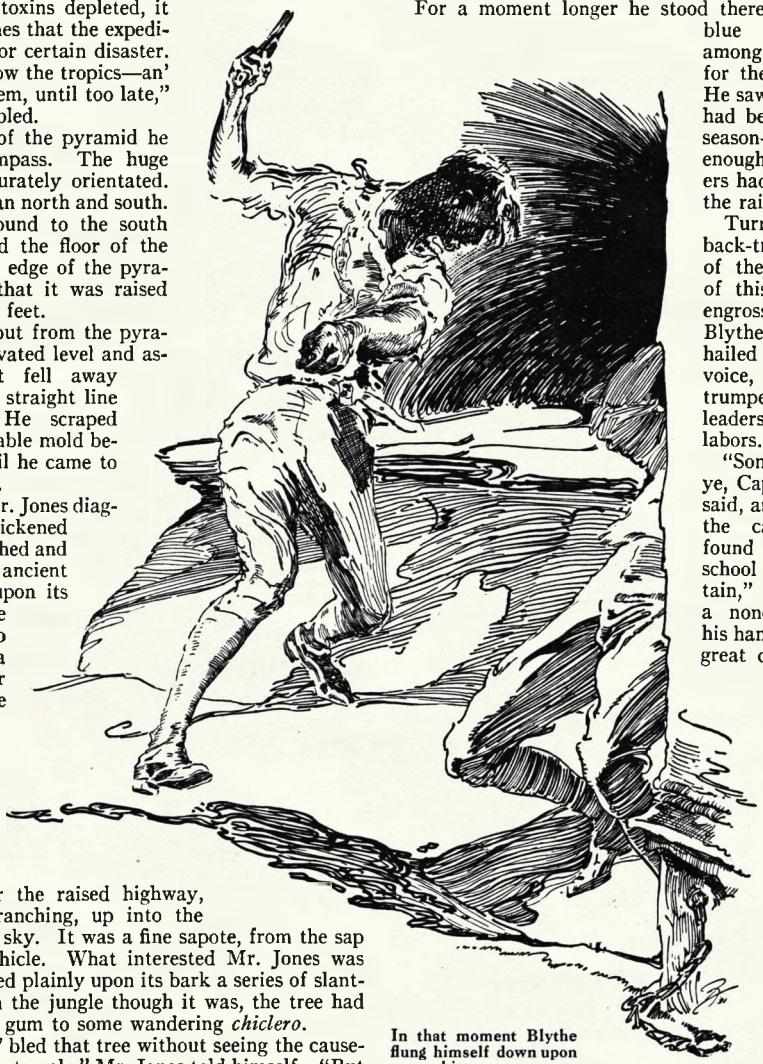
"Causeway!" Mr. Jones diagnosed. With quickened movements he slashed and trampled along the ancient stone road; but upon its surface the jungle had not reared so impenetrable a screen as on either side, and he made rapid progress.

For a quarter of a mile he advanced through the drenching brush. Finally he stopped beside a tall tree that towered near the raised highway, straight and unbranching, up into the gray and dripping sky. It was a fine sapote, from the sap of which comes chicle. What interested Mr. Jones was that the tree showed plainly upon its bark a series of slanting cuts. Deep in the jungle though it was, the tree had paid its tribute of gum to some wandering *chiclero*.

"He couldn't ha' bled that tree without seeing the causeway and maybe the temple," Mr. Jones told himself. "But probably he passed 'em by without a look."

A scant three hundred yards farther on along the causeway Mr. Jones made out ahead a lightening of the somber greenery of the bush. In a minute more he came out upon this clearer space. He stopped, staring hard.

Before him, plainly visible among the towering trunks of many high forest trees were the imposing ruins of a great city. Close at hand towered four immense, steep-sided pyramids, arranged in an enormous quadrangle and surmounted by temples far greater than the temple of Ahpuch, behind him. He saw altar stones, courts, long palace buildings, pillars and numerous other structures.



In that moment Blythe flung himself down upon his enemy.

"Great Peter!" he muttered. Awed, he slumped against a tree.

Soon he realized what his brain had failed to grasp in that instant of revelation—that the hand of man had been busy of late in tearing aside the thick green veil that the jungle had cast over this vast center of an ancient race. It stood out only because axes and machetes had been busy about that great quadrangle of pyramids.

For a moment longer he stood there, his faded, alert blue eyes searching among the great ruins for the sight of a man. He saw none. The work had been done that dry season—that was plain enough—but the workers had left their find to the rains.

Turning, the ex-mate back-trailed to the base of the outlying temple of this metropolis that engrossed the energies of Blythe and Carson. He hailed them loudly; his voice, imperative as a trumpet, brought the co-leaders down from their labors.

"Somethin' to show ye, Captain," Mr. Jones said, and led them along the causeway. "Ye've found a minnow in a school of whales, Captain," he added as with a nonchalant wave of his hand, he revealed the great city of ruins.

Carson greeted the sight with a roar of delight. Blythe only stared with smoldering eyes; his brow was dark and furrowed.

"Recent excavations and clearing!" he muttered. "This is no discovery of ours—it is a site, intelligently uncovered within the past few months. Our temple is a mere insignificant detail."

"Old stuff?" Jim Carson snapped, and grunted in morose disgust as the archæologist nodded. Then he turned.

"What do we care?" he demanded in a low urgent tone. "This is the stuff we want, isn't it? All we've got to do is shift the location of this place a few miles on the map, scramble up the buildings, double the dimensions, stick in some authentic new stuff. The greatest discovery since King Tut, in Egypt! I'll back these other fellows down—"

"You mean—" began Blythe, with a whitening face; but Jim Carson gave him no time to continue.

"The syndicate will eat it alive—and neither they nor anybody else can call our bluff in a hundred years. The jungle swallows it up again, see? How about it?"

"How about it?" repeated the archæologist. His voice suddenly gained strength. "This—about it!"

His quick right hand slipped down to the holster on his belt; he drew his small automatic and shoved the blunt black muzzle into the pit of Jim Carson's stomach.

"*This* about it!" Blythe raged. "I'll kill you, Carson, and leave you for the worms before I'll permit a single lie to be sent out from my expedition! I've had enough—more than enough—of you!"

CARSON did not move, but the brick red of his face turned slowly darker. Mr. Jones stirred uneasily, his senses concentrated upon the two antagonists.

"I'll not stand it!" Blythe roared. "We're going on—on until we do strike some new site for study. I must succeed—or I'll never be given another chance at field work! But it will be truth we report—nothing but exact, scientific truth! You hear? We go ahead whether you want to or not! *We go on!*"

Carson coolly looked sideways at Mr. Jones.

"How about this, Jones?" he asked. "You willing to go on with this boy scout until the fever gets us or the mules bog down? You willing to miss the schooner and let Haley die—when we can make our big play on this bunch of ruins? Speak up, now!"

"He'll do what I say!" snarled Clive Blythe, pivoting toward the ex-mate. He swung the gun in a menacing sweep to command Mr. Jones and emphasize his words.

That was what Jim Carson awaited. His left hand leaped sideways and closed like a noose around the scientist's gun-wrist; his right hand dragged his heavy machete from its sheath in a gesture of unrestrained fury. His eyes gleamed. "Now, you—"

Mr. Jones acted promptly; he flung himself headlong against the angry antagonists. The thrust of his long hard-muscled arms sent them both toppling over the edge of the causeway into the brush nine feet below. The pistol roared in Blythe's tense fingers as they fell sprawling, but the bullet thudded into the mud.

For an instant Mr. Jones paused. He took quick account of the position of the two half-stunned men below, and then jumped. Carson he bowled over, even as the prostrate man made a blind wild sweep with the machete; then twisting the man's wrist with all the force of his wiry muscles, he seized the weapon. Blythe had dropped the kicking pistol; Mr. Jones found it for him and tucked it into his own trousers pocket.

"There's two things that are quick down here in the tropics, Captain," he said, as he backed away from the co-leaders. "One's temper and the other's death. You better do some thinkin' about that."

Neither man answered him. Jim Carson heaved his considerable bulk upright, and climbed back onto the causeway. Then without a word he started back toward the pyramid of Ahpuch.

The ex-mate stretched out a hand and extricated Clive Blythe from the spiny entanglements.

"Give me my pistol, you clown!" the scientist demanded.

"It's too heavy for ye, Captain," Mr. Jones answered soothingly. "I'll carry it awhile—till we head toward the coast with poor Haley, let's say!"

Blythe's face contorted in a snarl.

"You can't buck the Yucatan rainy season, Captain," the seaman assured him earnestly. He waved a hand at the uncovered ruins. "*They* couldn't—the big outfit that was workin' here. Why not give Haley a chance? The mud alone would stop—"

"The mud!" Blythe broke in with frantic contempt. "You fool! Don't you know this is a limestone country? The rain draws away into subterranean rivers almost as fast as it falls. The mud will get no worse—the mules—"

"I know about the underground rivers—but the mud *does* get worse," Mr. Jones insisted. He gestured again toward the deserted city. "White men all pull out of the bush when the rains come. I know, Captain!"

"Then know this, too," Blythe said hoarsely. "This is one expedition that will not pull out—until we have attained our objective! And I'll have no insubordination—no mutiny."

He scrambled up the steep bank to the raised stone road. Jones, following closely, laid a detaining hand on his arm.

"I'm no mutineer, Captain," he said earnestly. "Nor no quitter. Give me a few days' leave and a couple of mules to take Haley to one o' the coast settlements. Maybe I can save his life. Then I'll come back with some quinine an' stick it out with you."

Clive Blythe shook off Jones' appealing clutch. "You stay!" he asserted wrathfully. "Haley stays! I'll tolerate no fraud—and I'll tolerate no disobedience!" Then he swung around on his heel and strode off along the causeway. Carson was already out of sight.

The ex-mate watched him go. "Indomitable—like a mule," he muttered. Resolution tautened his leathery countenance. With grim solicitude he examined the safety-catch of the automatic, tried an experimental shift of his long fingers from grip to barrel to make a club of the gun and then walked slowly toward the temple of the unpropitious god of human sacrifice.

JONES had not gone a hundred feet along the brush-choked causeway when he heard a rustle close behind him. It was no snake or lizard scuttling for shelter, and he knew no other wild thing would permit a man to approach so near in daylight. He swung around. . . . Even as he turned he tried to dodge. But he was too late to avoid the hurtling missile that had been aimed at the back of his head. A sizable chunk of stone hit him simultaneously on neck and jaw. He went down as if a bullet had surged through his brain. . . .

The consciousness that somebody was rolling him over and over at last roused Mr. Jones to feeble protest.

He opened his eyes and found Carson, unceremoniously throwing turn after turn of a long and tough liana around his body. From neck to ankles the ropelike vine was coiling. The syndicate man did not hesitate as he encountered Mr. Jones' startled eyes. He finished his task.

"There!" he grunted. "I'm no hand at tying things, but I guess that'll hold you for ten minutes. I need that gun—and your temporary absence, Jones."

"You blasted fool!" Mr. Jones said dispassionately.

Jim Carson's lips curled in a formidable grimace.

"I'm not killing Blythe—unless he gets me sore enough," he said. "And I'll be back to turn you loose after I've got him tamed and trussed up."

"Somebody's going to die," the ex-mate warned him. "You two can't play like that with guns an' tempers down here in the bush without somebody dyin' for it."

Jim Carson stood over the lanky figure of Mr. Jones with arms akimbo.

"Listen!" he said. "I'm a business man. I came down here to get stuff about ruined temples to sell to my syndicate and I'm going to do it. No half-baked scientist or sick radio man will stop me. Neither will you." He shoved his foot into Jones' ribs by way of emphasis.

"You play with me on this story for a few days and brace up Haley to shoot out the stuff. I'll see that you both make the coast and that schooner you keep talking

about. Side with Blythe, and the fussy damned prig will be a one-way guide to hell for the lot of us. How about it?"

Mr. Jones pondered.

"I've got a rough idea of what you think of Blythe," he said at last. "Well, what I think is that you and he are yella pups out of the same basket. Neither of you've got your eyes open yet and you won't be worth drownin' when you do."

Jim Carson again drove his boot into Mr. Jones' ribs with a force that sent a red-hot train of pain up into the seaman's head.

"Be damned to you!" the big journalist spat out. "I've offered to treat you like a man; now I'll ride you like one of these flea-bitten mules."

He kicked the mate again; shoved the scabbard of his machete into his mouth and bound it there with a handkerchief, then moved away with a certain furtive haste. Blythe's automatic was ready in his hand, as he headed toward the pyramid.

Mr. Jones rolled himself close to the bit of rock that had laid him low. With matter-of-fact efficiency he started the work of chafing through the tightest-drawn strand of the liana.

"That damned Ahpuch has put a crimp in this crew," he mumbled thickly behind the scabbard gag. "Since we run afoul o' that ugly skull—"

HE worked on, not with frantic speed but with steady persistence. Carson's estimate that he would be held prisoner for ten minutes was borne out. It took Jones fifteen to saw through the tough vine so that he could kick and elbow the coils from around his body. Almost at the end of those fifteen minutes of stiff work he stopped. To his ear had come the crashing echo of a pistol-shot. It was closely followed by a cry of fear or anger from the direction of the high-mounted temple of the Lord of Death.

"Sounds bad!" he muttered, with a grave face. For a tense minute he paused, listening, but heard nothing more.

He finished freeing himself. Standing up, he took a squint at his compass, climbed down from the causeway where he had met trouble and set a direct course through the bush for the halting-place of the Carson-Blythe Maya expedition.

He found as he approached the restive mules that young Haley was asleep or unconscious in his hammock.

The ex-mate moved softly past him. The Indian that had been left to watch the mules viewed the lanky white man with complete indifference. Mr. Jones tarried only long enough to get from a saddle-bag a short and inconspicuous but heavy iron marlinespike. With this tucked up one sleeve he headed once more for the temple.

With no great difficulty he made his way around to the far side of the pyramid. For a few moments he froze behind a tree-trunk at the base of the enormous pile, listening intently. To his ears came the distant, steady slash of machetes eating their way through the tangles of vegetation that encased the temple far above him. Nothing else. The Indians were still at work, then, despite that shot.

He emerged from cover and stared up the sharp incline. On this side the pyramid was quite bare. The temple wall had been partly cleared of the encumbering foliage.

Cautiously he began the ascent. Without a machete to clear the way it was a difficult climb, even for a sailor. But though the pyramid rose with menacing steepness before him, there was little danger of a fall. The matted undergrowth that barred his way offered him countless handholds. Crawling upward through that tangle he was a fair target for the *tomagoff*, the deadly yellow-jawed snake that infests Yucatan, but Mr. Jones risked that.

Three-quarters of the way to the top he stiffened and lay still. . . . Around a corner of the temple Jim Carson had strolled into sight. The big man moved slowly, with a casual air. His arms were folded on his chest. His right hand, the seaman noted, was very close to his armpit. His eyes wandered everywhere and his head kept turning slightly this way and that with a rapidity that belied his attitude of indifference.

Mr. Jones remained motionless until Carson had crashed his way through the virgin underbrush on top of the mound and turned the southern corner of the temple. Then, with increasing caution, he resumed his climb.

Suddenly the sight of another movement at the top of the pyramid halted him. Above the topmost course of the temple wall a bloody head had risen into sight. A man was scrambling up inside the ruinous building to the roof. Mr. Jones, staring intently, had no difficulty in recognizing the stealthy climber as Clive Blythe.

The archæologist had been shot or cut across the scalp. His wound, though it had incarnadined his whole head, in no way impaired his furtive agility. He gained the broad top of the temple wall and drew an ax from his belt. With great caution he stretched out flat upon the roof.

Mr. Jones laboriously executed a flank movement around the corner of the pyramid so that he would be out of Blythe's range of vision. Then he hastily resumed his climb up the acclivity.

"Got to get 'em both—somehow!" he panted. "No use—just one."

He reached the top of the pyramid without another glimpse of Blythe or Carson. He crept to the nearest opening in the temple wall. It was a mere slit of a window, but wide enough for Jones' lithe body.

There was only dim gray light inside the ancient sanctuary, for most of the huge capstones of the roof were still in place. Jones crept over débris in fierce haste. His feet moved noiselessly over great slabs of limestone in that faintly lighted, tomblike place. He advanced in strained silence to the end of the temple to a position near by, under the roof upon which Clive Blythe was lying outstretched, waiting.

Here several capstones had fallen and the light was better. Mr. Jones, looking up, suddenly saw the bloody head of the archæologist turn down toward him. Instantly the ex-mate stopped, flattened out against the wall.

Blythe's eyes roved on past him and Jones realized that the man had not seen him in the dimmer light. He did not move until the archæologist's head had withdrawn.

AT the end of the temple he looked about for means to reach the roof, as Blythe had done. His eyes encountered in the end wall a great, projecting head of Ahpuch—a solid block of limestone cunningly endowed with the grisly attributes of a skull. Surrounding the head were other stones deeply and elaborately carved. This was no doubt the most sacred spot in the long temple.

Mr. Jones gripped the head of the Lord of Death with impious hands. In an instant, finding many holds in the midst of the carvings, he was climbing.

Cautiously he raised his head between the end wall and the nearest remaining capstone. He caught a glimpse of Blythe's motionless figure within ten feet of him. His legs were stretched toward Jones, and he was watching the top of the pyramid.

Jones drew his marlinespike. Then, distinctly, he heard a sound within the temple—a slight clattering, as of a bit of stone kicked by an advancing foot.

Blythe heard it too. He peered down into the dim-lit temple. Softly he rose to a crouching position. His head turned slowly as he followed the progress of some moving body in the temple. His tight-held ax shook in his hand.

Mr. Jones spared a single glance into the tomblike interior. He made out vaguely the big form of Jim Carson advancing along the stone flagging toward the end of the narrow structure.

In that moment Blythe flung himself down upon his enemy. Almost instantly Jones followed him.

THE ex-mate landed heavily upon the flagging beneath the projecting head of Ahpuch. His ears rang with the roar of Jim Carson's pistol, and with the echoing howl of Blythe. He leaped to his feet, his eyes on the struggling bodies of the two antagonists. He took a step toward them, his heavy little marlinespike ready.

Suddenly, he found himself swaying. He felt strange—dizzy—the floor seemed to be moving under him. He stretched out a hand to the god Ahpuch's head to steady himself. A groaning, rasping, unearthly sound filled his ears. And then he saw.

The great flagstone upon which he stood was descending slowly under him; he was going downward like a man on some monstrous seesaw. His bewildered eyes saw the other end of the long, massive slab rising out of the temple floor. . . . The locked, writhing bodies of Carson and Blythe rolled toward him down that increasing incline.

Gasping, trying to cry out, Jones gripped with both hands at the projecting head of the god Ahpuch. He clung tightly, desperately. The pivoting stone dropped out from under his feet. It was swinging downward with increasing speed. The other end of the slab came up, mounting higher and higher like a great wave rising out of a calm dark sea. And the ancient stone groaned as it moved.

The clutching, scrambling men on the flagging were fighting now for a hold on the smooth stone, on themselves, on anything. A black, narrow void, slowly widening, was appearing by the end wall, just beneath Jones' swinging feet. From this pit there rose to Jones' ears the faint, distant sound of running water—water that must be hundreds of feet below.

"Catch hold!" he cried in a choked, straining voice, and kicked out his legs toward the dropping men.

Carson, after that instant of blind, bewildered struggling for his balance, had climbed to his feet on the slanting stone and now, even as he toppled over, he launched his heavy body toward the swaying legs of Mr. Jones. His arms went around Jones' knees with all the tightness of a snubbed line around a bollard.

"Grab!" Carson gasped, and even as he spoke the muscled, lighter body of Blythe struck him and Blythe's lean arms whipped around his waist like the tentacles of an octopus. Mr. Jones could feel his joints cracking and straining under this triple load.

The great stone slab pivoted downward with a steady quickening movement. It reached the limit of its swing and ground to a stop. The pit beneath the swinging bodies was broad now. From it came not an iota of light; it was black as if there was no bottom to that terrible shaft. From it rose to their nostrils a chill, earthy odor that was the very breath of death, and to their ears came that distant, snakelike hiss of rushing water.

The great stone slab was standing motionless, almost vertical. The pit yawned; Ahpuch awaited sacrifice!

Mr. Jones could feel the god's head trembling under his gripping, tortured fingers. He clung to his hold with the strength of ten men, but the sight of that waiting, motionless stone sent a flood of despair through him.

Suddenly the great slab shuddered on its ancient pivots. With a slow murmur the enormous stone moved again. It slipped from its supports and plunged downward into the square black orifice. Without another sound it vanished into that gaping blackness.

Far below, the hidden subterranean river rushed on its dark mysterious course through the caverns of the earth.

"Not—much—longer!" Mr. Jones gasped, as he felt his fingers weakening. The drag upon them bade him feel as though some Thing in that pit, and not the two dependent bodies, was trying to drag him down—down—down. The Thing had been waiting for fifteen centuries; and he could feel the very breath of it in his nostrils, numbing his brain.

Vaguely he heard a sound—a scraping, scuffling sound, such as a rat might make.

"I've got—toe-hold in the wall!" Blythe's voice said faintly. "Can you hold me—if I try—to get a finger-grip?"

Carson's powerful grip on Jones' knees relaxed slightly; then tightened again. Mr. Jones sensed that the man was hanging somehow by one arm locked around Jones' legs. His other hand was free to sustain Blythe's weight.

All he had of will and nerve went flooding into Mr. Jones' weakening fingers. And then, quite perceptibly, the strain that seemed about to tear his arms from his body diminished perceptibly.

"Right!" came Blythe's voice. "I'm on the wall. Swing toward it, Carson—there are holds in the cracks. Here's my hands! Get your toe—"

Mr. Jones emitted a faint, anguished cry as Carson swayed. Then, miraculously, Carson released him from that frightful dragging weight—he, too, was clinging to the wall beneath the head of the god Ahpuch.

ONLY Mr. Jones hung over the abyss, now, and he hung with weakened arms that would not lift him up. Things blurred. After ages had gone by he dimly understood that hands were clutching at him; voices were encouraging him. He was clawing his way upward—finding holds in the deep carvings that surrounded the head of the god Ahpuch.

And at last he made it. He was half-dragged up onto the roof of the temple, with a massive capstone under him. Things became less blurred; he saw that Carson and Blythe were sprawling on the same slab with him. They were staring at him and at each other like men awakened from a trance. And between the capstones was yawning still the hideous death-trap from which they had escaped.

"All right," said Mr. Jones, with an effort. He gulped down a deep lungful of air. "Go on with—with the fight."

"I've had enough—and Carson's had enough," Blythe said, and his co-leader did not contradict him. "We've had a hint—of death."

"We have," Carson agreed gruffly. "And say—about this kid Haley—that's— We don't want him dying on us. I don't want anybody dying—now. How about it?"

"He goes to the coast—with Jones!" said Blythe. "Right away! But I—"

He knelt and peered between two capstones into the pit in the temple floor. "There's nothing like this known—anywhere in Mayan architecture," he said with rising enthusiasm. "A swinging stone! It's unique—it opens vistas concerning sacrificial customs—"

"It's great stuff—as it is," Carson agreed. "We've got something that'll make us famous. And next year—"

Mr. Jones didn't wait. He slid over the lush green brush on top of the pyramid. It was still raining.

Slowly he dragged himself around the end of the temple, descended the pyramid and walked toward the trail. At the hammock where Haley lay he stopped.

The radio operator had lifted himself up on one elbow and he looked at the ex-mate with fever-bright eyes.

"We're goin' to the coast, son," Mr. Jones said softly. "On a hint straight from Ahpuch—you and me are goin' to the coast."

Flame in the Forest

The dramatic climax of this thrill-filled novel of the North Woods. . . . The noted author of "Timber" and "The Beloved Pawn" at his best.

By HAROLD TITUS

Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson

The Story Thus Far:

LITTLE Kerry Drake had been outside the sawmill office, staring up the road which Jack and the crew had taken before daylight, and where the cook had just gone with dinner for the fire-fighters, when the bookkeeper called to him.

"Listen, Kerry," Tod had said. "I took the pay-roll out of the cash-drawer, see? It's in this letter-file—this one, right here." He laid his hand on the brown box on top of the safe. Another file was on the desk, and more were on a shelf above it; but Tod put his hand right on that special one. "I'm goin' out to scout around. If anything happens, it may happen fast. The speeder's right on the track, now—right by the water-tank, there. If I yell, you bring the file and come a-runnin'. Understand?"

"Sure, Tod," said Kerry. The fire had grown rapidly worse—had come close. Tod had yelled to Kerry as he had planned; the boy had brought the precious file, and the speeder had carried them through the flaming forest to town.

A group quickly gathered, mostly old men and boys, because the best man-power of town was out on the fire-line, and they followed Tod and Kerry across the street to the bank, listened to Tod tell in quick high-pitched words what a good hand Kerry was to help save Jack's cash.

"That's fine," said the banker, pressing the catch of the file. "That's sure lucky! I happen to know that if Jack should lose—" He stopped short. "Why!" he said. "Why, Tod, it's *empty!*"

A moment of terrific silence followed, and then Tod looked down at Kerry and said in a queer, unfriendly way:

"Kid, which file did you bring?"

The boy swallowed, with a new sort of thrill running through his small frame. "Why," he said, "I fetched—You told me the one on the safe, Tod!"

The bookkeeper swore slowly under his breath and looked at the banker.

"Good God, I trusted him!" he said in a whisper.

The other clicked his tongue. "Oh-h," he said, long-drawn. "But he's only a little boy," he added, and slapped the file shut. "That surely is going to be tough for Jack!"

It was indeed tough for Jack—it broke him, in fact. He was already seriously ill, and that night he grew worse—he would sit up in bed and talk wildly; and finally the boy, trying to soothe him, crept close into the arms, and that seemed to bring peace to the old man.

"It aint so, what they're tellin', Jack. I didn't take the wrong one, unless he told me wrong!" Kerry whispered.

Jack Snow swore, a slow and terrible oath, then. "He *could* of," he muttered. "He *could* of set that fire himself. And buried the money and dug it up since the fire, and put the bee on a little feller!"

Before morning Jack was much worse, and that day they took Kerry away; and before the week was out, he had no old Jack looking after him. The Poor Commissioner was his boss now, and was boarding him out. . . .

Years later, a man grown, who earned his living as a wandering timber cruiser, Kerry Drake heard of a man named Tod West who had become a little king in the lumbering business along Madwoman River; and with his Chesapeake retriever Tip, Kerry turned his canoe in that direction. He arrived opportunely—saw through his glasses a girl leap into the water from a boat to escape from a man. Kerry ran a swift rapid to reach the spot, threw the man into the river, took the girl to shore—and discovered to his great joy that he had paid part of his score, for the man was Tod West. The girl, he learned, was Nan Downer, whose father had had a very up-to-date scheme in the lumbering business—selling off his land to rich men for hunting and fishing clubs while himself retaining certain timber rights. But he had been murdered the previous year and Nan was trying to carry on while West was using her debts as a lever to force her into marriage.

As Ezra Adams, the local physician, explained the matter to Drake, Downer had been shot dead while driving with a twelve-thousand-dollar pay-roll in his car, and the money stolen. Two men had been suspected; Jim Hinkel, a hireling of West's who had been drunk at the time of the murder; and Holt Stuart, a young forester who was in love with Nan but had recently quarreled with Downer—and who, the Doctor knew, had been laid up with a sprained ankle at the time the fatal shot was fired.

But Adams, who was the local coroner, still had hope of tracing the criminal through the serial numbers of the stolen bank-notes—one of which had recently come to light; and he swore in Drake as coroner's deputy to help him. Drake took another job also—as timber cruiser for Nan Downer; and he distinguished himself by rescuing Jim Hinkel's little girl from drowning. On the other side of the ledger were attempts to kill him or drive him away made by Hinkel, the halfbreed Bluejay and others of West's emissaries. Finally Drake surprised an intruder in his tent—and his dog Tip brought back in triumph from the encounter a piece of blue corduroy such as Tod West habitually wore.

By a stratagem Kerry got possession of West's revolver; and the coroner sent the weapon, along with the bullet taken from Downer's body, to a firearms expert—who reported that the bullet had come from the same gun. . . . Bluejay attempted to shoot Kerry from ambush but the young man escaped by diving overboard from his canoe. And then Adams and Drake learned of an attempt by West to "frame" young Holt for the murder of Downer by planting some of the stolen money in Holt's cabin. They barely got to the cabin ahead of West and the

Sheriff—and found three of the missing hundred-dollar bills in a tin box cached, too obviously, under the floor. Moreover Drake noticed another thing: the box, and the crowbar with which the floor-boards had been pried up, were both smeared here and there with honey; and the day before, West had explained his badly swollen face by a story of running into a hornet's nest. *(The story continues in detail:)*

THEY drove slowly back toward Nan's headquarters, talking intently.

To save Holt Stuart the ignominy of arrest, to tie together the evidence they had accumulated, to weave a net around Tod West and to discover the remainder of the money that rightfully belonged to Nan were their major objectives. . . .

In the car which preceded them had been intent talk, as well. West had had little enough to say at the cabin, but once on the homeward way, with new fears, fresh doubts, even greater misgivings stirring within him, he had talked—talked into Bridger's ear, playing on the man's vanity, his jealousy of his authority, his regard for his political fences. And after those first minutes at Downer's, with their confusion and excitement and triumph, Tod West, drawing Bridger aside, talked further. What had transpired in Mel Knight's store between Drake and Bluejay had come to his ears. He passed it on to Bridger and made deductions and, in a fever of relief, let his suggestions run into demands.

As Kerry and Ezra rounded the bend and came into view of the Downer buildings, Ezra leaned suddenly forward.

"What goes on here?" he asked, staring at the group clustered before Nan's headquarters. "That's Nat's car. Do you s'pose—"

Kerry had speeded up as apprehension settled upon him. When he drew close to the cluster of men about the Sheriff's car, it gave way and there—white of face, hair rumpled, talking wildly, excitedly, his hands manacled before him—they saw Holt Stuart!

Bridger pushed his way toward Drake as he opened the door. The man's face was flushed, and he bore himself with a new importance.

"Well, I guess you'll have to admit I was lookin' a little further ahead than you were, Drake!" he cried, waving a sheet of paper truculently. "I guess mebby the Sheriff's office can still be depended on to follow its best judgment for the people of this county!"

"Yeah? Just what do you mean?" Kerry asked evenly.

"Mean? I mean I was right all along! This lad Stuart is the man we want, Drake, and I wasn't a second too soon, either. I guess mebby there's been things goin' on about this case that nobody but you and him understood! I'll count Ezra out because he's—he's an old man. I don't s'pose you knew he was packed up, ready to haul, did you?" He gazed at Drake triumphantly.

"Holt, you mean?" Drake's voice was strained with surprise. "Yes, Holt!" Tod West was edging up now behind Bridger—frowning, nudging the Sheriff. "Yes, Holt Stuart! Packsack and suitcases all strapped up. And I come on him writin' this—writin' it to Nan Downer, who's been away today. Listen to this!" And he read:

"'Dear Nan: It looks as if I'd stayed on here too long now, and by staying, risked all kinds of disaster—'

"He'd got just that far when I busted in on him. Now, you got anything to say about that? Any cock-and-bull story to explain *that?*"

"Why should I have an explanation?" Kerry countered.

"I wondered"—thrusting the paper into a pocket and edging closer with an expression of craft which Kerry, in that moment of confused thought, did not detect, "—I wondered, Drake, if you mightn't know enough about it to be interested. I wondered that, after I heard you done your best to drive the State's chief witness out of the country this—"

"Here! What the devil!" Drake grunted as he began to struggle. The deputy Butch had him from behind. Bridger had grasped one wrist in both his hands; Tod West stepped in to secure him, to help hold him despite his first amazed struggles.

"What comes off?" Drake demanded. "What's the big idea, Bridger?"

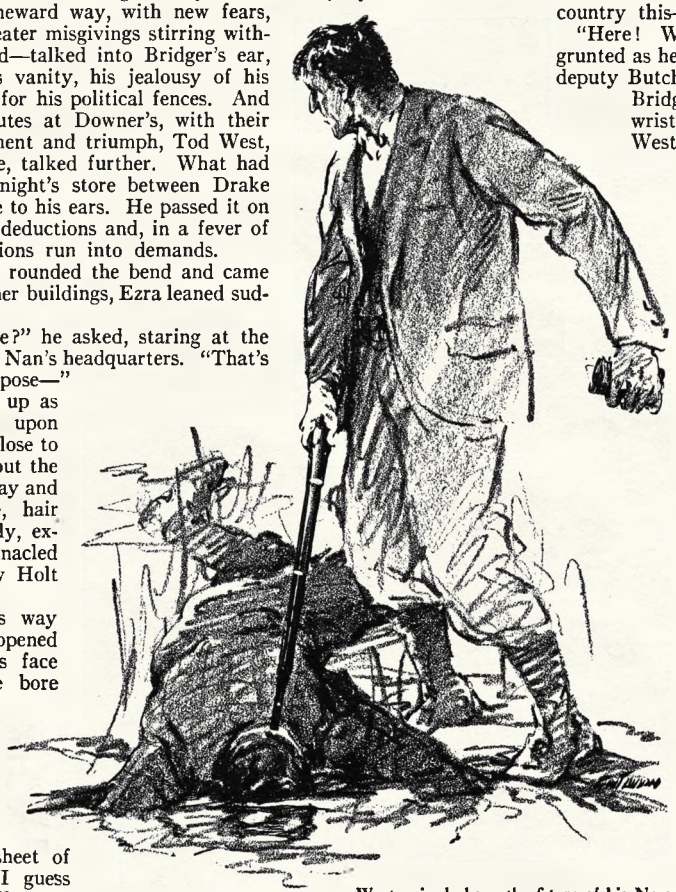
The Sheriff was reaching for handcuffs. A leer came about his mouth.

"I've got Stuart as a suspect in a murder-case," he said loudly, "and I'm takin' you, Drake, for interferin' with a witness in that same case!"

The cool steel encircled Kerry's wrists; the ratchets clicked. Those who had held him stood back.

"Why, this is the damnedest, most far-fetched outrage—"

"You tell all that to the Judge!" snapped Bridger. "Here, you boys, get back, now! Stand away. Butch and me, we got to get these two into a cell. Stand back, boys!"



West poised above the figure of his Nemesis, dropping the rifle-muzzle quickly to the back of the bared head.

He whirled on Kerry, unable to withstand the impulse to taunt.

"You got the guts to deny that you drove Frank Bluejay out of town this afternoon? Have you even got the brass to try to explain that?"

Drake was breathing hard. Confusion and dismay lay heavily upon him. He looked from Bridger to Tod West, and his lip curled. West with his swollen face, was glar-

ing at him, triumphant for the moment, because his agile mind had turned events off that course which, had it been followed, might have overwhelmed him.

"Yes, try to explain that, if you can!" West growled.

Kerry threw back his shoulders.

"Perhaps I can, Tod West!" he said calmly. "Perhaps I can! Tomorrow's another day, remember! . . . . We'll make a try to explain it then!"

And handcuffed, with Bridger jerking him toward the open touring car in which he was to ride—a prisoner—into the county seat, he laughed, bitterly, defiantly. . . . .

Old Ezra, his nervous fingers twisting strands of his beard, came close as Stuart was helped into the back seat, and Drake in beside the driver.

"Hold everything, Ezra!" Kerry said. "You sleep on that stuff! Understand? Guard it with your life, if necessary. See me in the morning and—and take care of Nan!"

His voice dropped on this last and he averted his eyes from the old Doctor's face.

Tip, still sitting on the seat of Ezra's car, watched with stiff ears as this other automobile moved away. The crowd, after that departure, began to buzz loudly. Doctor Adams carefully gathered the pieces of material evidence they had found and carried them into Nan's office.

The dog whined a little, staring at the way his master had taken. Then he stood up and waggled his tail and whined again. He slipped through the open door and sniffed the ground. Slowly, almost tentatively at first, he took the road; stopped once and sniffed the air. Then, at a rolling lope, he disappeared beyond the sawmill, headed for Shoestring.

CHAPTER XX

THE ride into town was one long succession of attempts on the part of Bridger to make one or the other of his prisoners talk.

"Just where were you all day Thursday, Holt?" he asked in a patent attempt at ingratiation.

"Go to hell!"

Bridger shrugged and smiled to himself. Car-tools, loose on the floorboards at Kerry's feet, clanked and rattled as they took the bumps.

"Now, Drake, you'd ought to come clean for Holt's sake, about why you run this 'breed—"

"Tell him to go to hell, Holt," Kerry chuckled.

"Well, then," Bridger finally snapped, "if there's any goin' to hell to be done by this gang I'll leave it to anybody with eyes to see who's on the road!"

They swung through town, around to the rear of the jail and entered by a side door.

Butch and Bridger took their possessions from Kerry and Holt, and hustled them into the bull-pen.

"Pick out your own beds," the Sheriff snapped. "You'll have the place to yourselves, likely. And I hope you like it, both of you!"

It was not long before excited citizens commenced to arrive. They clumped up the front steps and through the corridor and cast self-conscious glances into the dimly lit space behind the bars; went into the Sheriff's office and congratulated him boisterously, then came out more boldly and hung against the steel door of the bull-pen and peered through. But Kerry on a bunk in one cell and Stuart on another, kept out of sight and made no responses to the advances.

Bridger was in high feather. His talk rose high and higher in this, his moment of greatest triumph.

By late evening the stream of callers had petered out. Butch had been called out to a country dance where bad whisky had caused trouble, and when no one appeared for a quarter of an hour, Bridger stalked through the corridor and called through an open doorway:

"I'll be over at the pool-hall, Ma! If anybody calls, or you hear anything, just ring me. The boys'll be all right."

AS soon as the sound of his footsteps had died away, Drake was out of his cell, and across the bull-pen. He sat down on the edge of Holt's cot where the boy lay, his face in his arms.

"Buck up, son!" he whispered, a hand on the lad's shoulder. "It looks like a mess, but we'll clear it up!"

A shudder traveled the lithe, slender frame beneath his touch.

"What happened?" And when the other made no move: "Won't you tell me?"

Slowly Stuart rolled over, and the faint light from above showed his face white and drawn.

"Damned if I know!" he muttered. "I'd packed up this afternoon. I was on my way." He paused and a thrill of apprehension ran Drake's spine; he could speak confidently enough, but the items that Bridger had reported so tauntingly did not make it look any too good for this boy. "I didn't want to leave without some word for Nan. I'd just started to write a note when in busted Bridger, grabbed it off the desk and— Well, that's all; except that I lost my head and tried to take 'em all on."

"Then you were actually hauling?"

"Yes!"—bitterly.

"Why?" No answer. Stuart continued to stare at the latticed bars above him. "What was the big idea, Holt? You don't mean— It can't be"—tensely—"that this yarn Bluejay told—"

"Oh, hell, no!"

Stuart sat up quickly and drew both hands across his eyes.

"Hell, no! What that's all about, I can't tell you. I got enough from Bridger's boasting to see what they're driving at. And I *was* off alone all day Thursday, and I *was* leaving, and I *did* start a note to Nan with a couple of sentences that maybe will make it look a little tough in the beginning. But I didn't kill Cash and I didn't bury anything at Townline and I wasn't there Thursday! Somebody's trying to frame me, but it's— That's only a detail, now."

Drake drew a long and mystified breath.

"*Detail!* Maybe. But, good Lord, chum, they've got enough stuff to hold you here until we can blow up their case! Why, it's worse-looking than I'd figured it could be!" He rubbed a temple briskly. "Damn it all, they've got— Where were you, for instance, on Thursday—the day Bluejay apparently is ready to swear he saw you at the cabin?"

"All over hell's half acre."

"Alone?"

"Alone."

"Doing what?"

"Walking."

"*Walking!* Why, Stuart, aren't you—" Drake shook his head hopelessly. "And then you get ready to pull out, and write to Nan that you've been risking all kinds of disaster—"

"And didn't I?"—savagely. "Didn't I stay here and eat my heart out and know all along that it was no use—that I'm too young, and not fine enough for a girl like that, anyhow? And then you—"

Kerry got to his feet.

"But, good Lord, son, didn't she—didn't Ezra— Why, last Wednesday night Ezra told me what she said to him

after West had been there and you'd mixed it with him! She said to Ezra that she couldn't let anything happen to you; and she cried because a mess like that had happened just when she— Well, as Ezra told it to me, just when she'd fallen in love with you!"

"With *me!*"

The exclamation gave Kerry a curious feeling; Holt's amazed look furthered his puzzlement.

"With me!" Holt repeated, and laughed bitterly. "Drake, are you blind? Is old Ezra crazy? Yes, he was there; he came into the office just after she'd told me that—" He rose from the bunk and stood stiffly, arms at his sides. "She took me into the office away from the others after West left. She told me that her heart would be broken if anything happened to me because of my loyalty to her. I—I lost my head again, and begged her to love me. Then she told me that such a thing was impossible, that she cared for me only as she would for a brother. 'Do you love Kerry Drake?' I asked her, and she—she just nodded and said we mustn't talk any more about it, and went on to beg me to watch my step with West. That—that's all, Drake." He turned away for a moment. Then he added: "I guess, Kerry, you're as blind as I thought you were! All along, ever since I first saw you and Nan together, I'd been afraid of it. I—I'd loved her a long time, you see."

"What the devil!" Drake grunted. The Sheriff was reaching for handcuffs.

Strength drained from Kerry's body. One knee shook spasmodically. His throat swelled and a chill enveloped him.

"You mean—she said I— Holt, and *you're* telling me this!"

The other sat down suddenly, as if in collapse. He leaned on one elbow, his head turned away from his fellow-prisoner.

"All right," he muttered, as Drake moved impetuously. "It's all right. I was jealous of you at first, but— You're her kind. I—I'd just like to be alone for a minute, please."

That is how it happened that Drake stood alone at a rear window of the jail, hanging weakly to the bars, his head pressed against the cold steel, his eyes closed, with a sweet agony surging through his veins. . . . .

So his heart *had* found a home—unoccupied! Little things that had been said between them; looks Nan had given him; gestures. . . . All these details now, in memory, returned with their full significance.

She did not love Holt Stuart—she loved him, Kerry Drake! And she was out there, now, distressed, awaiting him—and here he was, jailed, helpless to help her. And if West could only keep him out of the way, and hot-headed, impulsive Holt Stuart out of the way— He straightened. Nan Downer, until he was at liberty, was virtually at West's mercy! Old Ezra was her only counsel, her only protector! . . . . . An ague shook him.

Tod West, with his swollen face. . . . . Drake stood back from the window, then, his eyes closed. A hornet-sting, had not somebody said? The casual word, making no impression at the time, came back now, looming into tremendous importance. *Hornet?*

He cocked his head to listen. No sound came from Stuart. He wet his dry lips to speak and checked himself. . . . . From beyond the circle of light thrown by the incandescent globe above the jail's side door, he saw movement. Two green spots. . . A vague, tawny blotch moving toward him and then a faint sniffing. . . . . It was Tip, his tail threshing, coming faster now, coming toward the Sheriff's car standing there where it had been left; putting his paws on the running-board, sniffing at the front-seat cushion, staring about and panting from his long run.

"Tip!" Kerry called softly. "Oh, Tip!"

The dog whirled. Drake spoke the name again; the retriever threshed his tail and running to the wall, placed his front feet against it, stretching to his full height.

"Drop, boy!" whispered Kerry cautiously. "Drop! Good dog!"

Hastily then he ran along the cells until he reached Stuart's.

"Listen, chum!" he whispered, grasping the other's arm. "What you've said— Well, maybe you can imagine how I feel. You're all man, son! And after this is over maybe the feeling of—of the worst embarrassment I've ever known'll wear off, and I can talk. But tonight we've got things to think about—a lot of 'em; and we'll have to think damned awful fast!"

He paused to listen. No sound came from the front part of the building; across the street a radio blared.

"I've been working for two weeks on this thing," he went on. "It's a dead certainty that Tod West killed Cash. . . No! Don't you talk! Time for that later!

"West killed Downer and cached away the money. Only just now he's dared to use a little of it, some that he didn't know could be identified. When the first of it showed up, on the same night I happened to hit the Landing, Ezra came to me and let me in on it. I've been busy ever since."

Rapidly he narrated what they had learned and suspected; what they had found today; his encounter with Bluejay and the very obvious fact that his own arrest had been made on Tod West's suggestion.

"You see, Holt, he had a double motive with you. Likely he too thinks Nan—well, likes you a lot. He wants you out of the way. You were in a bad spot the night of Downer's murder; he plants the box with just a little money, gets Bluejay ready to swear to this story of his and figures that'll dispose of you. *Me,* though—he figured he'd better hire me killed, and he missed by about a hair. The next best thing is to keep me behind bars as long as he can because he knows damned well neither Ezra nor I fell for the Bluejay lie. So here we are: the two of us in jail, something over twelve thousand dollars still missing, and West on the loose.

"Did you notice that West's head and neck were swollen up? You did? Am I crazy, or did I hear somebody say he'd been stung by a hornet?"

"That's what he *told!*" Stuart was infected by Drake's tensity.

"Check! That's no hornet-sting. That's a *bee* sting. He's been fooling around bees somewhere; he gets stung and gets all daubed up with honey—for there's honey on the box and honey on the crowbar he used in making the plant!"

"The hell you say!"

"Fact! Do you know anybody that keeps bees?"

"Bees? There isn't a hive of 'em in the county! I know all these—"

"But there are wild bees in the woods. . . . *Oh!*" Kerry muttered exasperatedly, rising and slapping a hand to his head. "Why the devil won't a man's brain work when he needs it most. . . . Honey and money! Money and honey!

"We should be out of here tonight, but there isn't a chance! And controlling county politics as he does, you can bet West'll see to it neither one of us get loose in a hurry. Money and honey. . . . . Holt, the thing's just too damned hot to let drop. . . . How in the name of high heaven can we get out of here?"

He swung out of the cell and tiptoed to the window before which he had stood. The heavy bars were set in stone. Even with a hack-saw, it would take hours to cut through. . . . Back he ran to the panel of bars which made the front of their prison. Bars, heavy and thick, running from ceiling to floor, set in a plate; the plate held to the concrete floor by heavy square-headed lag-screws.

On his knees he felt along that plate.

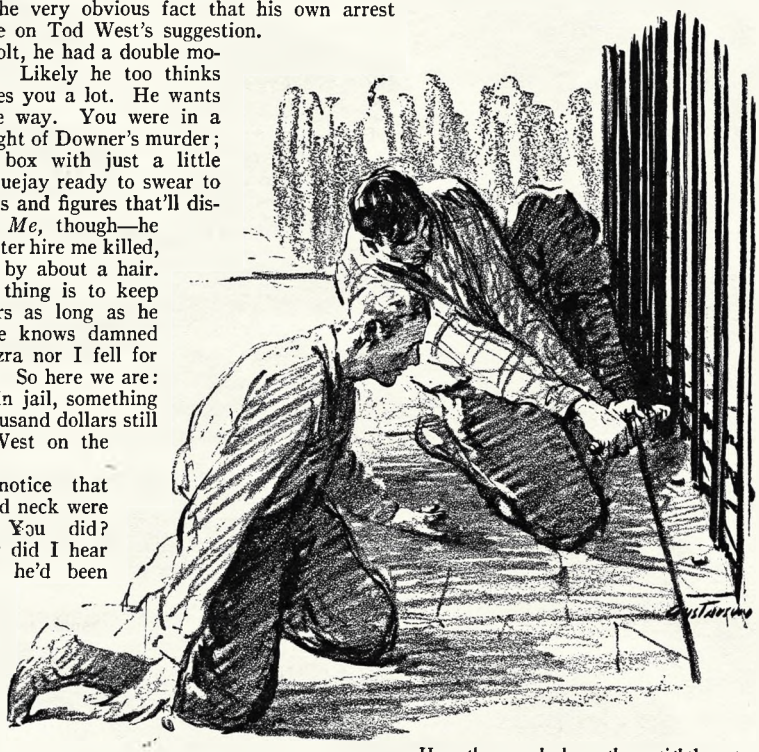
"Lord, here's a short section of it!" he whispered. . . . "Look; the thing's in three sections!"—running his hands up the bars. "This door and its steel frame is one. And one, two, four— *Seven* lag-screws hold it to the floor. With those out—"

"But how?" Holt whispered. "How the devil would you get 'em out? Where'd you find a wrench?"

"Wrench? Why — why — Christopher! Holt, on the way in—"

He gripped the other's arm so tightly that the boy winced; Kerry strained to listen, then put his lips close to Stuart's ear.

"Stand here, and if anybody comes, talk or whistle or sing! Whistle, if you can! For the love of God, walk up and down and whistle. . . . No, never mind, why. . . . Let me alone—I'm going to try to pull a fast one. . . . . Got any string? Search yourself! Or a shoestring'd do. . . Yes! Get one out—and cover me up, boy, if you ever did anything in your *life!*"



How they worked on those tightly set lag-screws! On their knees, ready to throw themselves back into the cells at the first alarming sound, they toiled.

Ducking into a cell he felt along the base of the wall, scraping up fragments of plaster. With these, he went quickly to the rear window and peered down. Tip lay there, still panting from his long, hard run.

"Hi, chum!"—cautiously. The dog rose and stood looking upward, tail busy. "Tip, fetch!" On the command Kerry tossed a bit of plaster toward the car.

The retriever went out with a great bound, running in short circles, sniffing, looking up, whining.

"Fetch!" Again he tossed a fragment, and it struck the fender.

With the sound Tip whirled, bounded toward the car, pawed at the ground and picked up the plaster in his mouth, trotting back to his place below the window.

"Give! Now, fetch again! In the car, boy, *in the car!*"

Behind him, Holt Stuart was pacing and whistling softly, raggedly; not a musical whistle—a rather dry and husky one, to be sure, but still, it was sound. . . . .

Mystified, Tip trotted out to where he had found the plaster and sniffed and pawed, looked back, ran around the car, stopped and lifted his nose high, drinking in scent from the seat.

"Right! Good dog! Up, now! Fetch!"

Lightly the dog leaped within, bunting wide the half-

opened door. He investigated at length, smelling here and there, pawing; then, on a blanket which spread across the cushion, he found his master's scent the strongest and immediately began tugging at it stoutly.

"No! Not that! Not the robe!" Drake moved his feet up and down to relieve the nervous tension which racked his body. "Stay there. . . . And fetch—*fetch*, old-timer!"

Tip abandoned the rug. More sniffing, more pawing, then he came trotting toward the jail wall, a limp glove in his jaws.

"Fine! Give! That's the boy! Now fetch again!"

He turned and beckoned Stuart closer with a jerk of his head.

"Working fine! Get a blanket and cut it into strips, about so wide"—measuring with thumb and finger. "And keep whistling! For the love of God don't stop *whistling!*"

Now Tip was fetching a tire-iron; next he brought a pair of pliers, handling the metal gingerly, head bent far to one side as the grip necessary to holding them hurt his teeth. As he deposited each against the wall he looked up anxiously and threshed his tail and panted.

"Fetch!" whispered Drake harshly. "Clean her out! Bound to be a wrench!"

But there was an S-wrench, then the other glove, and a screwdriver, next a jack-handle and then—

DRAKE was laughing excitedly beneath his breath as he waved an arm wildly to Holt—for Tip was advancing with a monkey-wrench held gingerly from the side of his mouth!

"Good dog! Take! . . . . Hold it, now! Steady—"

"How's that?" muttered Stuart, thrusting the rope made of a ripped blanket into Kerry's hands.

"Whistle! . . . Stay by the door and *whistle!*"

He scanned the darkness beyond the lighted area anxiously. Any passer-by, seeing the dog, could upset his plan. And Nat Bridger might have his vanity satiated now, by the gang at the pool-room. Time was precious!

The blanket rope was long enough. He bent the shoelace to it and made in it a running loop. Then cautiously, trying to keep his hands from trembling too much, he thrust the string through the bars and carefully paid out the strands of woolen fabric.

Tip stood there obediently, wrench in his jaws, rolling his eyes toward that descending strand. It swung and swayed; the loop touched the dog's head, dangled near the wrench—then closed of its own weight!

With a muttered curse, Kerry jerked it upward again, improved the knot and tried once more. Thrice, and a fourth time, he was forced to open the loop before it finally swung over the end of the wrench. Then, holding his breath, he drew it taut and with a muttered *"Give!"* swung the tool free.

It touched the wall with a dull click; it came up and he drew a great gasp of night air as his hand, thrust between the bars, closed upon it. . . .

How they worked on those tightly set lag-screws! On their knees, close together, ready to throw themselves back into the cells at the first alarming sound, they toiled. Two of the seven came easily. Two more yielded to their combined strength. The fifth and the sixth finally moved, but the seventh—ah, that seventh one!

With Stuart's hands gripped over Kerry's they put their weight on the wrench-handle until Drake thought the flesh would roll from his palms. They sweated and panted and cursed in whispers; then, without warning, it gave, letting go so suddenly that Drake lunged noisily against the bars!

And on that sound came another: steps approaching, feet at the entry. They scuttled for their cells.

"Any calls, Ma?" It was Bridger's voice, and a woman answered from somewhere.

He came on and peered through the door, trying the lock. Drake held his lungs flat in fear the whole panel would move.

"You boys all right?" he asked.

"What d'you mean, all right?" Drake growled.

The Sheriff laughed and turned away.

For an hour then they lay still; not until a muffled, regular snoring heralded the fact that rest had come to the county's servant, did they leave their cots.

It was work of a mere moment to remove the last screw. Then with his shoulder to the panel, Drake shoved carefully. The bottom plate grated on the concrete, gave, squeaked a trifle and then—swung free! A man could roll beneath it to the jail corridor and be on his way!

But he let it swing back and crouched on the floor, listening. Abruptly he said: "After I'm gone, you set the screws back and cover the heads with dust."

Stuart looked at him blankly.

"You mean— You're going *alone?*"

"Listen, chum! It's tough, I know. But you're in as a murder suspect—breaking jail would be damned serious for you. With me, it's a lesser offense. And besides that, we'll need information about Bridger's plans, perhaps."

That was not his real reason. Good enough, to be sure; but knowing Stuart for a hot-headed, impulsive, action-loving boy, he did not dare risk liberating him now, when so much careful, patient work lay before him.

"Hell, Drake! I hadn't figured—"

"But I had. I know just what's got to be done, outside. Can't you see that maybe you'll be helping Nan by sticking here and keeping your eyes and ears open?"

"Of course, if you put it that way—"

His consent was not without reluctance.

Drake rolled beneath the out-swung panel.

"Good luck!" They gripped hands through the bars. "Tell Nat the fairies came for me. . . . And when you've got the screws back, duck that wrench down the sewer!"

Silently he made his way into the Sheriff's office and down the side steps. With a low whistle to Tip, he leaped into the car standing there. He opened the choke wide, stepped on the starter, and the motor caught and drummed. Then quickly he slipped in the clutch and turned down the jail drive to the street.

Once there, he looked over his shoulder. Lights showed above two entrances to the jail, but the windows of the Sheriff's living-quarters were blank. Nat Bridger was deep in dreams of continued grandeur, while a prisoner used his car for escape. As Kerry bounced across the railroad tracks, leaving the town behind, and headed for the Madwoman, he beat Tip's ribs resoundingly with one hand and laughed until his sides ached!

CHAPTER XXI

JIM HINKEL had not slept. Too much had happened to let his senses sink into unconsciousness. Besides, he had had Tod West to watch, until West took to his bed. He had promised Drake he would watch West's every move, and he was doing his best to make his word good. So when a light rapping came on his door, he was out of bed with a stealthy bound.

"Drake, Jim!" came a cautious whisper in answer to his query. "Come out here!"

"My God, Drake, how'd *you*—"

"Never mind anything now, Jim. Where's West?"

"Asleep,"—peering toward Tod's house. "I watched until long after he'd gone to bed. He come to the store pret' well tanked up, I'd say. That was an hour after they took you to town. He seemed more like his old self than he has for a long time. He laughed and visited around, then went home. I watched through his window and saw him hittin' a bottle right hard. Then he went to bed."

"One other item about West. Where was he yesterday? Friday?"

"That's somethin' I dunno. All day Thursday he was here. I seen him talk to Bluejay in the evenin' and—"

"Check!"

"He turned in right after that. Friday he made a lot of fuss about goin' fishin'. He drove to Big Beaver and set up his rod and got ready to fish—but he *didn't* fish. He cached his rod under a log and hit out. I followed far's I could, but lost his trail, it bein' so dry that—"

"Which way'd he go?"

"North and west."

"That checks, too. And when he came back to town, what?"

"He was all puffed up. Said a hornet'd stung him."

"Fine!" whispered Kerry. "That all ties in! Now that's enough of West. I've got to talk fast. Back down the road half a mile you'll find Nat Bridger's car—"

"Nat's!"

"Yeah. It—it helped speed his departing guest!"—chuckling. "I don't want him to know what direction I hit, of course. I want you to drive his bus back to Shoestring, cut west on the trunk line highway, go as far as you can without making too much of a walk for yourself, let the air out of a tire and leave it."

"But what are *you* goin' to do, Kerry?"

"Going bee-hunting."

"*Bee*-huntin'!" The man's incredulity was explosive. "What in the hell do you want of—"

"I don't know—that's the devil of it! But I'm on my way. You get back, fast as you can and stand by to watch Tod."

"My gosh, Kerry, I don't understand—"

"And neither do I, maybe. Good night!"

And Kerry slipped away noiselessly. . . .

At Nan's, Drake also found sleeplessness. He could see the girl and old Ezra sitting together in the light of a single lamp, and from the doorway he hailed them cautiously.

"Careful, now!" he warned as their amazement became articulate. "I don't want to be seen."

Omitting all detail, he told what had happened. Then:

"Money and honey, Ezra! There's a hook-up somewhere; they tie in. I'm on my way to try to wangle it out. I want some stuff from the kitchen and the men's shanty, Nan!"

HIS eyes had been on her face as he talked. Its oval seemed more sweet and gentle than ever. He wanted to touch her, to take her hands, to draw her close and say the things that were surging in his heart—things of far more consequence than the things he let his lips say. But he repressed the impulse.

They followed into the darkened kitchen and he searched for what he needed: a small fiber cracker-box, a tumbler, a jar of strained honey.

"Get me a quart bottle, please, Nan. Fill it two-thirds full of honey and finish with water—warm, if you've got it. I'll need a pack-sack and some stuff from the shanty!"

He was back in a moment, sack on his shoulder, rifle in his hand. Quickly he stowed away the other articles.

"Ezra, we've got to keep Bridger as far in the dark as we hope we can keep West. We didn't dare trust him with the bullet identification; no more can we on the fingerprints. You'll find Jim Hinkel home by the middle of the forenoon, anyhow. My suggestion is that you write a telegram and send him out with it; away out—I wouldn't even trust the Shoestring operator. Get the State police in here as fast as they can come and until they do you sit on the stuff we brought in last evening and don't let a soul near it, much less touch it! Am I right?"

"Right as rain! I'd wondered what to do, and this is it!" Ezra agreed.

Kerry turned to Nan, then, and looked down at her, smiling in the faint light. She was more appealing, more desirable than ever. . . . Holt Stuart's words, with their almost incredible implications, came back to him. He felt suddenly humble.

"There are so many things to say to you, Nan," he said gravely, and saw her eyes drop at the quality of his tone. Ezra noted it too, and he moved softly away. But Drake only added: "Tonight, though, there's only one thing for us to think about, to work and hope and pray for: and that is to reach the end of this trail we're on. After that—"

She looked up almost timidly and gave him her hands. He stooped on quick impulse, and pressed them to his lips. Then he went hastily out and with Tip at his heels he disappeared in the night, taking the road he had traveled thrice yesterday, once on foot and twice in Ezra's car; the road where bees had been working in wild bloom.

CHAPTER XXII

AN early northern dawn was already dimming the stars when he reached the place. He was drenched to the hips from the dew that clung to the grasses.

He spread his one blanket; then, rifle against his side, Tip's warm body for a pillow, and his slouch hat over his eyes, he snuggled down for what sleep he might have. It was the sun on his cheek two hours later which wakened him.

Fireweed grew all about, rank and tall, its light magenta blossoms drooping and a-glisten with drops of dew that gleamed like jewels in the slanting sunlight. The sky was cloudless, the morning very still and Kerry muttered a word of thanks for that.

A fire of dry cedar twigs which threw little smoke made his breakfast tea and broiled his bacon. As he ate, he watched the flowers begin to nod gracefully under the slightest of breezes, saw the dew disappearing from them, saw the petals spreading wide. As soon as he had eaten he took the cracker-box from his sack and cut a hole an inch square in the cover.

He smoked his pipe thereafter and waited,—listening, looking,—the dog sitting before him with a puzzled expression, whining softly and licking his chops and gaping. After all that had happened yesterday and last night, Tip appeared to be thinking, this was a devil of a way to start the morning!

"Ha! . . . . *Here* we are!"

Drake was on his feet, then, bending over a blossom that sagged slightly under the weight of a bee. Busily the striped insect explored that flower, then crawled to another and still a third, and finally, locating what he wanted, squeezed his head and foreparts into the petal-fringed nectar cup.

"Shove 'em, old feller!" Kerry chuckled as the hind legs braced and the bee twisted and strained mightily to get nearer the precious product of the bloom. "If a bee can grunt, Tip, he's grunting! *Look* at him work!"

He shook the bottle of diluted honey and poured some

carefully inside his box. Then, holding the open receptacle beneath the working bee, he struck the spike smartly, knocking him free, down into the box, and clapped the cover in place.

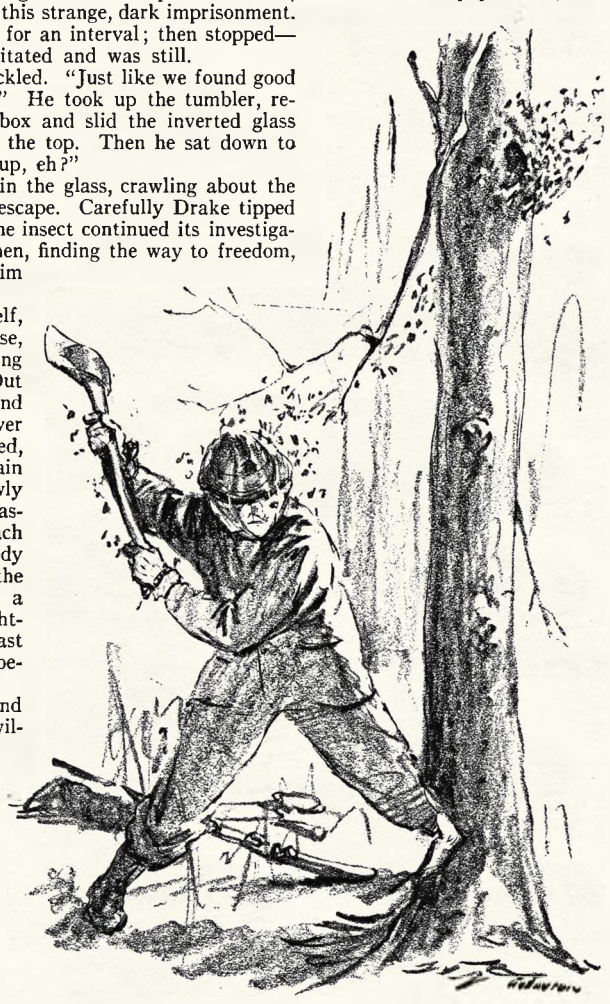
With his hat he covered the top; then waited while the bee buzzed within, bumping sides and top and bottom, angered and frightened at this strange, dark imprisonment. The buzzing was constant for an interval; then stopped—began again; halted—hesitated and was still.

"Found it!" Kerry chuckled. "Just like we found good old Nat's car last night!" He took up the tumbler, removed his hat from the box and slid the inverted glass over the small opening in the top. Then he sat down to wait. "Hi! All loaded up, eh?"

The bee had appeared in the glass, crawling about the interior intently, seeking escape. Carefully Drake tipped the tumbler to its side; the insect continued its investigation for a moment and then, finding the way to freedom, poised an instant on the rim and took hasty wing.

As the bee launched itself, Kerry stood erect and tense, eyes on the swiftly moving dot against the pale sky. Out it went in a great circle, and back again, skimming over the box. Wider it circled, and higher; again and again it swooped above its newly discovered source of treasure, widening the circle each time, and Drake's body moved as he followed the course. . . . Then, with a final swoop, the bee straightened out, bearing a bit east of north, and disappeared behind a hemlock stub.

"There!" Kerry said and looked down at the bewildered dog. "That's the way it works, Tip! He's taking the bacon home, chum! He gave the box all those swings so he'll know where to come for more of what he found. Oh, yes, he'll be back! He'll fight wind and distance—anything but rain or cold—to get here, so long's there's a drop left. And he'll tell his buddies about it, too!"



Not half a dozen blows had been struck before the bees were upon him in a cloud. But Kerry swung his ax steadily.

More bees appeared on the fireweed, but Kerry gave them no heed. He smoked and stood over his box, waiting through a long half hour. Then a louder buzzing, a more intent sound, came out of the silence; a bee zoomed over the box, lighted on the cover and disappeared within.

"*And* his gang!" the man cried in triumph. "His gang, Tip! See? Two more—three—four—seven!" Singly and in braces the bees dropped to the box, sought the hole and, up-ending, went out of sight.

When no more appeared, Drake placed his hat gently over the hole, picked up the box and, stepping carefully over the tangle of down stuff that he might not fall and so invite temporary disaster, made his way to the foot of the hemlock stub where the first bee, homeward-bound, had disappeared.

Reaching there, he placed the box on a stump, removed his hat and slid the up-ended tumbler over the hole. Almost immediately bees appeared inside the glass. He let three show before liberating them; then with bated breath, he followed their circlings until they had straightened out, and marked a poplar tree, five rods away, as the last certain point on their course.

"Not so good, Tip!" he muttered. "Took that first one a half hour to go and come. Maybe it's a big tree; if so, he may have a lot of crawling around to do to get rid of his cargo. But, even so, it's a long ways off. They'll do a mile in five minutes in country and weather like this. . . . Timber's not so far from here; they won't fly so fast in there as they will in this burning. And we won't be able to see so far, either. . . . Well, it's like leapfrog. Come on, chum, let's drag the duffle up!"

Again nearly a half hour passed, but this time the first contingent brought more helpers and when Kerry moved the box forward to the base of the poplar tree, a handful of bees were trapped there and, when the last had gone, he replenished the supply of honey from his bottle.

That was a few minutes after eight, just at the time when Nat Bridger, drawn and gray of face, hammered loudly on Tod West's door.

West answered sleepily from above, and after a short interval appeared.

"What the devil's up?"

"Enough! I been tryin' to get you for three hours by phone, but either you slept like hell or—"

"What's *up*, I asked you?" West's jaw was quivering.

"Well, Drake made a get-away! Must've had help from outside, looks like. He's gone."

For a moment the room was silent and then came a hollow rattle: Tod West's teeth clicked as a spasm of fear shook his great frame.

"You poor sap!" he rasped. "You simple—"

Bridger protested and West stormed. Explanations, excuses, regrets, mingled with condemnations.

"I've done all I can. I've notified every Sheriff for two hundred miles. He went west—took my car and drove a tire flat and left it. Chances are, though, he's to hell-and-gone!"

On this, something like relief flickered in West's eyes;

but it was of short duration. This reckless stranger was not the sort of man who flees in the face of as flimsy a charge as had been placed against him. West had hoped at the most to keep Drake in safe confinement until Bridger and the prosecutor could perfect a case against Holt Stuart which would forever remove from his own breast those hidden fears. But now—

"Gone, eh?" he muttered. "Well, you've been made a monkey of by him! How'll folks think of *that* when they go to vote for Sheriff again? I tell you, Bridger, you got just one chance: that's to start things movin' against Stuart and not let 'em stop!"

"Well, I'm tryin', aint I? But what can I do when Ezra's sittin' on the evidence? I've got lines out to locate Bluejay, but it's Ezra who'll gum up the works!"

"Then you better use what you call your mind, and drum up somethin' to make Ezra string along with you! What the hell's a prosecutor for, anyhow, if you can't get him to help you?"

"But the law's with the coroner!"

"To hell with that!"

They argued fruitlessly, and when Bridger was gone Tod West paced the room and that fine beading of sweat pricked out on his forehead again. He felt caged, trapped —and yet he could discern no snare or deadfall immediately about him. Still, with this reckless fool of a Drake on the loose—

"Damn!" he snarled. "Damn everything!" And whirled sharply—he thought that from somewhere he had heard Drake's ringing, taunting, vindictive laughter again!

CHAPTER XXIII

JIM HINKEL was out his way out toward Shoestring again before mid-afternoon. He yawned as he drove, and his eyes were heavy. But he drove one of Nan's cars into town rapidly, then turned eastward and made better time on the highway. He went into the third town before he stopped at a telegraph-office and thrust across the counter the message that Ezra Adams had intrusted to him.

"State Police Headquarters," the operator read aloud, then mumbled the rest. . . . . .

It was sundown, with the cool mantle of evening descending on the forest.

"Tough luck, chum!" Kerry Drake muttered to Tip, as he finally gave up hope and turned away from his bee-box. "They've called it a day. . . . . But we can't be far off, now, and unless it rains tomorrow—"

He looked anxiously upward. Clouds were riding up from the west. The air felt like rain. If rain held tomorrow he would be put to the ordeal of keeping out of sight and accomplishing nothing—not a nice prospect.

"May have a wet night," he told the dog. "We can't be far from the cabin on Townline, but we wouldn't dare risk that."

He found a down maple and under its sheltering bole spread his blanket; then, rifle handy, dog beside him, stretched his tired body. Rain began to fall and in the distance thunder rumbled. His thoughts turned to Nan, to Ezra and Holt—then to West. He drew a long, uneasy breath. . . .

He would have been a trifle more at peace had he known that a car bearing two men was whirling into Shoestring from the southward, lights glaring with intensified brightness in the downpour of rain there. It came to a stop before a gas-station and one of the occupants, slicker-clad, leaned out.

"What's the road to West's Landing?" he asked.

"First to the left and straight on, twenty miles. Look out for the culverts if the creeks is up!"

"Thanks!"

The car pulled away and the one who had asked directions said to the driver:

"Don't you want me to take her, Sergeant? You've had a long trick at that wheel."

"Mebby so. You've napped. No tellin' what this old coot of a Coroner'll have on the bill for us when we get to him."

THE rain was heavy but of short duration. Stars appeared; the rumble of thunder retreated; and when the sun rose to warm and dry the land, insect life resumed its activity. Drake, biting hard on his pipe-stem, carried his bee-box forward, put it down, and carefully liberated the confined workers within.

"We're close, Tip!" he muttered. "Close and closer! Look at 'em!"

Dozens of bees swarmed about the box, buzzing shrilly.

An hour after the first visitor had called for his portion of honey, Drake stood at the foot of a gnarled beech tree, staring upward at the old scar in the trunk, twice as high as his head, watching the come-and-go of workers through the hole that gave access to the tree's hollow heart. He did not move much after he had finally located the tree. For long he stood in one place, looking about, searching out what sign he could find.

Man sign was there in plenty. Yonder, a white pine had recently been blazed and pitch globules glistened in the sunlight. Brakes had been trampled down; here a seedling maple lay crushed into the duff, its leaves not yet wilted. At the base of the tree lay a saprophyte which, until recently, had been growing on the scarred portion of the tree. He could see where the bracket-like growth had been attached, two feet above the ground. He picked up the fungus and on its pale tan velvety surface showed the print of a heel, even to the nails, dark brown against the buff. Some man had used that bracket in starting to climb that tree!

On his knees, he searched. The rain had not struck here with great force. Small bits of bark and lichens, with a fresh appearance, were there. The protruding end of a small limb, long since dead and all but absorbed by the expanding trunk, bore bits of thread, as if a garment had rubbed over it. . . . . Yes, some one had climbed this bee-tree!

Honey and money! . . . Money and honey!

Yonder went a trail—faint, yet readable to Drake's eye. Not a game trail, either; he found the ill-defined outline of a boot-sole there. Stooped over, he followed the trail. Broken, withered brakes told that some one had gone this way weeks before; broken brakes, still fresh, attested to a more recent passing.

The sign ended before a pair of limestone boulders, tilted together, forming a small cave, close by a pool of water standing in low ground. Another stone had been set against this opening once; now it was gone, rolled yonder.

Kerry lay on his belly and shot his flashlight into the small cavern. Granules glistened on the stone; he touched them with his finger and looked closely. Black, brittle, glittering flakes, they were. . . . . Lacquer from a japanned box?

His mouth was dry as he rolled quickly to his side to stare at the tree. A box the size of the one he had dug up yesterday never could have been concealed in the hollow of the beech; the opening was too small. But a box had been hidden *here*, and a man had climbed the tree. . . . And honey had daubed the man who handled both box and crowbar. . . .

"I'm a son-of-a-gun!" he cried. And his face showed, for an instant, a flash of admiration for the ingenuity which had laid out this course—if the course he now suspected had indeed been followed.

He had been right about the cabin on Townline. It was a short mile there and he covered the distance at a jog-trot, Tip close behind. He halted at the edge of the clearing to look and listen and then went forward without hesitation.

From a bed-net above one of the bunks, he cut a portion; he found a pair of old leather gloves, a workman's denim jumper, a hank of stout cord. From the tool-cache he took an ax, a cedar saw, a splitter and two wedges. These, with his rifle, made a burden of consequence and by the time he reached the tree again sweat bathed him.

From the netting he improvised a veil, adjusting it over his hat and tucking the edges into the neck of the jumper. He put on the gloves, tied the jumper-sleeves tight about his wrists, and picked up the ax.

"Tip—yonder!" He gestured in command. "Away back and lie down! There's going to be a lot of hostility here in a minute!"

He waited until the dog had obeyed, and then sent the bit of the ax deep into the beech.

He was right about the hostility! Not a half dozen blows had been struck before the bees were upon him in a cloud, buzzing angrily, seeking ways through his veil and garments for countless stingers. But Kerry was well protected and swung his ax steadily, eating a great gash in the trunk. One or two got to his wrists, and now and again he felt a burning prick on the shoulders when his jumper stretched tight. But that was as nothing, in this interval of suspense.

The tree sagged and shivered. It snapped. He struck three more swift blows and stepped back as it came down with a mighty, swishing roar and crash.

He had dropped the ax as the beech toppled. Now he took up the saw, and standing in a cloud of furious bees which hovered over the entrance to their fallen storehouse, he sent the teeth singing through the stout wood. Swiftly his supple body swung to and fro; stoutly his long, strong arms drove the avid blade. The forest rang with the sound. . . . . Rang with the sound which would have covered even the noise made by a frantic man, crashing through the brush, running intently, breathlessly, his hat gone, his face scratched and clothing torn; heedless, apparently, of everything except making speed and clinging to the rifle he carried across his chest.

The man was not close enough to have the sound of his approach reach Drake. But he *was* close enough to hear the ringing voice of that saw. He drew a hand across his face to wipe away the blood and the sweat, and tried to still his breathing to listen. His trembling lips shaped a word and then he went forward cautiously, walking like a cat, rifle held at ready. . . . As he approached the source of those other sounds, which had now changed from that of sawing to ringing blows of a sledge on metal, he bent forward a trifle and went even more quietly. . . .

"They had a box and a crowbar and a tin cup on the table. They was sayin' as how they couldn't do nothin' till mornin'."

WEST'S LANDING and its environs had experienced two long evenings and one long day of excitement pitched to a point never before attained.

And now the second day was beginning. Work was forgotten, and before Mel Knight's store was gathered a group which argued and debated and orated.

Holt Stuart was in jail. Nan Downer, it was said, had brought in a lawyer from outside yesterday and the three had been together in Nat Bridger's office for a long time. But as yet no attempt to secure Stuart's release had been made.

Kerry Drake had escaped during the first night of his imprisonment and not been heard from since, though the search was frenzied.

Frank Bluejay was gone somewhere in his tattered flivver, and men combed the blueberry country for sign or word of him.

And across at Nan Downer's headquarters, old Ezra Adams sat behind the locked door of the office with the articles he and Drake had brought from Townline, refusing to budge, denying Bridger admittance, awaiting for something—one knew not what!

Tod West had been in and out, saying little, going into long, heated, but confidential talks with the Sheriff.

"He's givin' Nat hell!" the wise ones opined. "Tod's anxious to see things go right in this county, you bet! Leave it to Tod; he'll give good advice!"

But this last was a matter of habit. Even when men said it and others agreed, they were making mental reservations. Somehow, Tod West wasn't the figure he had been. . . . . .

And now came young Logan DePriest—none-too-bright grandson of old Perry DePriest—walking across the trestle from Downer's, where he was employed doing chores at headquarters.

"Well, Logan, you got it all settled over there?" a wag asked.

"Damn' right we have!" the youth replied importantly.

Something about his manner tugged at the interest of

those who heard and saw. Yet Logan was not to be taken seriously.

"I s'pose you've found Drake and Bluejay, and know what Ezra's got hatchin', eh?"

"Damn' right I do!"

"A lot *you* know!"

"Betcha I know more'n any of you-uns! Betcha million dollars, I do!"

"Take you. Bring out the million!"

"You think you're funny!" The youth's pallid eyes flared indignation. "You think you're smart, you do! Well, lemme ast you this: You know who them dudes was that druv into our place after the rain las' night? You don't? Well, I do—one of 'em's a corporal and one of 'em's a sergeant, and they're detectuffs!"

"Go on!" So commented one—but others lost their smiles and drew closer.

"Betcha two million!" Logan spit and nodded. "Why, Miss Nan, she gits me up to put their car away, she does. And after I'd done it, I seen 'em all in the office. I walked by, and they was standin' there, Ezra and Miss Nan, and the detectuffs. They had a box and a crowbar and a tin cup on the table. They had a coal-oil lamp there 'cause the storm put the 'lectric lights out; they was all bent over the table, and sayin' as how they couldn't do nothin' till mornin'—"

Now even the scoffers were edging closer, and another had come from behind young DePriest—Tod West, this, halted in his evident intent to enter the store, was looking and listening.

"Well, this mornin' them detectuffs was up early," the boy continued. "And what'd they do?" Cunningly, he looked about, enjoying immensely this moment of importance. "They start blowin' powder on 'at box, and blowin' powder on 'at ol' crowbar, and stickin' black tape over the powder, and showin' it to Ezra.

"The sergeant, he's the boss. And he says to Ezra: 'The feller who handled the crowbar is the fella who left his thumbprint inside the box!' 'Nen they picked up 'at ol' tin cup and went to work on it, blowin' powder; an' they says to Ezra 'at if the prints on 'at ol' cup's the same's the others, they c'n git their man jus' by reachin' out fer him!"

He looked around again. "Jus' now, 'at was," he declared. "Jus' now, they're blowin' powder on 'at ol' tin cup!"

The group pressed closer, but it had one less member, now; Tod West was walking blindly, staggering a bit, toward his house. And as he glanced across the river to where two tall young men walked toward the trestle, one on either side of Ezra Adams, he began to run. . . .

The spruce forest grew close to his back door. It was but a moment's work to secure his rifle and a supply of ammunition and then disappear through the trees. Panting, he fled upstream, crossed in gravel shallows and plunged through the bush northward.

He had a gun and he knew where he could get an ax. With an ax and a gun a man may live in the woods a long time, provided he knows the woods and their ways. Tod West knew that vast country beyond Townline Lake better than did any other. He could hide there, could remain in safety for weeks, for months. He could not, of course, stay forever; and when he did emerge he would need more than an ax and a gun—he would need money. On his way to his first sanctuary he could retrieve money.

UNDER the riving of the wedges, the trees split and its halves rolled apart at Drake's feet. A great mass of brood and comb and oozing honey glistened in the sunlight. Trickles of the golden fluid ran across the freshly broken wood. In great sheets, the comb ran up the cavity —great folds. . . . And near the bottom of the hive, about the length of a man's forearm from the entrance, embedded in comb, snug and tight and safe, was the thing which belonged in no bees' storehouse!

Drake dropped the sledge and tore into the comb with his gloved hands, wresting from that sticky mass the cylindrically shaped object his quick eyes had detected. Honey dripped from it; bees swarmed about his hands as he turned it over and over.

"What a place!" he muttered. "No mouse could gnaw, no prowling bear find it! Nothing, Tod West, except the *bees* knew! . . . . And who'd hunt for this tree? Who—if you hadn't happened to leave honey sticking to that old crowbar!"

He shook off a bee which stung his wrist. He moved away from the buzzing cloud, making his way to the leaf-dappled pool of water and, stooping, sloshed the honey-smeared roll of bills about.

The honey washed away quickly, dissolving even in the cold water. Kerry saw a figure on the currency; it was a hundred-dollar bill; many more were there. . . . He washed them briskly and Tip came close.

"Got it, Tip!" he cried. "Got dear Nan's cash! We've got—" He stopped—a part of the smear would not wash away. He examined it carefully and the dog, snapping at a bee, did not catch the sound from behind—the sound of a man rising in a screen of young growth, bringing his rifle slowly down, pressing a scratched and sweat-stained cheek to the stock. . . .

"Pitch!" Kerry muttered. "Pitch, sure as hell! That's why the blaze on the pine tree! He smeared it with pitch, Tip, so the bees wouldn't try to carry it away, piece by piece! He knew—"

DRAKE whirled, then, because the dog had turned, stiff and alert, in his throat a ragged growl. In the soft earth, one of Kerry's feet slipped; he had started to fall even as the rifle spoke, started to throw himself toward his own rifle, leaning against a boulder. . . . But he did not reach it. That other weapon barked and he went down with the agonies of hell itself tearing at his left shoulder. . . . .

So it was Tip who rushed Tod West, who charged forward as the man emerged from the brush, rifle at ready —Tip who, with teeth showing, and eyes wicked with an orange flare, stood alone between Nan Downer's money and the man who had cached it so cunningly!

Again the rifle crashed and the dog, yelping, snapping at his right hind leg, went end over end through the underbrush, threshing, rolling, screaming with pain as Tod West charged past him. . . .

Drake had fallen face down into the muck about the spring. His right hand lay limply in the water and away from it, rocked by the little ripples which still disturbed the surface, floated the roll of bills, turning slowly around and around.

West saw the money. With an oath he snatched it up, then pumped a fresh cartridge into the rifle-chamber. He poised there above the figure of his Nemesis, dropping the muzzle quickly to the back of the bared head.

And then caution asserted itself. How far behind pursuit might be, Tod did not know. Already he had fired twice, and sounds would carry well that day. He stopped, listening. The pound of his heart, the rasp of his own breath were loud. He lifted Drake's arm and let it go. The inert hand smacked the water dully.

Then, with cruel craft, West placed his foot against Drake's cheek, shoved his face down into the spring and leaped the now roily pool.

"Breathe and drown, damn you!" he growled shakily and set off at a run. . . . . .

It was the whining dog, tugging on his collar, which roused Kerry. He stirred and gulped and gasped. With a herculean effort, he raised his head and half rolled over; then dropped it to the ferns and lay there moaning. He should not be there, he knew; he had something to do; a matter to attend. . . . But things were so far away, so faintly outlined, so—

Tip's tongue was frantic against his closed lids; Tip's breath hot in his own nostrils. Consciousness came back with a nauseating surge.

"Oh, God!" he moaned, getting his knees somehow beneath him. "It's gone. . . . Tip! That was West—it was— And he's *got* it!"

FIGHTING sickness, shaking his head against blindness, he searched. The money was gone! Tears coursed his cheeks as he shouted that at Tip and then stopped, leaning close to see better as the retriever licked savagely at his own thigh.

"Oh!" Kerry gasped. "And he almost got you!" With his good hand he touched the creature's leg. "Broken!" he muttered as Tip winced. "Christ, the two of us. . . . And he's making his get-away with Nan's money!"

A great rage shook him, lifted him above pain, above dizziness for the moment, sent a savage will surging through his broken body.

"Tip, it's up to us! Shy an arm, shy a leg, but— Which way, Tip?" He reached for his gun. "Which way? Come! Hi. . . . *Here!*"

Footprints in the muck gave him a lead. He walked bent over, following the sign in the soft forest mold, at his heels the dog on three legs, whimpering with hurt.

West had been running. His footprints were far apart and deep. That made trailing easy—but it also meant that he was gaining on this feeble pursuit by cripples.

Kerry breathed through dry, open lips. He staggered once and stopped, leaning against a tree, looking backward. He had come such a little way!

"Up to us!" he panted. "—Us cripples! Hi on, Tip!"

The dog looked into his face, then with a moan, dropped his muzzle to the ground, sniffing. He reeled as he lurched along; but he was trailing, and his tail was up!

Drake began to laugh, a bit crazily. "He can't beat us, chum!"

He reeled along after the dog. Now and then he could see the trail itself; at other times sickness engulfed him; the trees swung and tilted crazily; he could scarcely see Tip. But he kept on, up a gentle rise, out onto a limestone ridge. . . . .

Tip was sniffing wildly, there, tail motionless. Then he found again what he was following! With a whimper, half of pain, half of delight, he staggered forward, his master, dragging the rifle, close behind.

Kerry walked that way for a month—a year—a generation! He fell and cut his lips. He bumped into a tree with his wounded shoulder and screamed from the pain. Tip looked back and stopped and waited. When the man got up to him again he went on, trailing like a hound!

Time and distance and pain meant nothing—until they came to that long halt. Perhaps it was the respite from the effort of movement, perhaps the imperative demand for alertness from deep in him that brought Kerry slowly out of that numb state. . . . . Anyhow, he saw that they had come to a clearing. A building was swimming before his eyes, like a moving mirage. . . . That was Townline cabin, and through the open door he could see movement that was no trick of his vagrant senses. This gave him a moment of clarity.

A man was flinging things to the floor in there, dropping to his knees beside them, making wild, extravagant motions as he crammed articles into a pack-sack. Kerry closed one eye tightly to concentrate on recognition. The man was Tod West.

Kerry staggered on a few steps, trying to get the rifle to his shoulder with one arm. He could not do it. The thing was a tremendous and unwieldy weight. He needed a rest for the barrel. . . . Yonder was a rock; he lurched toward it. An upstanding slab of limestone, it was, split by frost with a crack into which he could have laid his arm. . . . He laid the rifle-barrel in the opening and stretched himself laboriously on his belly.

Carefully he sighted on the doorway and worked his tongue in his parched mouth, striving to conjure moisture there so his speech might be good.

"Put up your hands!" he croaked at last. "I've got you covered, and—"

West reared on his knees, rigid. The sight wavered toward him. Drake's finger was on the trigger, ready to thwart any move. . . . And then his man was out of sight, throwing himself sideways along the floor.

Kerry fired, and the shock of recoil sent fresh agonies through his body. He saw the table, on the far side of the room and opposite the doorway, splinter. . . . Then silence fell.

When he had rallied the strength, he called:

"Come out, West! I'll give you one chance!"

On that West spoke:

"To hell with you, Drake!"

Kerry drew a great breath which tore at his wound. So that was it! West had confidence. Desperate, he would be defiant. The only means of exit were on this side: the door and the one window. So long as he could remain in this position and keep his eyes and mind clear, West could not emerge. . . . But how long would that be?

Tod West spoke again.

"I'll wait you out, Drake!" he taunted. "When you've bled enough, I'll finish the job!"

Kerry shut his teeth and tried to pray. He could feel a renewed trickle of blood down his side.

"Oh, God," he began mumbling, "give me strength to scotch this snake! Oh, God, let me hold out to save for Nan what's hers! . . . . Please, God!"

Tip, beside him, moaned and trembled and began licking at his leg again.

Thereafter was no speech nor movement for a long interval. The shadows shifted beneath the march of the sun. A fly droned about Kerry's head. His tongue was so parched that it seemed it would crack.

THEN suddenly he was aware of stirrings within the cabin and something flashed across the doorway; West had crossed to the window end of the cabin. Kerry fired again, but aimlessly.

"Still awake, eh?" West jeered. "Look your last! Or, I'll trade with you. Throw your rifle into the clearing and I'll give you my word I'll not come near—"

Kerry fired again and a windowpane pulverized. He heard the other cursing sharply and knew he had not been wrong—the suggestion of a shadow against the glass had been West, peering out.

It was agony to pump in another cartridge. His left arm lay cold and lifeless beside him, but his shoulder burned and throbbed. He got a box of ammunition out of his pocket somehow and stuffed the magazine full. Blackness hovered over him for a moment. . . . .

He tried to reason things out. He could not last much longer. Loading his gun had started the blood again. When the bleeding had sapped him enough, or when night

fell, Tod West could slip out and be gone forever. And what was it that Nan had said about West and the country beyond? . . . . . Oh, yes! West knew it like a book! He was the only one who knew it! Once in it, then, the Downer account against him, both in blood and money, might well be written off!

If he only had help! If Nan or Ezra or any of them only knew where he was! But they did not. All they knew was that he was hunting a bee-tree. He was alone—he and Tip were alone. . . .

He held his eyes on the cabin and kept the rifle-butt to his good shoulder with his chin. His right hand went out to Tip, caressing the short, curly hair, and the dog whined; but not from pain—it was an inquiring, concerned whine and he stared hard into his master's strange face.

"Tip! You've got it—to do!" Kerry whispered. "It's tough, with that leg, but it's her only chance. Maybe—my only chance! . . . . You've got it to do for Nan! Understand? For Nan!"

The dog's nose began to quirk and his tail moved slightly.

"Hear me, Tip? (God, I can't tell whether I'm yelling or whispering!) Hear me?"—gripping the coat and shaking the dog a little. "Go to Nan, Tip! Go to Nan! . . . . Hi on! To Nan—*Nan!*"

He shoved at the wounded animal and Tip rose painfully to his feet, staring incredulously at his master. *"Nan?"* he seemed asking. "Go away, with you in a jam like this?"

Again Drake spoke: "Hi on! *Nan,* I said!" The savagery in his voice made the dog's ears drop meekly. "Go to Nan! Don't you hear?" He had raised himself to his elbow, thrusting his face close to the dog, snarling the words.

Surprised and shocked, Tip slunk away. He licked his chops and waggled his tail apologetically. Never before in his life had he been addressed so. At a little distance he halted, as though expecting to have Kerry relent.

"Nan, I said! Go to Nan!" Kerry's eyes were glowing with fever, now. "Go find Nan, I tell you!"

He picked up a pebble and clumsily shied it at Tip, groaning the while from the pain the action gave.

With a protesting little whimper, that one leg dragging uselessly, the ragged bone-ends biting into raw flesh at every move, the dog made his way slowly through the brush. Shortly he came out to the road he had traveled before. He stood there and gave a long look backward. Then he limped gingerly across the first rut and, panting from the effort, set out to do his master's bidding. . . . .

CHAPTER XXIV

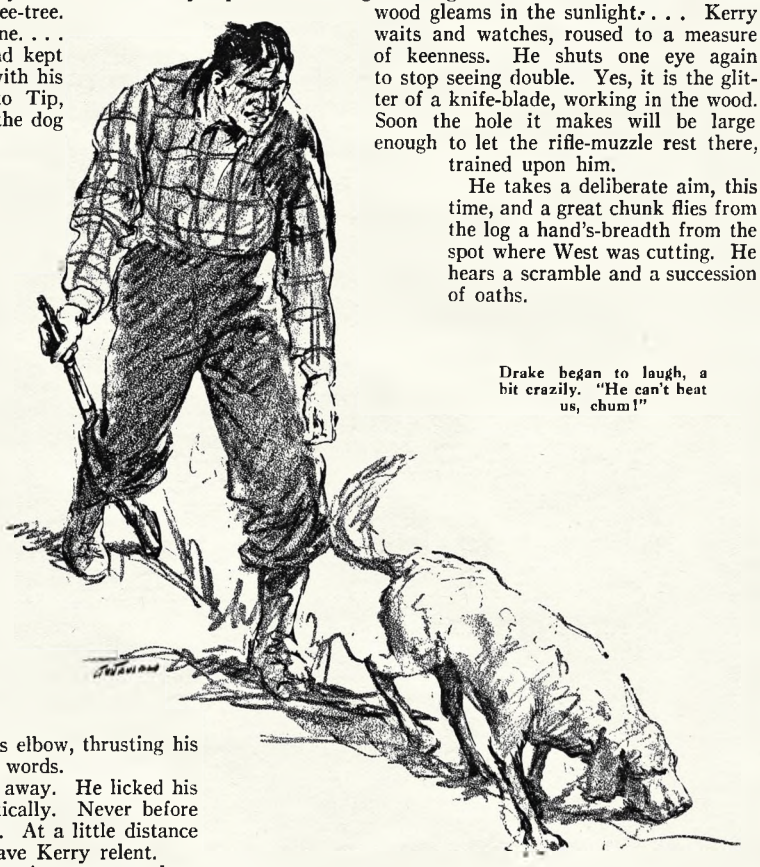
NOW a man is fighting to retain consciousness. He fights to keep his eyes open, to stifle the buzzing in his head, to down the nausea which grips his vitals.

He shouts a warning; he shoots again; he hears a harsh laugh. . . . .

Something strange about the window, now; something moves there. Or are his eyes up to tricks again? No—something is coming across the sill, poking out, long and dull—a rifle-barrel, thrusting toward him. . . . . The sill beneath it splinters as he squeezes the trigger. The other weapon is hastily drawn; West curses breathlessly.

Then a long silence, with no sound but the weakening pound of pulses in Kerry's ears. After a time another sound, a steady, distant, small noise. Then a sliver appears at the edge of a log below the cabin window. Fresh wood gleams in the sunlight. . . . Kerry waits and watches, roused to a measure of keenness. He shuts one eye again to stop seeing double. Yes, it is the glitter of a knife-blade, working in the wood. Soon the hole it makes will be large enough to let the rifle-muzzle rest there, trained upon him.

He takes a deliberate aim, this time, and a great chunk flies from the log a hand's-breadth from the spot where West was cutting. He hears a scramble and a succession of oaths.



Drake began to laugh, a bit crazily. "He can't beat us, chum!"

"You can't last, Drake!" West calls sneeringly. "It's your life, or your chance at getting somewhere! Will you trade?"

"To hell with you!" Kerry cries, trying to put strong scorn into the words. But Tod West only laughs. "Your voice is a whimper!" he says. "I give you another half hour. . . . Throw your gun out in the clearing and you'll have your chance, same as me!"

"To hell with you!" Kerry cries again—and knows his words are a weak falsetto. . . .

At the telephone in Nan's office sat one of the State Police.

"Sergeant Parfit speaking, Commissioner," he said over the long-distance wire. "Yes sir; we've got everything cut off, except to the northwest. We're organizing a posse now to work that way. . . . No. . . . I'm sorry, sir. Yes sir; if he's got into that country it'll be tough going for us. . . . . I'm sorry, sir! How he got the tip-off, we don't know. Yes sir. I've got the best trailers in the country. What? . . . . We're nearly ready to start. Yes sir. . . . Of course."

He hung up the receiver, a flush caused by rebuke staining his cheeks.

"Now, Coroner," he began as he rose; then he stopped, his attention caught by something outside.

He bent to stare through the window.

"What the hell," he muttered, "is the matter with that dog?"

PLAINLY the dog had come a long way; and he had perforce come slowly.

One leg dragged behind him. His eyes were glazed and his tongue caked with mud where he had licked wet earth from the ruts. His head weaved from side to side, and his tail-tip moved in drooping circles as he tried gallantly to hold it up.

Ezra shoved up his spectacles and stared.

"I declare!" he said. "I declare, Officer, that's Drake's dog!"

The sergeant of police was outside with a long stride. Others were running toward Tip, now collapsed in the road.

Jim Hinkel came up, chattering in excitement: "Wha's matter, Tip? Wha's matter?"

"He's mad!" some one warned. "Stay back! Look out!"

Jim and the others did draw back; it would not be safe to get too close to those clicking teeth, those blazing eyes.

"Why, he's hurt! Look at that leg! Here, Tip—" Again Jim tried to get near, but a shrill raging and the flashing of those strong white teeth set him again in retreat.

"Mad, I tell you!"

"Here, Tip! Let's see!" Ezra Adams was trying now, but the dog drove him back, also.

And then Nan Downer pushed through the circle.

"What's wrong? Oh! Tip! Why, *Tip!*"

The tail flopped heavily, the dirt-smeared tongue lolled; the dog panted and whined. The girl dropped to her knees beside him and put his nose in her lap. His eyes closed and Tip drew a quivering sigh. . . . . He had come to Nan, at last. Now he could be touched; now the hurt could be examined.

"Broken!" gasped Ezra. "And— Good Lord, Sergeant, this dog's been shot!"

The word echoed from a dozen throats:

"Shot!"

"He was with Kerry!" Nan cried. "He was with Kerry! Ezra! Where is Kerry? Where is—"

"That," snapped the policeman, "is what we've got to find out! Come on, you trailers! Look! You can see every step he took, in this road!"

CHAPTER XXV

MID-AFTERNOON now; Drake's head rolled drunkenly as he fought off that cloud of darkness. He could not hold it much longer. The cabin was beyond his range of vision. . . .

He had one cartridge left. He remembered that. For weeks, it seemed, his intermittent firing had kept West within that cabin. He had only one more shot to fire, and he could not see the bead of his sight. That was all blurred, like other matters such as pain and sickness and his manner of getting here.

His face drooped heavily against the stock. He was so weary. He wanted to sleep just a moment. . . . just a second. . . . One little wink of respite. . . . .

And then he knew that for ever so long voices had been in his ears. Voices, saying over and over: "Here he went!" . . . . Or was it just once that the words had been said? "Here he went!" It must have been Jim Hinkel, saying that—Jim's voice, saying it just now: *"Here* he went!"

Jim was standing there in the road, bent over, with a group around him. . . . And Nan with her hand on Jim's shoulder, and the sound of glass breaking. . . . .

Glass breaking! Window-glass breaking before the thrust of a rifle-barrel through the pane; tinkling as it spilled over the sill. . . . And a man with his shoulder slammed tight against the window-casing, sighting that rifle!

Tod West, that was, taking his final toll! One—two—three. . . . They'd drop there in the road before the crash of Tod's repeating weapon! One, two, three. . . . In sight, exposed to him!

Oh, how well Drake could see now—with the final reservoir of his strength and mind burst open, flooding him with capacities! He could see the bead of his front sight, could see it flash true against that bulky chest. And the recoil did not hurt, that time—he did not even think of it!

But he saw that other rifle-barrel fly upward, saw Tod West spin about, his back to the window—saw him stand there a moment and then, in the terrible silence, saw him disappear with a crash which loosed torrents of cries and words and sounds of running feet. . . . .

Then Kerry Drake put his cheek down on the cool, moist earth and drew a long breath.

THEY had him back at Nan's in an hour. Ezra had the bullet out before sundown. But it was midnight when he opened his eyes.

At first he thought he was alone in the room, then realized that a man alone can not have that sweet sense of peace and well-being which spread over him like a mantle. . . . .

He moved his head slightly and saw Nan sitting there expectantly, her face gentler than ever beneath the shaded light.

"Nan!" he breathed and she came quickly close.

"Oh, Kerry!" The words were a sob.

"And you're—all right?"

She nodded.

"Right! *Every*thing's all right!"

He closed his eyes.

"Tip?"

"Ezra says he's done the best job of bone-setting he's ever done for man or beast!"

Pause. . . .

"Holt?"

"Here"—in a whisper. "Waiting to thank you—before he goes."

"And—West?"

"Already gone,"—gravely. "And forever!"

He stared hard at the ceiling through a long moment. Then, with an effort, he began:

"Nan, I guess—I guess I'm all right, but a man never can—just tell. There's something I've got to say. . . . . Put it off for the right time—right place— But I've got to—say it—now—"

"Sh!" Gently she placed cool fingers against his lips. "You mustn't talk. You'll be all right—Ezra swears it. But now— I'll say it for you, dear, dear Kerry! I'll say the thing you want to say: *'I love you!'* And I love *you,* Kerry—love you, love you, love you!"

Her lips were living warmth on his cheek.

THE END

Three—and a Boat

The colorful story of an Irish-American's extraordinary adventure in Italy, by the author of "Scum of the Sea."

By ROY NORTON

Illustrated by Edward Ryan

THAT smile which had carried Shamus Coyne from boyhood in the Irish-Italian section of New York to employment by the Dryad Motor Boat Company —thence to become expert mechanician for its agency in Naples—was missing. The corners of his well-shaped mouth drooped, his blue eyes had lost their friendly twinkle, his mass of wavy hair was ruffled, and even the big muscles of his splendid body seemed lax as he bent above a show engine he was grooming on the floor of the display room on the Via Partenope. Martelli, the Italian agent, had come from his office vehemently swearing, to break the news that Shamus must shortly be transferred to Venice, where the Lido agent stood in need of his skilled services.

Shamus in one year had accomplished two loves; one was for Naples, but the other, more absorbing, trying, filled with curves and declines like a fever-chart, was for Lucia Esposito—Lucia of the Mergellina, that ancient town within a city but proudly not of it—"Lucia *la Bellissima,*" or "Lucia the Peerless," sought after by scores, impertinent, scornful, but at last favoring this *Americano* whose pay was said to be rich, and who had been impervious to ten thousand blandishments of laughing eyes, provocative smiles, and gay if casual salutations. And now, when hope ran high in Shamus' dreams, he was to be transferred. He wondered if he could find another job, could engage in some little business—anything to keep him in Naples. That was his mood when the shadow of an expensive car outlined itself in the hot summer sunshine in front of the Dryad showrooms and from it descended no less a distinguished person than the Conte di Torcelli, noticeably ugly, decidedly gray and needlessly emphatic. That hawk nose from a long line of quarrelsome, powerful ancestors who in bygone days had sent men to the fire, the rack, and other unpleasant experiences, was quivering when the agent rushed forward, obsequious, hopeful, bowing repeatedly like an automaton. The Conte had lost a boat-race to a man he despised. He wished to buy a speedboat that would beat the world,—regardless of cost, for to him money meant nothing,—the sole stipulation being that it must win the big event at the forthcoming regatta, the King's Cup. Not that a gold cup given by a king meant much to Torcelli, but the conquering of a despised rival did.

The Conte di Torcelli was shortly followed by the Contessa; when he heard her slow footfalls he whirled, scowled and growled: "Curiosity again, *aigh?* If you found the car uncomfortable—" Then he strode toward the rear office with the agent, leaving her alone. It was like the removal of a sinister shadow, leaving behind a dream, for in her golden loveliness she was superb. Not even the elusive, hungry sadness of her eyes could detract from the beauty of her face, the breeding of a great lady still in her youth, and when, ignoring her husband's rudeness, she paused beside Shamus and exclaimed, "What a beautiful boat you have!" he looked up. He had never seen such a woman. She reminded him somehow of a Madonna before which he had bent in an old and sunlit cathedral.

"They are beautiful in the water only, signora," he said, momentarily confused; then recovering, he smiled and added softly: "A swan on land seems helpless, out of place. It is the same with a boat such as this."

"Good," she said. "I hadn't thought of that. Yes, all things out of place are unbeautiful." She observed him curiously as if surprised and added, "But you are not Italian, although you speak it fluently." There was a question in her words which he answered.

"No, signora, I am American. Nor do I speak your language well, for mine was learned from the Sicilian boys with whom I played."

"Ah," she said, "you have traveled far. It is good thus to be free—free to move here and there, as one wishes." When he did not reply, she led him on with: "You love engines? I thought so by the way you handle the one there by you. It is as if you caressed it with a sure and friendly hand."

"That is something that I hadn't thought of," he replied, looking up at her and smiling more freely. "Yes, I think I do love them. And one's hands must be gentle with anything he loves. You cannot know, Signora, how there is something lives in great engines, something responsive, giving, yielding, doing for those they like, but rebellious, contrary, stubborn with those who mistreat them."

"Precisely like human beings," she said, as Coyne, feeling that perhaps he was becoming loquacious, again bent above his work. For a moment she stood looking down on his broad shoulders whose muscles moved beneath the clean denim with the supple strength of youth, at his white neck and wavy hair. Then she sighed, as if sorry that she could not talk more, and walked slowly down the line of exhibits.

It was not until the visitors had gone and the exultant agent shouted for Shamus to come into the office, that he knew who they were.

"Think of it, Coyne! The biggest order we've ever had! Nothing like it. At least fifty thousand lire profit—if we can meet the demands. That was the Conte and Contessa Torcelli. He's one of the most distinguished and richest of men in Italy. Why, if we can sell him a boat that will win the big cup at the autumn regatta, I am made. And—if this sale is made, you shall have from me a present of five thousand lire for yourself. We must get a boat of these dimensions that will win. We must! We shall cable the company at once. And I shall insist on your staying here until the matter is settled."

His hands trembled with haste and excitement as he sought the company's code-book—while Shamus asked shrewd questions, and now and then offered a suggestion.

Yet his mind was not on the boat nor the Contessa, but on the prospective exile from Naples when they closed the place that night and he sauntered homeward through the Communale Park, for once oblivious to the masses of summer bloom and the red light on the lateen sails of the fishing *feluccas* out beyond on a purple sea. The distant, mellow booming of a chime of bells warned him that he must make more haste if he would have time for an appointment with Lucia the peerless.

The title seemed merited, if measured by flashing eyes and teeth, blue-black hair, and a figure that, while not up to Neapolitan ideals of plumpness was yet voluptuous. Nor were her looks all she had to commend her as a highly desirable *sposa;* for was she not well off? Many could recall the day when she left the cashier's desk of a tearoom, having unexpectedly fallen heir to a forgotten uncle in the Argentine, where so many Neapolitan uncles had disappeared, later to enrich or bedazzle home-staying relatives. Lucia had promptly opened a gay little sweet-shop in the Mergellina, and if the shop of luxury sometimes failed to pay, did not that uncle in the Argentine prove periodically generous? Had he not once sent her as a Christmas present a real diamond that flashed more than her eyes and bedazzled those who bought her wares when her plump white fingers fluttered here and there?

"Ah, Shamoos *carissimo,*" Lucia exclaimed when he appeared just in time to take her to a picture-house which they regularly attended each Wednesday, and the demure little shopgirl left behind to close the place smiled at that familiar address and was certain that her beautiful employer and the "so-rich *Americano*" would soon be *fiancata.* Shamus feared otherwise. He was in the first stages of an unknown and violent love. Desire and uncertainty made him so timid and dumb that he dared not even hold her hand in the darkness of the cinema.

When they returned through the park to her home above the little shop she led him on to talk of his hopes, and of his income, until his courage swelled to a point of recklessness. In a moment he would have told her of his dream of marriage had not a group of laughing girls, arm-in-arm, interrupted, bantering him on his good looks which he never detested more than at that moment. He did not see the peculiar stare of annoyance, almost disappointment, in Lucia's eyes. Neither did he observe as they crossed the plaza beyond the park that a huge limousine swerved to avoid them and that for a moment, from its rear window, the Contessa di Torcelli regarded them.

In the following three weeks, when the summer heat denuded Naples of tourists, when crowded tenements poured their inhabitants down to the long waterfront each night, and all business was stagnant, Shamus saw the beautiful Lucia more frequently. Sometimes they listened to the big military band in the park, strolling aimlessly as thousands of others strolled. Now and then they took excursions; once, on a never-forgotten Sunday, to Capri, twenty-odd miles away, the farthest Lucia had ever been before from her native city—almost like a tour of the world. And then one night Shamus felt lost, bereaved, when she told him that she was going to be absent for a whole week.

"Think of it!" she exclaimed, like a boast. "I am going as far away as Rome. Never have I been there; always have I wanted to go. Is it not wonderful?"

Shamus smiled at her enthusiasm. To one who had crossed an ocean and had been familiar with the hard brilliance of New York, neither the journey nor the city ranked high. He secretly smiled when he thought of his dream of some day taking her to that distant New York to exhibit her proudly as Mrs. Shamus Coyne. She would then learn what travel meant. He was curious enough to ask with whom she would visit.

"My uncle," she replied, and it was the first time Shamus had ever considered that unknown person.

"Why, I thought he lived in Buenos Aires, or some such place," he said, and she retorted: "You don't think he is tied down there, do you—or that he never comes back to Rome for a visit? Don't be so stupid!"

But she was emphatic when he proposed to lay off work long enough to see her aboard the Rome Express. It was unlucky, she said. That was a new superstition to him. He tried to laugh her out of it, but failed and, therefore obeyed her wishes, as he was learning to do.

"They want you up at the Palazzio Roccoromano, Shamus," the agent said on the following forenoon. "Want you to overhaul the engines in one of their boats up there. Ask for the Contessa; it was she who called up."

Shamus took his tool-kit and boarded the tramcar that wound its rattling way up the long and beautiful incline

Shamus saw Lucia frequently. Sometimes they strolled aimlessly; now and then they took excursions. One night she told him she was going away for a week.

to Posillipo, that place of beautiful homes and unparalleled views, historic through one generation after another since the time when it was the summer seat of emperors. The palace stood almost on the edge of a sheer cliff over which one could drop a pebble to hear it splash two hundred feet below. At the ornate bronze gates he told his errand to a lodgekeeper, who telephoned before admitting him.

He walked through wonderful gardens,—now and then passing a fountain or a pool,—descended a few steps and stood wondering where to find the correct entrance, when he heard a musical voice that sounded vaguely familiar, like the ringing of a silver bell once heard but never forgotten. He turned to see the Contessa.

"Ah, it is you who have come to fix my poor boat," she said, to his surprise in almost faultless English. "And the name is—yes—Mr. Shamus, they told me."

"That, lady, is my first name," he corrected. But she snapped her fingers, smiled and said: "Oh, well! It will do. I will show you where the boats are kept. You could never find it without a guide. The palace is very old. It was built on Roman ruins above what were, for long years, smugglers' caves. You may follow me."

They passed to the wall of the garden overhanging a cove of the sea and he saw the magnificent view of the whole of Naples and the sweep past Vesuvius with its smoking crest to the dim blue spot that was the island of Capri. Hundreds of steps led to and fro in the face of the cliff down to the water's edge. The sun made of the Contessa's wonderful hair a shining halo as she seemed to float downward ahead of him. They halted just at the edge of the waves, where iron gates full thirty feet high barred their entrance. She unlocked them and he pulled one open. Again she moved forward, calling, "It is gloomy through here only," and her voice echoed mysteriously, repeatedly, as if it rebounded from vast hollows.

And then of a sudden he halted amazed, for he stood in huge caverns, quarried by slaves for building purposes in ancient days, inside of which a miniature skyscraper could have been placed; caverns floored with dry sand, and chambered high above where wretched slaves had sometimes lived, and where smugglers, pursued, had found refuge. Looking through an arch seventy-five feet high, as through a frame, Shamus saw the languid blue waves, the red sails of *feluccas*, and at one side a private bathing-beach, completely shut off from view and entered by ancient marble steps. Here and there, white and gleaming, he saw marble statues—a nymph, a Neptune, a Bacchus. Roman seats surrounded the swimming-pool, into which the waves from outside laved through some subterranean passage with a musical splashing and soft roar. In the light he saw that some of the walls had once been stuccoed and plated with shells from the sea, their pearly luster still undimmed after all the ages. Here and there they had fallen away leaving patches of red where the rocks of the cliffs were exposed.

"This was once a Roman's pleasure resort," she said, smiling at his astonishment. "Once it must have been beautiful, if weird. A place for lovers, for gayeties, and—perhaps less pleasant things. Through this small archway is the cave we use for the boats. Save for the way we have come it can be reached only from the sea."

She went on, through the small archway ahead.

Again he followed and marveled at such a place for the humble storage of boats. There were many of them—rowboats, a canoe, a small sailboat, and two launches, one an elegant craft of the "runabout" type grounded at this low tide on the clean pure sand.

"This one is mine," the Countess said, gesturing at the runabout. "I have learned and like to run it myself; but something has gone wrong. I am not mechanic enough to know what. I should like to have it—what is it they say in English? Oh, yes! Have its engine taken down and overhauled. That's what you say, isn't it?"

She laughed with that bell-like voice at her own blundering, and he found it infectious and laughed with her, before he replied, "Yes, lady, that is the jargon we use. Take down and overhaul. But perhaps it will not be necessary to do that much and—"

"I wish it done," she said, with that air of demanding and expecting obedience to her slightest wish. "If I am willing to pay for your time—"

"My boss will be glad, of course," he finished for her, and feeling that his well-meant suggestion had been taken amiss, soberly dropped his tool-kit on the sands and boarded the launch. She came after him, seated herself on the deep rear seat and watched as he unfastened the shields and exposed the engines.

"We have ordered the racing boat for the Count," he said, glancing around at her and trying politely to give her news.

"He is a very impatient man," she replied. "He will be glad to hear that when he returns. He is away from Naples for a week or two. When do you expect it to arrive? And what will it be like?"

She had opened a topic on which he could be eloquent, and while he worked with his strong deft fingers he found conversation easy.

"Some one has— I'm sorry, lady, but some one must have purposely upset these engines," he said, straightening up and addressing her directly. "Bolts and screws have been loosened and—why, the carburetors are almost taken to pieces! I hope the missing parts are beneath on the engine-beds. What on earth do you suppose—It can't be that you have enemies who—"

"Oh, many of them, I suppose," she laughed. "But this was probably done by a man I recently discharged—a wine-swallower who was more useful as a confidential messenger for my husband than as a boatman."

The sudden bitterness in her voice astonished him, caused him to regard her with wider eyes. But as if a reversion to some secret vexation had changed her mood she stood up, and before he could move stepped over the side of the boat to the near-by edge of a stone ledge and slowly walked away.

"Phew!" he muttered, watching her as she disappeared through the shadows inside. "Guess folks who live in palaces don't get along much better than those who live in—Hester Street," he concluded incongruously. Then he laid his tools out on the floor, stripped off his shirt, exposing his bare muscular arms, and whistling softly, fell to work.

She returned that afternoon, bringing with her a piece of the embroidery that the Italian ladies seem ever to have unfinished, and as the shadows lengthened over the high ridge behind Posillipo she seated herself near where he had parts of the dismantled engine spread and after a grave salutation said: "Tell me, Shamus, of that land of yours, the so-young America."

"A bigger job than these engines," he said. "Of what in particular, lady, would you know?"

She began to question him until, unaware, he was tell-

ing of his own boyhood and youth—of the schools, the life, the irrepressible vitality of his native land. And then, abashed by his own loquacity, he suddenly recalled the time, consulted his watch and said, "Why, I have worked late! They will wonder what became of me. I must go."

She sighed and with him walked through the now gloomy caverns to the gates, locked them after him, hesitated and then said: "Perhaps you had best keep this key for your use. We have others in the Palazzio."

She did not look back when they reached the head of the great flight of steps that seemed not to tire her quick feet, but he heard her *"Buona sera, Signor* Shamus!" wafted over her shoulder, as if left behind floating in the air when he turned into the garden pathway leading upward to the lodge, the surly fat porter, and the street. He was suddenly disturbed by the thought that by now Lucia would be in Rome, perhaps forgetting him in the excitement of her new environment. He sighed so deeply and audibly at the thought that a bright-eyed *contadina* laughed in his face and murmured, "Sigh not, thou strong one, for there be others as well as that one for whom, perchance, thou sighest. For instance—me!"

Two servants from the palace, headed by the porter, brought Shamus his supper.

And her gay laughter as she broke into a run brought back the smile to his face and he called to her, "Perchance, my pretty one. Stay!" But her laugh was mockery as she ran across the street without a glance and disappeared in the shadows of a door which was wreathed with long strands of garlic, with wicker-bound carafes, and homely vegetables. . . .

For five days Shamus worked in the huge grottoes beneath the Palazzio, and five afternoons the Contessa sought the coolness for her embroidery. Now and then she would sit idly staring out through the huge archway at the blue sea which has from time immemorial been the very inspiration of poetry and romance; then with a sigh she would resume her work, sometimes leading him on anew to conversation. Sometimes when alone he sang in a rich, natural baritone and one day, curious as to the vast echoes, he threw his head back and let his voice go to its full capacity in an impassioned love-song of old Naples. The grottoes rang and reverberated, white-breasted gulls floating outside the caverns rose swirling upward, and he turned to discover that the Contessa had entered unknown to him and stood with eyes that were wide and veiled and with a face as rapt, unsmiling and wistful as if for a moment she had lived in a dream. Before he could recover from his embarrassment she gave him one long, peculiar look, turned, and seemed almost to run from him across the white sands. It was like flight. After she had disappeared he shook his head ruefully and muttered, "Humph! She'll think I'm like most Neapolitans —a singing loafer on a job!" He sang no more.

When the job was done he locked the tall gates, climbed the flights of stone steps to the gardens and was starting toward a small entrance of the palace when he discovered her sitting on one of the curved stone benches facing that distant, plumed Vesuvius.

"Lady," he said, halting before her, "I have finished, and was just returning your key."

He stood there very youthful, strong and handsome, with his kit of tools swung over one broad shoulder, and held the key toward her. She lifted her hand to take it, looking at him rather than it, and then withdrew the hand.

"But," she protested, "you haven't tested the boat on the waters outside, have you?"

"It will not be necessary," he assured her. "You may be certain it will—"

"I prefer to make the test," she said decisively, as one accustomed to command. "Tomorrow afternoon— Let me think! Yes, say at four o'clock, when it is not so sunny, I wish you to take me out in it that I may run it and—convince myself."

He did not mark the little hesitation between her words. Convince herself! He wondered if she doubted his assertion of the engines' condition, but he only said, "Very well, I shall be here; but it seems a useless addition of expense."

She gestured with her hand, whether in dismissing the matter of expense or him he did not consider; he accepted it as the latter and with a quick doffing of his shapeless straw hat went his way.

"Fussy! Eh? Well, we can't afford to do anything to displease those people," the agent said when he reported. And so, on the following afternoon, cleanly garbed lest his working-clothes soil a lady's boat, Shamus presented himself again. He was glad that he was clean, for the boat had been groomed by house servants until it was spotless, with silken covers fitted over seats, and rugs on the floors. The Contessa, clad in an immaculate white boating costume, took her seat by his side as he ran the boat out into shadows thrown by the high cliffs, and headed it toward Naples.

"No, not that way," she said. "Around to the right,"— so he swung the bow and followed the shore-line of the

picturesque cliffs where they could look upward at massed gardens and beautiful villas, that rich environment to which she belonged. She talked blithely, or reflectively, in changing mood, and he did not recall until later that not once did she show any interest in the boat or its engines. Five days' familiarity of presence had stripped him of embarrassment, and he too talked, as if to an old acquaintance. But when he suggested that she take the boat back she shrugged and said, "No, it is not necessary. I can see it now runs perfectly." And then she fell into a silent, thoughtful mood, and when he glanced at her face just as they were approaching the Roccoromano grottoes he discovered that she was

He clawed over the edge, and struggled out upon a flat place. "You are unhurt, Shamus?" a solicitous voice murmured.

frowning upward at the gray old palace high above as if returning to it with some secret reluctance or repulsion. He was afraid when they parted at the head of the steps that she was going to offer him *mancia*—a tip—for she seemed doubtful about something; but she did not and when he said, "Good-by, lady," she smiled and said, "No—*a rivederci*, I hope." It did not enter his head to feel flattered at the subtle distinction between a farewell and a temporary parting. He was not conceited enough to think that a great lady could have much interest in a mere workingman. Not in a land like Italy.

The return of Lucia was unheralded. She had promised to send him a note when he could meet her, but she had neglected to do so. When he went to her shop to learn when she would return she was there. She looked exhausted, as if the gayeties of Rome had taxed even her robustness. Yes, it had been a wonderful holiday. Only her uncle, an old man on a "bust," had dragged her everywhere until she was tired. Sick of Rome—it wasn't so much, after all! Not nearly so fine as Naples. Daytimes her uncle had been busy, and she had gone about alone. But—look! He had given her a brooch and bought her two new gowns. "Yes I am glad to be back again, *caro mio*—back in Naples with my big *Americano!*"

Shamus' heart jumped emphatically. On the following night he took her for a stroll along the sea-front and told her of his love, of his hopes, of the business he would build to enrich them if she would marry him and with him return to America. His tongue had Irish-American eloquence on that lovely night. Lucia permitted him to caress her, the first time he had ever dared. But she would not resolve his doubts with that tiny potent word *yes*. She wanted time to consider. Yet there was tacit promise in her manner. He reflected that all women like to dally over consent. He esteemed Lucia better for it; women who yielded too easily weren't the kind one wanted for ever.

Upon their next meeting it seemed but reasonable that she should, with cold Latin logic, ask him pointed questions: Just how much pay did he get; how much money had he saved; what could he make in business for himself? New York was of course wonderful, but could she come back to *bella Napoli* whenever she wished?

The answers of Shamus were the good-natured, simple replies of one with clean heart and mind. He told her nothing save truth. But when he urged her to a definite assent she patted his cheek with both plump hands and silenced his protests with, "Give me time to think it out, *caro mio*. I must have time to decide."

"But—but—you love me, don't you?" he cried, as probably Adam the first man cried to Eve, the first woman ever loved.

"*Si, si, si,*" she replied with the repetition of impatience, and he left her that night in an ecstasy of hope.

A week later she consented to marry him. But there was something about her manner he could not understand. It was as if she did so in pique. Moreover, to his surprise, she fairly blazoned the news that she was *fiancata* throughout the Mergellina, that strange village within a city, where each knows the other or another. The news had spread before Shamus was aware of it. The girl in the gay *kiosk* at the corner of the park congratulated him, his barber made intimate Italian jests, and the gnarled old orange-woman wished for him and Lucia a "bedful of children." But because the new speedboat which must

break records had arrived and his mind was absorbed in its assembling and tuning he did not observe a tinge of growing and malicious ridicule. Once he heard two street urchins giggle, *"Shamoos et Lucia la bellissima!"* and whirled to see them impudently holding index fingers at each side of their heads.

He was for a moment indignant, angry; then he shrugged his wide shoulders and passed onward, grinning at such boyish impudence. Doubtless they did that to anyone and everyone. Indeed, he laughed—it was like Italian urchins of the Mergellina, where jests were flavored with gutter tang. Once Shamus had seen a priest ridiculed because his garters dragged on the pavement. Nothing was sacred to the children of the Mergellina.

"The Conte di Torcelli has been in," said the agent of the Dryad Company when Shamus returned from making overhauls at the Yacht Club late one afternoon. "That old sparrow who thinks he is a duke has got a new notion in his bald pate. He fears that some of his rivals, or competitors, or enemies, will get the best of him before he wins the King's Gold Cup. Some one must have been shaking a mattress of fleas over his wits. But the Contessa was here and smoothed him down. *Sancta Maria!* What a glory of a woman! How beautiful! How tactful with that old devil she is! Just when he was raging because of his unnecessary fears, she suggested that his new boat be sent to their grotto and that you be hired to guard as well as tune it until the race is run. He studied about it for a while, grumping by himself, his wicked old eyes covered like an eagle's, and then agreed. Funny, too—because not ten minutes before he had called you what you say in American, 'a too-fresh' and wanted to know if I could get another man to race her. Why doesn't he like you, Shamus?"

"Lord! Never knew he didn't. Didn't suppose he knew I was on earth." Bewildered by such notice, Shamus rubbed his square chin in perplexity.

"Anyhow, the Contessa fixed it up. That old brigand must have anything he wants, because he could pay a million lire just like that—like *that.*" The agent made a noise with his mouth, *"pouf,"* like a breeze of wind. "So you are to take the boat over to the Palazzio tomorrow afternoon, after you have finished that little job you are on, and stay there night and day until the race is run. He pays, and money is nothing to the Conte di Torcelli—rotten old bird as he is. Besides, it will be for but two days. If you win that race for him, Shamus, you're a made man."

SO Shamus, after visiting Lucia to explain a two-days' absence, ran the new speedboat from its dock by the Vecchio across the bay and into the yawning hollows beneath the Roccoromano. For a moment he was puzzled because the boat grotto had been denuded. There was not a boat of any kind, not even an oar left. Probably, he thought, another of that old crank's gestures—afraid that Shamus would make nocturnal excursions in one of them! He grinned at such lack of trust, and then regarded the arrangements made for his comfort by the Contessa. They seemed excessive, for there was a cot with blankets, a small table, an easy-chair, a huge lantern and some books in English. Her solicitude for his comfort was evident, but for the moment he thought of a needed adjustment of the boat's engines, so he opened the hoods exposing them and did a half hour's work. Then idly he sauntered through gloomy passages, to find the gates locked. He returned to the boat grotto and loitered around it. He looked at those steps which the smugglers had used—mere niches a few inches in breadth and depth, and full two feet apart. He stared upward into the shadows and saw where in one place, sixty or seventy feet above, a climber would have to cling like a fly to crawl beneath and over a mass of rock that jutted outward like a broad cornice.

"No wonder the smugglers always got away," he thought. "If I were chasing them I'd not risk my neck in that sort of place! The steps going straight up are bad enough."

He examined them curiously. Time had somewhat eroded the sharpness of the edges. The more exposed ones at the bottom were almost weathered away. He wandered back to look over the books and was feeling drowsy when two servants from the palace, headed by the fat porter who carried a bunch of keys, brought his supper. That too was luxurious, proving that although the Contessa had not descended to the grotto to inspect her arrangements, she had not neglected him. When the servants returned and cleared away, and the pompous porter followed to re-lock the gates for the night, Shamus laughed at the silly precaution.

THE speedboat was grating a little on the sands and he tugged until the bow was well grounded. The ebb of the tide would leave her resting firmly, secure and safe, almost out of water. He thought it useless to replace the hoods in that shelter. He hung the lantern upon a rusted iron hook in the rocks, and dressed in trousers and underwear only, luxuriously and lazily threw himself on the bed to read. The book proved dull and soon, lulled by the slow languid rhythm of tiny waves, he slept.

Vaguely at first, then compelling, a voice, "Shamus! Oh, signor, awaken!" aroused him, and he sat up, aware that his lantern had guttered out, and that against stars and pale moonlight the great arch of the cave was silhouetted, and that in the gloom beside him was a woman distractedly whispering him to wakefulness.

"Who is it?" he whispered back, but without her reply knew that it was the Contessa.

"Your life is in danger. Now! Any instant, they come. To murder you! To take your body out and sink it in the sea. Oh, Shamus—Shamus! Delay not, but follow me. You must!"

He felt her hand reaching for his and dragging at him.

"But—what—where—" he began and she hastily muttered: "We can not escape by the gates. You must go the way I came—up the smugglers' steps."

"What?" he cried, unbelieving. "You came in that way? I can't!"

"You must," she urged. "If I can, you surely can! Quickly, for the love of the Virgin Mother—come! I haven't time to tell you now, but— I must go and you must follow. It is ruin to me to be found here, and death for you."

He could not let a woman show more bravery than he, nor at the call of honor involved thus to save his life could he flinch in ingratitude. Already she was ahead of him, a dim shape struggling upward in those treacherous handholds he had but late that day studied. He thought he heard stealthy sounds approaching from the bath cavern adjoining. Almost as if impelled by a will outside his own his hands sought the first niche, then another, and he was climbing. Halfway up he hesitated for rest, panting slightly—looked upward into the shadowy darkness and knew rather than saw that the woman, lighter, more certain, more agile, had outdistanced him. He could hear nothing more than the faint rustle of silken garments. No—he could hear something else, below and out there toward the sea: a faint thud of muffled oarlocks, a creak of rowing oars, and suddenly the slight grating of a boat coming aground.

He now detected several dim shapes on the white

pallor of sands at the entrance. Six men, he thought, all moving noiselessly, stealthily. Had he questioned the credibility of the lady's warning, the actions of those below offered proof. He had even seen the pale glint of moonlight on steel. He dared not look longer and began hurriedly climbing. A sudden turmoil rose beneath—exclamations, shouts, oaths; then a voice crying, "Get the lantern from the boat and uncover it. The bed is still warm. He is here somewhere. We must get him!"

Listening and panting, Shamus had paused for a moment to gather strength and coolness for the terror ahead of him. He was clinging there with outstretched arms and feet when the darkness seemed split and a voice bawled: "There are tracks in the sand and— *Per Bacco!* The smugglers' steps—look! Look! See up there—the dark shape! He climbs!"

KNOWING that he was discovered, but grateful to God that the Contessa must have advanced beyond sight, Shamus began desperately pulling himself up again, leaning out over the abyss, clutching the hollowed holds in the stone with fingers and toes, cold sweat breaking out over his body, his jaws set and teeth clenched. His imagination played upon the danger of one of those hollowed rims of stone giving way to let him drop whirling downward to broken, painful death; and suddenly he did almost lose his hold as a terrific sound bellowed and reechoed about his ears, magnified by the surrounding hollows, and a splash of rock but a few feet to one side of his head warned him that now some one was shooting at him, undoubtedly intent on murder. Somehow it angered him into coolness. He climbed more steadily, more fearlessly, more rapidly. A second shot almost struck his hand. A third grazed his hip like a touch of fire. Then, no longer counting the shots, he clawed over the edge of the projection, felt his arm clutched and heavily pulled, and struggled out upon a flat place dimly lighted from some paces behind by a candle.

"You are unhurt, Shamus?" a solicitous voice murmured as he got to his feet.

"By the mercy of God," he replied, and then relief was supplanted by anger, the primitive rush of fighting-blood. He never knew whether he thrust her to one side rudely or gently; nor could he clearly recall his bellowed war-cry: "You scum! Kill me, would you? You wanted death—then try some of it with this!"

He bent forward whilst shouting, seized a seventy-pound stone as if it were of no weight, lifted it high above his head and with all the strength of his broad shoulders and arms threw it outward. A terrific, metallic crash from below roared upward.

"Too far," he growled. "And too bad! Those engines are done. Too far." But even as he lamented he seized other stones near by and threw them downward. He heard oaths and imprecations from below mingled with a man's scream of agony, and exultantly felt around for more missiles. He had forgotten that the Contessa was there until he heard her voice, "Behind you! At your heels!"—and felt her pushing more stones, some too heavy for her to lift, against him. This time, fighting as barbarously as a savage of the stone age, he leaned far outward and threw a stone at a man who had started to climb. The man whirled and fell thudding on the sand in a heap. And then Shamus was aware that a shower of smaller stones were whistling past his ears as if beside him a cave-woman were fighting with her mate. The Contessa too was fighting to kill!

The lantern on the sands far below dashed out with splintering glass. The shouts were now those of terror, haste, and pain, a confused babble: "Help! Help me! Get me out of this death-trap. My shoulder is broken." "Carry Raphaello to the boat. I think he is dead!" "Luigi too is down. Run fast, lest we be all killed. Haste! Haste!" Curses were bellowed, intermingled with prayers. He heard the clumping of the boat and then a single, determined voice, "Come back—you can get him yet, you fools!"

Shamus leaned far out and hurled more stones. The lone voice was not heard again.

Then two slender hands caught Shamus' arm, and the Contessa's bell-like voice cried:

"No more, Shamus, no more! It would be murder, now—nothing but murder. They have suffered, are defeated, so let them escape." Then listening more calmly they heard the boat shoved off, furious beating of oars, and—dying echoes followed by a profound, unbelievable silence. He turned and for the first time looked at her, disheveled, in a torn silken wrapper begrimed with dust and splotched with dirt. And as he did so she said, "Come back to where my candle must be dying." He did not then appreciate that she had used those words with a sadder than physical meaning, and mutely followed her until they turned a corner and he found himself in what appeared a room hollowed out by slaves or freebooters hundreds of years before. The candle, on a shelf above their heads, glorified her hair to wisps of curling gold.

"Now that you are saved," she said bitterly, "you must know—everything. Please listen and do not interrupt, for time is but a sword cutting rapidly."

He started to speak, but with a single gesture she silenced him and turned so that the feeble gleam was behind her, her face in darkness as if some secret shame in what she had to say could thus be partially hidden. Beside her he appeared rugged, huge, stolid. His lips were still grim from conflict; a thin line of blood trickled unheeded down over one bare foot. His eyes were wide with inquiry.

"The Conte di Torcelli is a monster—a hideous-souled, bestial, merciless old man, wallowing in his iniquities, forced upon me in marriage by the accursed customs of my class here in Italy. My parents sold me to him," said the Contessa evenly. In sheer amazement Shamus heard her denunciation, wondering what that had to do with the night's turmoil and battle. But before he could even exclaim she hurried onward, her words incisive, rapid, unfaltering, as if she would have it over and done with.

"IT does not take much to incur his hatred," she said. "You won it in full measure. He planned to have the boat taken to an isolated, abandoned boat-house, up toward the point, for you to watch. I overheard him making inquiries for obtaining it. I knew that something devilish was in his mind, and could think of no way to help you, save to suggest bringing it to our grotto."

"But—but— Lady, what made you suspect?" Shamus cried, astonished, even incredulous.

"That I shall explain later," she said. "But tonight when I was going to slip down through the gates in darkness to warn you, I got the proof. Aye, the proof! I heard voices of two men who sat smoking beneath me at a turn of the steep steps. At first I could not imagine why they were there—on our private way. They talked. They were there to guard against anyone coming to the gate or the possibility of your escaping that way. Oh, yes, they talked, as if over a prosperous piece of business. Garrulously, as thugs from the slums of Naples will. The Conte promised to be rich picking hereafter. He had engaged their leader to come by boat, surprise you, murder you, and take your body out and sink it in the bay, weighted. You were to be nothing more than just another inexplicable disappearance. I was distracted. I knew

not what to do. Then I remembered that through an abandoned wing of the older wine-cellars is a passage made by the smugglers, perhaps more than a hundred years ago, and once I had gone through it and looked down into the grottoes beneath and thought that I myself could descend if I wished, for I am mountain-born—from the Abruzzi—and know climbing from childhood. Tonight I saw that such must be the way, and —I went."

"And but for you," he said, "they would have—" He shook his head, recalling the glint of light on long-bladed knives.

She half-turned so that the light of the candle fell upon her face, resolute but distressed. Her slender hands went up to her breast, and she felt within the folds of the robe.

"Shamus," she said gently, "I would be the last woman on earth to hurt you, to give that sort of wound which is hardest to heal; but for your own sake, I must."

Staring at her in new wonder, he saw the hand that had been hidden withdrawn. But it did not return empty; it held a crumpled letter.

"The Conte di Torcelli was in a great rage a few days ago. An unusual one even for him—a man with a fiendish temper. He threw this in his waste-basket. I found it there. It gave me no very new information. It did not bring shame, for it was a matter which I have regarded with the utmost indifference. Something not at all unusual amongst Italian gentlemen—the keeping of a mistress. But when I saw that *you* were involved—Here, take it—read it. The handwriting you will doubtless know."

Still puzzled, he took the letter and opened it. Instantly a frown of interest puckered his eyebrows. Know the handwriting? No chirography more familiar to him than this, indeed! And then he stepped closer to the candle, turned his back and read—while the Contessa moved softly away, regarding him from a distance, pityingly.

Conte di Torcelli—Signor:

I warned you when we were in Rome that I must have more money. You said that word "insatiable." Good. So I am. And haven't you for nearly three years, given to me stingily, you who are rich? The *rich* uncle of mine in the Argentine, out of whom I got nothing but the start of a shop and some jewels you wouldn't give to that marble-faced Contessa of yours! I'm sick of lying about a rich uncle who swears he adores me, yet deals out his lire in small bits. I warned you after I came back from Rome that if you didn't give me the money you promised I would marry that ass-headed *Americano,* Shamus Coyne, whom you had forbidden me to be seen with any more. We are *fiancata* now, and I swear that unless you do give me five thousand lire at once, I will marry the stupid fool just to prove to you that there are ways by which I can get along without you, and your crazy love. If you send the money, I'll get rid of him, but if you don't you can always feel that a common *Americano* working-man took from you your "beautiful firefly," as you have so often called me.

Lucia Esposito.

He seized a seventy-pound stone and with all the strength of his shoulders and arms, threw it outward. A terrific crash sounded from below.

It was to Shamus as if some sacred image reared in the clean niche of his heart had fallen to befouled ruin in a gutter. Almost stupidly he brushed his forearms across his eyes; then his hands fell, his head and shoulders bowed, and he threw the letter from him with anger and disgust.

"And this—*this*—is what I loved!" he said, in a voice not his own, so hoarse it was. "Oh, dear Mother of Pity—why had this to come to me—who have believed in the beautiful cleanness of love, and good women? Lucia! Of all women, *you!*"

The heartbreak of that cry of desolation seemed wafted here and there, as if to taunt him in his torment. He was unaware that a Lady of Pity stood there, with twisting fingers, watching him, until he heard her voice, "Come! Come, we must go—for the candle nears its end." When he did not move her hand caught his arm, and urged him forward. He had no consciousness of distance or direction, but he felt a freshening of the air, a lessening of the blackness, until he could see her dimly, a slender pallor leading him on.

"We are near the exit—your exit," she said, suddenly dropping his hand and he let it fall again, inert, at his side. She gently raised her hands until they rested on his shoulders.

"Oh, Shamus, Shamus!" she said. "You must leave Naples, for in it you will be ever in danger—with such enemies. So probably I shall never see you again. But go away remembering this: that yours is not the only heartache in the world to be endured with bravery. I too have mine. It is how we bear heartaches that counts; how we suffer the betrayals and treacheries of individuals without losing faith in all mankind. Be brave; forget that worthless one—even as I shall try to forget you."

And suddenly he felt a fluttering kiss on his cheek, the thrust of her hands turning him toward the outline of a door—a sigh, and she was gone, like a ghost. Through the dim light he found the door and stepped through it into the garden. Off above Vesuvius the faint glow of red was matched by the red of dawn from beyond the far hills. For a moment he stood quietly, then stubbornly lifted his head. Over that way was Venice; to go there would not be unwelcome now. That old monster the Conte could have the field to himself.

But he need not have considered that phase of his tragedy, for the Conte di Torcelli, who had furtively concealed himself in the grottoes beneath to enjoy the murder, lay dead and alone upon the sands—and in the future tales would be told of how stone falling from the roof had not only killed him, but ruined the boat with which he had hoped to win a gold cup.

An air-mail pilot himself, Mr. Jamieson here tells the stirring story of an air-mail pilot who defended his cargo with his own peculiar weapons.

Thrice Armed

By LELAND JAMIESON

Illustrated by Paul Orban

NO one had ever said of Collyer McGinus that he was not quick-thinking, or that he failed to use good judgment coupled with that alacrity of thought when confronted by an emergency. But tonight, at Bellefonte, going east with a load composed largely of registered pouches, he was not particularly rapid of thought, and he admittedly acted wrongly when his mind did function. Still—it is rather a disconcerting thing, especially the first time it happens, to find yourself suddenly looking up into the muzzle of a gun held in the hand of a very aggressive and obviously hurried man.

It would have been less nerve-racking had Collie been ignorant of the shipment of securities in the mail-pit of his ship. But knowing that in one or another of those bags was a bundle worth something over a million dollars, —the word had been whispered by a mail-clerk in Cleveland and passed on to Collie in awed secrecy,—he was shocked into inaction for that brief fraction of time that might have made this into a different story, or no story at all. . . .

He was coming out of Bellefonte. It was a heavy, black night, with a thick overcast at eight thousand feet, and a roaring west-southwest wind of gale proportions that bore an occasional spit of icy rain. Collie, riding this rough, bellowing wind, had come in ahead of schedule. He was thirty-five minutes ahead, and since he couldn't go out again until he was due out, he cut off his engine, climbed from the cockpit and lumbered awkwardly through the yellow glare of the flood-lights into the office. His great height sent grotesque shadows dancing on his trail. He paused at the door and looked back at the mechanic huddled on the upper wing pouring gasoline into the tank and then shuffled through the door.

Haynes, the youthful field-clerk, looked up as Collie entered.

"Great guns, but you made time tonight!" he ejaculated. "But Lord help the guy that's going west against this wind!"

Collie sniffed through his cold nose and pulled his gloves off. From under his arm he took his flight-report and pilot's board. Then with great deliberation he sat down and filled in the time of his arrival and departure. He hadn't departed yet; but he was on time, and he always did this. Then he grinned good-naturedly.

"Going to set a record for 'em all to shoot at," he declared. "Boy, I've waited all my life for a wind like this! I bucked it last night, but it was mild then; tonight it's going to take me home!"

They talked about the weather, and the new equipment it was rumored B-T was going to get; they talked as only a chief pilot and a member of an admiring ground-crew do talk, and the minutes slipped by until it was time to go. As Collie struggled to his feet and swung his parachute onto his back, Haynes hurried out to load the mail. The mechanic started the motor just as Haynes returned to the office where Collie now was gathering up his various equipment.

"Clothes don't do you any good tonight," cried the younger man. "This wind is awful—goes right through you. Why, I didn't hear you come in awhile ago, it was blowing so hard—didn't hear a thing. And I'm going to plant myself right by this fire while you go out—I don't get paid to freeze myself!"

Collie grinned: "You're getting soft, boy; you ought to fly the mail awhile." He saw envy in Haynes' eyes, heard, as he closed the door, the youngster's words:

"I'd trade jobs with you—if I could fly!"

But Collie wouldn't have traded jobs with anybody in the world. He wouldn't have traded with Van Duyne, the operations-manager of B-T, or even with Canfield, who was president. He compared what he did—his duties and work and worries—with those same things of theirs as he walked toward his ship, his parachute-pack swinging heavily behind him from its leg-straps on his thighs. He had, he was confident, the best job of them all.

He climbed into the cockpit, and adjusted himself, and motioned to the mechanic to help him with the wing in turning the ship around. Then Haynes snapped off the floods, and left the field dark except for the white boundary lights, the green runway-markers, and the glowing rubies which marked the obstructions to the approaches.

He turned around and taxied down-wind, away from the hangar. He fought his brakes to keep his ship from ground-looping into the gusty, bucking wind until he was almost to the boundary lights, and then began to swing around for his take-off. He meant to run his motor up, holding the plane stationary with his brakes. He always did this as a last precaution against the possibility of motor failure on the beginning of his flight.

But as he was turning around, he saw the flash of a red light in the darkness to his right, perhaps thirty yards away. He was turning toward it, and thinking it was the night-watchman out upon the field, and that the man had discovered a ditch or a newly made wash, Collie waited as the light approached.

He had not long to wait, for the man walked rapidly, or ran. And then, when the other was to the cockpit, a flashlight blinded Collie, and a cold calm voice spat out the words:

"Up outta there! Stick up your mitts where I can see 'em! Move, dammit!"

Collie hesitated. He thought of ducking and jamming his throttle open at the same moment—of getting away from there. But he knew that he would be dead before the ship could start rolling—he had seen the gun there above the cowling, almost in his face. So he reached for the sky, while his motor clucked in slow contentment.

"Outta there, I said!" the gunman snarled.

"I heard you distinctly," was the by-this-time cool reply. "An' I'm coming." As he lifted his great bulk down, he wondered if the mechanic, or perhaps Haynes, would note his delay in taking off and hurry to investigate. But he knew that this could not be. Haynes had not heard him come in because of the howling wind; he would not expect to hear him go. And the mechanic no doubt had long since sought the warmth of the fire in the office.

The gunman jerked Collie's pistol from its holster, prodded him with the other gun. He disposed of Collie's gun, and then snapped on a flashlight so that Collie made an excellent target.

"Over to your right—and walk steady!"

Collie walked, his moccasins dragging heavily through the grass. Ahead of him, in a sudden splash of light from another flashlight, he saw a second plane, which bore no lights, and the outline of a man beside it.

Collie knew that he was outlined sharply in the flashlight of his captor, but he also knew that it would be better to attack his aggressors singly if possible. He stopped in his tracks suddenly.

"Somebody coming in!" he cried softly. "Hear him? He's liable to smack us, out here on the field."

"Shut up," barked the gunman, but he added: "Stand there a minute."

But instead of standing, Collie whirled and smashed a sudden blow at the white blotch above the beam of the flashlight. His clothes bothered him, but he put into that movement all the viciousness he could summon. The blow landed, and his captor dropped the light. Collie was on him in a wild leap.

They struggled at each other in the darkness, a strange pair, fighting with passionate determination, striking at what they could not see, hoping that each lashing blow would find a solid target. The gunman, either from inability or from fear of arousing the field personnel, did not attempt to shoot; he contented himself with a hand-to-hand encounter. But he was as heavily clothed as Collie, and he did not reckon with the other's strength and size.

Collie found the gunman's face and smashed it murderously. The gunman relaxed with a grunt. And then something hit Collie on the side of the head. It felt like a blackjack, and it stunned him. His head buzzed and swam, but he could hear voices.

"Kill him!" some one snarled. "Gimme that gun—where the hell did it go?"

"Naw, you fathead, let him alone! Tie him up and bring him along."

They tied his hands securely behind him, marched him to the second plane and helped him into the passenger cockpit. He had, after that, a moment to think, and he was not surprised at what followed.

THE first gunman hurried back to Collie's ship; the second climbed quickly into his own plane. There was a moment's delay while the first was getting into the cockpit; then his navigation lights winked twice, and both planes took off.

In the take-off, because they were close to one another, the engines sounded as one to any unpracticed ear which might have been listening. The difference in the speed of the propellers might have produced an overtone of sound; but this, if present, was not loud enough to arouse Haynes in his office where he hugged the fire. And the whole affair had been accomplished with so little delay that there was no reason for Haynes or his mechanic to become concerned; neither of these expected to hear the ship as it went out, because of the wind.

The ships took off quickly, and as quickly climbed into the blackness of the overcast sky. And in the air, as on the ground, only the mail ship displayed lights.

The lead ship climbed to a thousand feet and then turned abruptly toward Hadley. The second pilot, with Collie a helpless passenger in front of him, lagged behind and seemed deliberately to lose distance on the other.

Collie, sitting in a cramped and uncomfortable position in the forward cockpit, was calmer now than he would have expected, if such a thing as this occurred to him. There was no doubt that his mail would be robbed; his last prospect of preventing it had glimmered away when the second bandit had hit him on the head and knocked him out. And Collie, although calm enough to all appearances, was enraged and perhaps shocked at the feeling of impotence that possessed him in the thought of that stout cord which bound his wrists. His momentary delay in making a decision, he reasoned, had permitted this.

The mail was lost; he thought next of his personal safety, for it seemed to him odd that his presence should be desired at the conclusion of the bandits' act. This led him to wonder as to what method his captors might take in completing their work, and he considered, in a last small hope, every possibility open to him in thwarting them. There was little chance of this in prospect; for he was unarmed, and tied in the cockpit. He wondered if they would take him with them, along with the loot, or if they would turn his ship back to him and allow the completion of his run, minus the securities. But here he encountered a blank barrier to his analysis.

Whatever came about, he would put forth the best effort he possessed. If he had the opportunity, he would fight it out with them—if there was any slightest possibility of success; and if there was no such opportunity, he would use whatever shrewd judgment he had. But he would, he knew, probably be entirely incapable of blocking the theft; all he could show these men, before they were finished with him and were on their way, was that they had encountered a man both determined and unafraid.

Thus he looked at the matter as he listened to the throaty rumble of the exhaust and strained his eyes to follow the navigation-lights of his own plane somewhere in the murky darkness there in front of him.

Since the season was early spring, daybreak did not come until almost six o'clock. Collie's captors, therefore, had almost two hours of darkness yet remaining; and two hours, in the mail ship at least, meant two hundred miles which could be put behind them.

He wondered why they were flying eastward with him, instead of westward—toward open country and toward areas of small population. He himself, had he been they, would have chosen the westerly direction. He tried to follow further his own reactions to their problems, now that the robbery was under way. . . .

For nearly an hour they roared on through the darkness. They left the rugged hills and the thin, scattered, isolated lights. They came down upon the coastal plain, and into settled country—reached at last the emergency field thirty miles from Hadley. And then Collie's captor-pilot eased his throttle back and came down in a slow, shallow, cautious glide, his engine murmuring softly through its long exhaust-stack.

The pilot landed gently, rolled to a standstill. He climbed out, ran over to the trio of lights which marked the other ship upon the field, then as rapidly returned. He helped Collie from the cockpit, and at the point of his pistol escorted him back to the mail ship from which he had been taken at Bellefonte.

"Climb in," he said threateningly, cutting Collie's bonds. "Your engine's stopped. Leave it that way till we're out of sight! Then crank up and go on in." He laughed in loud and boisterous triumph. "You been easy meat, old-timer. They told us you'd be tough to handle!" Still laughing in loud scorn, he turned away and was gone into the night.

Collie chafed his bruised wrists and wished fervently for his gun. He subdued a mad impulse to leap from his cockpit and pursue the other man, regardless of his lack of weapons, regardless of the folly which such a thing would be. As he listened to the churning of the other engine, he fought against the quick and unreasoning anger which the gunman's words had produced in him. But he was not successful in regaining caution.

Without waiting for the other ship to take off, he shoved hard in on his starter switch, listened abstractedly to the increasing tenor of the starter's whine, then engaged the clutch. The engine barked into fitful life, settled to its steady drone.

He thought: "Wonder if they heard that?" And didn't care if they had.

There was a risk in this, but Collie was beyond consideration of all risks now. He had planned to inspect his remaining mail-pouches, to see what mutilation had been done there, but in his quick change of mind he quite forgot this. Now, as his engine barked into action, he half expected a gunman to return to stop forever this pursuit; but none did, and a few moments later Collie saw the blue jet of flame that marked the other plane in its quick and surreptitious take-off.

He could have climbed from his ship and hurried to the field-house that nestled under the flicking finger of the beacon in the corner of the field, there to telephone Van Duyne, the operations manager at Hadley, of the loss. He had thought of this as soon as he realized that a landing would be made here. But to do this now would mean losing the bandit ship from sight, and this thing he did not wish to do. His was a single-track mind when once it became fixed upon a goal; and its goal now was pursuit, the apprehension of these men, the recovery of those valuables which had been intrusted to his care.

His reluctance in reporting this staggering loss of mail was prompted wholly by pride and that sense of responsibility which mail pilots long in service come to have. During more than four years in his job by day and by night such a thing as this had never happened to him before; on two other occasions, when fellow-pilots had been robbed, he had worked out in his precise Scotch mind the things he would have done in their circumstances had he been they. And when such a thing had actually happened to him, he had done nothing! His plans had been forgotten momentarily in the sight of the ugly muzzle of that gun.

He had thought of every angle of the case as he had ridden, a prisoner, from Bellefonte to this isolated field. He had phrased his report in his seething, tormented mind—had listened, in his imagination, to the minute and penetrating questions of the postal inspectors at Hadley. He had heard and seen them operate before.

There would be Mitchell, thin-faced, hawklike, who would make sneering implications. He would point out that Collie had left Bellefonte with the mail, that Haynes had seen him leave, had heard him take off soon thereafter. He would point out that Haynes had been conscious of no unusual delay. He would remind Collie that such a robbery was most unusual, that he had never heard of such a method before; and he might even add that in his opinion it couldn't be done. He would question insinuatingly:

"You're positive, McGinus, that there isn't some small detail that you haven't given us—ah—completely?"

No, Collie's pride demanded that he himself make some further attempt to recover his lost cargo before making his report. And toward this he had one idea in mind, which was not to lose sight of the other plane. So instead of taking off meekly and winging his way into Hadley, there to blurt his heated explanation, he watched the blue spot of flame where it was diminishing rapidly in the darkness. He ascertained the other's line of flight, and then with a rush took off in determined pursuit.

He had a purpose well defined, but no definite plan

of procedure that promised success. His mind had not gone that far as yet; the immediate thing was not to lose the other plane, and to this end he raced after the dwindling spot of light, his throttle wide, his ship adding momentarily to its speed.

Presently he began to gain; the spot grew larger. He flew below it, his navigation lights dark now. He was like a hound upon a scent, his huge, heavily clothed body thrust forward in his cockpit, his eyes glued upon the other plane except for brief glances at his instruments.

The bandit pilot held a course to the north of Hadley, and flew at about a thousand feet above the awakening countryside. There are a dozen scattered airports in the vicinity of New York, and there was no way of determining in advance to which one, if any, he was going. He might land in an isolated field, awaited there by an accomplice with a car; and once into New York, it would be difficult, if not totally impossible, to trace him. The ship might offer a means of identification, provided it still remained intact.

Collie knew that as long as they stayed in the air, there would be no way to overcome them. He had no weapon of any sort that would be suitable either to damage their ship or to harm them. True, he had his pistol flares, which could be shot at any angle to the sides or above or to the rear of him; and he thought for a moment of attempting to use them. He might succeed, by a freak of luck, in setting fire to their ship. But if he failed in that one attempt, he would have warned them of his presence near at hand and would no doubt thereby defeat himself in whatever later scheme he might devise.

So he followed, content to sit under their tail and see definitely where they meant to go. And as he sat there, turning first one plan after another over in his mind, he hit upon the one scheme which it appeared would be effective. . . .

Dawn was streaking blood-red into the thin, high clouds over the Atlantic to the east when the bandits reached their field. Collie, quick to sense their intention of landing, started climbing. He pulled his ship up into a stall, thereby letting the others outdistance him, and then dropped his nose a little and swerved slightly off their course so he could watch them over his lower wing.

He went up, while they went down. He was three miles away from them when they landed, and was flying at four thousand feet. But he could see the dot which was the car he had anticipated, and as the other ship touched the ground this dot raced for it. On seeing that, Collie cut his throttle and started in his glide.

It was no surprise to him when he saw the other plane burst into flame, for he had rather expected the bandits to set fire to it when their trip was finished. But after one look at the conflagration he paid it no more attention, and focused his scrutiny upon the car.

He was down to three thousand feet when the machine darted out upon the road and turned toward a town five miles away. He cleared his engine with a long burst of the gun, listened to the exhaust as he did so, then throttled back to a steady thousand revvs and dived.

But he saw, while still above a thousand feet, that he would overshoot them and go beyond before he reached the ground. He cut his throttle back entirely, pulled up and away; and while he flew he watched the car over his shoulder. When it had gained sufficient distance on him he dived again.

The car was making between seventy and seventy-five miles an hour over the broad, straight, gravel road. Collie, as he hurtled down, studied this road, the fences at its sides, the telephone lines beside the fences. The telephone lines appeared to be quite high, and they were close together for what he meant to do. It would be as dangerous a proposition for him as for the bandits.

He swept down behind the car, the plane's wires hissing in the wind. He reached a point a hundred yards behind the machine, and ten feet above the ground. His airspeed needle stood at eighty-five.

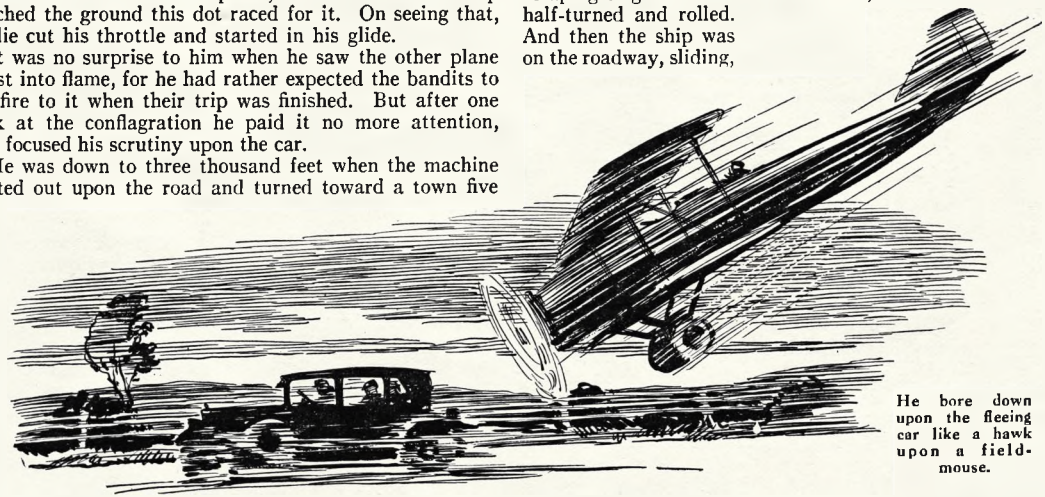
As the ship slowed he gunned it, picked up speed again until he was overtaking the car at ninety miles an hour. He was afraid to hit it going any faster, for fear of killing himself; he knew he must strike it at least that fast to accomplish his purpose. He had, during that short pursuit at the break of day, reconciled himself to the loss of the ship; it would be better, from his standpoint and from the standpoint of the B-T company, to regain the securities even at the cost of the ship.

"I'm flying an old crate anyhow," he thought.

The distance narrowed quickly. The car disappeared under the bulge of the ship's nose, and Collie kicked rudder and dropped a wing and flew slightly on his side to see in front of him again. And then, when he was fifty feet behind, and still gaining at a steady rate, he slammed his throttle hard against the stop on the quadrant and shoved the nose down.

He bore down upon the fleeing car like a hawk upon a field mouse. He counted the seconds, timed his crash. The intervening distance disappeared. The plane's propeller, turning two thousand revvs, snarled into the wood and steel and fabric of the machine.

At that instant Collie cut his switches to prevent fire and flung his left arm up before his face to cushion the violent impact that came a moment later. Into his ears beat the cracking of metal and the scraping of gravel as the car careened, half-turned and rolled. And then the ship was on the roadway, sliding,

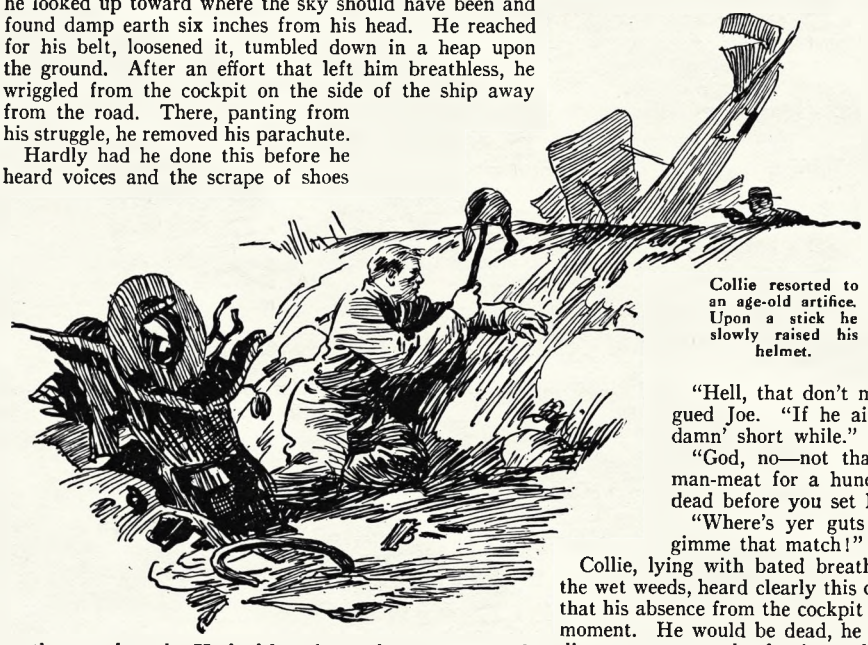


He bore down upon the fleeing car like a hawk upon a field-mouse.

bouncing violently. It went up on one wing; the nose caught in the ground; and it flung itself, so much formless wreckage, into a ditch fifty yards from where the car had come to rest in the ditch across the highway.

Collie struggled back into consciousness amid the reek of dripping gasoline. He was still hanging in his belt, and he looked up toward where the sky should have been and found damp earth six inches from his head. He reached for his belt, loosened it, tumbled down in a heap upon the ground. After an effort that left him breathless, he wriggled from the cockpit on the side of the ship away from the road. There, panting from his struggle, he removed his parachute.

Hardly had he done this before he heard voices and the scrape of shoes on the gravel road. He had heard no other car approach the wreck; and he knew, therefore, that one or more of the bandits had escaped the crash and was coming, seeking him. Furthermore, he was trapped. He had no gun, no other weapon of defense. With a quick movement he dug his way under the fuselage again, and disappeared into the inverted cockpit.



Collie resorted to an age-old artifice. Upon a stick he slowly raised his helmet.

It was perhaps ten seconds later when he reappeared, and now he bore a strange implement resembling a pistol-grip in one hand, and four long aluminum cartridges in the crook of his other arm. The cartridges looked like three-pound shells, in shape, except that they had no projectiles. They were flares.

Certain of being discovered if he remained at the wreck another moment, and still undecided as to what use to make of his flares, Collie crouched low and ran two dozen quick paces down the gully, stopped and threw himself into the tall grass. He wriggled into a position from which he could see the wreckage of his ship.

The men—there were two of them—appeared upon the edge of the road almost as Collie dropped from sight among the weeds. They stood in silent inspection of the scene for a time, as if debating what next step to take. From his position Collie could see them well.

They were nondescript in appearance, although well dressed. They wore business clothing now, and Collie wondered, should the opportunity come, if he would be able to single them apart in a crowd. One was of average height; the other was very slender and quite tall. His thinness accentuated this appearance.

"Cripes!" the taller one ejaculated. "Joe, that crazy guy sure give us a break!"

"How ya mean?" asked Joe.

"Why, you dumb palooka, this lets us out—we got nothing to worry about now, Joe. Everybody'll think McGinus crashed—got lost or something, and smacked the ground right here. We'll sure set fire to things to make it look real—that'll burn up the rest of the mail—and everybody'll think that it all burned up."

Joe frowned slightly. "What about Shorty—and the car?"

"Let 'em lay. It'll look like the ship came down on the road and hit Shorty as he was driving along. All we got to do is set fire to the ship and beat it."

The smaller man grinned. "That's the ticket—gimme a match." He slid down the embankment.

"Wait a minute," said the other; "we ought to see if McGinus is dead yet."

"Hell, that don't make any difference," argued Joe. "If he aint now, he will be in a damn' short while."

"God, no—not that way, Joe! I'd smell man-meat for a hundred years! See if he's dead before you set her off."

"Where's yer guts?" Joe sneered. "Here, gimme that match!"

Collie, lying with bated breath and tensed muscles in the wet weeds, heard clearly this conversation and realized that his absence from the cockpit would be discovered any moment. He would be dead, he knew, shortly after that discovery was made, for it would be a matter of but a moment for Joe and his confederate to beat out the grass in both directions from the wreck. Since he had failed in his attempt to stop the others by crashing into them, some other means must be adopted.

There were three things uppermost in Collie's mind. The most important was the saving of his own life. After that, he wanted to recover the securities and the mail lying now in his wrecked ship; and if possible he wanted to bring the bandits to subjection. He was not ordinarily given to great deliberation before entering a physical conflict, but the odds in this one were so overwhelmingly against him that he hesitated and studied the situation.

He was lying on very wet ground, and as the moisture seeped through his flying-suit and against his body, it occurred to him that probably, somewhere near, was a drain or culvert under the road. This, if it existed and was near enough to be accessible, would give him passage in safety and secrecy to the wreckage of the car, provided he could reach it before the bandits located him. So, leaving the two by the plane arguing the matter, he began his slow and wary way through the grass in retreat.

He made no sound through the damp weeds, but the long tops moved every time he moved. He inched along, stopping breathlessly now and then to listen, and then to raise his head a little, cautiously, to see if his absence had been discovered. He was crawling backward, and he still retained his flares and flare-pistol, despite their encumbrance to his progress.

He had crawled perhaps fifty yards from the wreck, and had just come upon a narrow concrete culvert, when he heard Joe's excited yell. He overcame an impulse to look up, and dived into the dark hole. He hoped his tracks through the muddy ditch were not too prominent.

The culvert was small, and it was sixty feet long; but Collie went through it like a mole. He emerged among the weeds at the other end, and crouched, his head above the grass, to look around. He saw the damaged car almost in front of him, but nothing of the gunmen. Forthwith, still clutching his flare equipment, he reached the car in three leaps.

Evidently the propeller of the ship had done for the driver. Collie discovered him still in what had been the driver's seat, but now his head was a shapeless mass, and Collie had to stifle the clutches of nausea before he searched the man for the gun he hoped to find.

But no gun was there, and Collie quickly turned to the wreckage for the registered pouch. That too was nowhere to be found.

Collie was still down among the wreckage of the car when he heard a man curse close at hand upon the road, and another's harsh reply. He flung himself free of the tangled metal, reached his flares where they lay at one side upon the ground, whirled and saw Joe and his companion approaching. He quickly inserted the butt of one of the flares into the pistol grip, clicked it into place. And at that moment Joe saw him.

Joe snatched at his gun at the moment Collie lifted his strange armament, and aimed and pulled the trigger. Collie heard the metallic *pl-u-r-p* as the flare-case spat its slender cylinder, which contained the flare itself—and he also heard the angry whine of Joe's bullet. The flare-cylinder, because of its delay fuse, did not explode when Collie fired it; it struck Joe on the body just below the chin; then the delay fuse ignited the flare, and the full force of two hundred thousand candlepower burst in his face.

Joe screamed in the high tenor of agony and flung his hands to his eyes. His gun flew from his hand and clattered to the gravel.

His companion, after the first quick and startled glance at him, turned toward the cover of the ditch across the road. What he had seen he did not fully understand. As he ran, Collie dropped another flare just in front of him, where it exploded with its full force. But this was not enough to halt the bandit's dive to safety.

The first flare had burned and temporarily blinded Joe, and he was out of action. He sat down upon the road, his head in his hands, and screamed and rocked his body in the agony of his hurts. Collie, from the car well out of range of the second of the pair, watched him cautiously. The second man, his gun evidently ready, after a first experimental shot from his new cover, protected Joe.

Perhaps five minutes had elapsed since the crash. Collie knew that undoubtedly some one would soon pass the place, must stop at this strange apparition in the road, the wreckage of an airplane and of a car. But in the meantime he was not certain that Joe's companion would not himself discover the culvert and use it as Collie had used it. From the black mouth of that concrete tunnel a half dozen yards away, he could end this thing effectively.

So Collie withdrew cautiously from the car and crept down the ditch a dozen feet. There he resorted to an age-old artifice. Upon a stick which he found in the ditch he slowly raised his helmet until it protruded slightly above the road. He waited thus for half a minute and was rewarded, then, by a sharp report and a bullet-hole through the helmet.

Collie's head came up suddenly after that shot, an arm's-length from the helmet. He saw in a quick glance where the bandit lay. Collie was down in the ditch again in a fraction of a second, and scurrying back to the car. He reached a position directly in line with Joe and the man in the ditch across the road; then he loaded another flare. He held the last one in his left hand for immediate use.

He fired the first flare into the ditch across the road four feet to the right of where he had last seen the man. With a flick of his thumb he ejected the empty case, loaded the remaining flare and fired it at a point three feet to the left of the bandit. He heard the two flares explode in quick succession as he hurled himself from the ditch and whipped up Joe's gun from where it lay ten feet from the moaning man. He turned and flung himself back into his cover as a bullet from that gun across the road burned him on the shoulder.

It was a skin-wound only, although the shock of it numbed Collie's left arm. But the use of the arm was now unimportant; he had Joe's gun, and with it he would soon adjust this matter finally. For the second bandit was pocketed between two white-hot fires; he would be smoked out in a matter of seconds.

Which proved true; but when he came, he came shooting. Apparently he relied upon the old psychology that a man taking aggressive action is more formidable than his defensive opponent. At any rate he boiled out of his hole, his gun roaring. But Collie was not to be stampeded; instead, he dropped the man with his third shot.

So when Collie, after finding his registered pouch, blood-soaked and slightly torn, under the front seat of the bandit car, started toward town five miles away, he had only one prisoner. But he had a clerk from that near-by post-office standing guard over the mail still remaining in the ship, and he himself carried the bulky and inconvenient bag, the value of which had been a dangerous thing to him that night. He did not explore its contents; he was tired, and the reaction to his excitement was setting in. He presumed the bandits had known the register-lock number of the pouch, had identified it that way. . . .

Three hours later a ship from Hadley, bearing the immaculate Van Duyne, and the postal inspector Mitchell, picked Collie up beside the wreck. He told them the story, pointed out the evidence. And he said, a little ruefully:

"I was a bit slow getting going. I should have stopped all this at Bellefonte when it started. They jumped me too quick, though; I'll know more about it next time."

He added some embellishments, finally concluded with a sigh: "Lord, I'm tired. Take me home." Van Duyne solemnly agreed.

Then Collie thought of his flare-pistol, where he had dropped it by the wreckage of the car. "Wait a minute," he said. "I'll be right back." And he went wearily down into the ditch and up again, and crossed the road.

So he was out of hearing when Mitchell turned to Van, and smiled, and said: "He put up a hell of a good fight for just a bunch of canceled checks. Too bad the stuff wasn't really in there. Would have been, too, if you'd connected schedules at Chicago." He paused, and watched Collyer McGinus with admiration in his eyes, and then went on: "You've got a fine bunch of pilots, Van; I wouldn't be surprised if he's not about the best!"

Van Duyne nodded. "He is, beyond question. But don't tell him that—he's a hard baby to handle sometimes. And Lord, don't tell him he really didn't have the real stuff with him—it would break his heart in two!"

Collie returned, and he was happy now, and smiling. To this day he doesn't know.

A Route for the Guns

The famous Hell's Angels squad of the Foreign Legion carries through a desperate mission.

By WARREN HASTINGS MILLER

COMMANDER KNECHT came into the *Bureau de Place* of Erfoud; and Sergeant Ike and Hell's Angels snapped to attention, while Lieutenant Hortet rose respectfully from behind the desk of the Officer of the Day. The big and genial Commandant bore a sheaf of photos in his hairy fist, and his shovel beard waggled in a grin at Sergeant Ike as he waved a sketch map at that imperturbable ex-cowman from Texas.

"*Voilà*, my Buffalo Bill, the token of a daring incomparable!" He tapped the map, made during the earlier Tafilelt campaign by an intrepid scout officer of the staff. It was the only one in existence of this hostile region, containing a population of over two hundred thousand and sporting thirty thousand guns for defense. No one had even tried to make one since, the Tafilelt being unhealthy for white folks, alone or in armies.

"She is filled with important omissions, this map," went on the Commandant. "I ask you—how are we going to get our artillery from Tighemart to the plateau of the Oued Gheris?" He placed a thick finger on the road sketched down through the great oasis as far as the walled town of Tighemart. There it ended, with a tail running out toward Bou Am. The map was all blank there, eloquent evidence of some skirmish where the staff officer had had to leave off cartography and fight for his life.

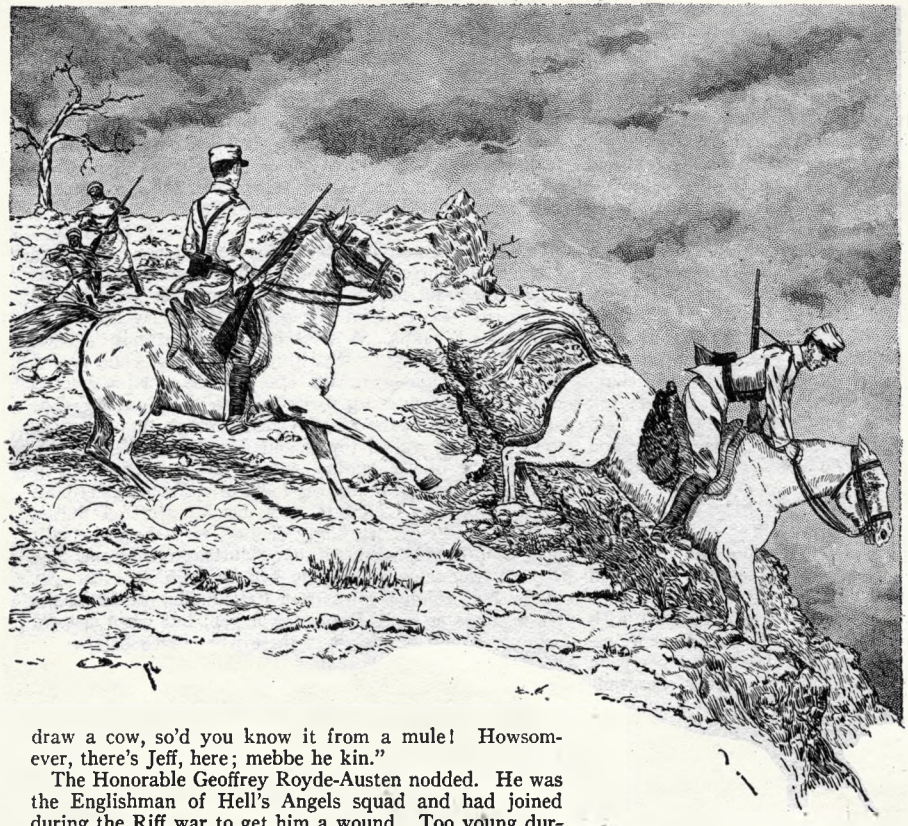
"She is practicable for our seventy-fives that far," said Knecht. "But a ford for them across the Oued Ziz? And how to ascend the plateau? These photographs do not help much."

They looked over them. Memories of what might have been, crowded into Ike's mind as they were spread out on Hortet's desk-top. Here in '24 the Légion had captured Tighemart and all the surrounding region, after a series of battles with the tribesmen of the Aït Atta Confederation. And then Abd-el-Krim had broken out up north in the Riff, and they had to leave it all. It would take an army to get back to the scenes of those photographs now! There was one showing the mud-walled marketplace of Bou Am, with five mounted Légionnaires on guard around a civilian in a white topee who had come down from Algiers to organize some sort of loyal native government here. The Légionnaire in the foreground with a beard was poor old Rosskoff, who had since given his life in the Grand Atlas. Come back from the dead, he seemed! The airplane reconnaissance photos were more recent, but they showed only caravan-routes that might be mud sinks in spots, where the heavy seventy-fives would mire down. You had to know, not guess, before those guns moved!

Commandant Knecht winked cheerfully in Ike's direction and licked his beard with a red tongue. "You are a superb draftsman, my sergeant, *hein?*" he teased. "Suppose you and the excellent Hell's Angels map us a route for our seventy-fives? If one thirsts for more glory, he might find a lifetime of it between Bou Am and the plateau of the Gheris—or, a monument! But it is essential for our guns to arrive here"—he put a thumb on that plateau which the photographs showed as barren escarpments rising five hundred feet above the dense valley of palms along the Oued Ziz—"so as to command the waters of the Gheris with artillery fire. No water for their flocks, we receive the submission of the Aït Atta Confederation quickly!"

Ike chewed solemnly. He and Hortet and Hell's Angels had been there once before, on a raid to make trouble between two jealous tribes of the Confederation. They had been too busy to more than look sketchily for any artillery route! But it was an essential part of the plan to retake the Tafilelt, he knew. There was no way to subdue the desert tribesmen but to seize their water. Nothing but artillery mounted on that plateau between the two rivers would do that. Ike pondered this; at last he said:

"The top-kick shore does git passed all kinds of bucks in this outfit, Commandant! Me draw a map? I couldn't



draw a cow, so'd you know it from a mule! However, there's Jeff, here; mebbe he kin."

The Honorable Geoffrey Royde-Austen nodded. He was the Englishman of Hell's Angels squad and had joined during the Riff war to get him a wound. Too young during the big show to see any action, he had been slated by his father, Lord Austen, for that crack London outfit, the Seventeenth Lancers. His girl, though, would have none of it, no tin soldier for hers. As the Légion was the only place a man could see real fighting nowadays she had sent him into it to acquire a few honorable scars.

The levity left Commandant Knecht's face and was replaced by a dolorous expression as he turned to the Honorable Geoffrey, whom Ike persisted in calling "Jeff" under the impression that he was named for good old Jeff Davis of the Confederacy.

"Ah, non!" he said. "He must stay at the *poste,* Sergeant Ike. I have sad news for you, *mon ami.* Lord Austen died last night, of a fall from his horse in fox-hunting. The wire came in this morning. I had intended to break the lamentable news to you privately," he added apologetically. "Your Lordship will pardon. . . . Also the British Government has asked for your release from the Légion."

Jeff had staggered against the wall with the blow of that news. His eyes filled with tears. His comrades supported him, with sympathy. There was a silence.

"Poor old guv'nor!" Jeff husked through his tears. "A knight of the old style, sir," he told the Commandant proudly. "You note that he died in the saddle—as he would have wished, sir."

"Bien triste!" Commandant Knecht murmured. "We all know the sadness of losing a father. The protecting arm, always there since childhood, gone on. . . . You have all our sympathy, Lord Austen."

Again Ike thrilled. He was feeling to the marrow of his bones the significance of that title in a land where titles meant something. This capable young soldier of his squad was a big man, now, in his own country—a member of the House of Peers!

But this exceptional young man had thrown back his head and was saying: "Sir, I can't see that this news has anything to do with our mapping a route for your seventy-fives. As I understand the officer's compass and have had a bit of map-making myself, sir, in field maneuvers back home, I'd like to see it through, sir. Permission to get on with this show before we talk of any release, sir?"

"*Good* waddy!" growled Ike with pleasure.

But again Commandant Knecht shook his head, and his eyes twinkled on Jeff.

"Ah, non!" he said slyly. "Your little lady arrives, Lord Austen! By airplane from Ksabi over the mountains. She has an *autorization militaire."*

Jeff looked puzzled. Why in the world his fiancée, Lady Diana Burdwynd, should find it necessary to come here was not apparent. He wrote her regularly, but both were waiting till his Légion term should expire, when he could come to her a first-class fighting man, with the scars of pitched battles on him.

"In that case, sir," said Jeff distressedly after that first scowl of puzzlement, "I must demand to go with the squad. You know *her,* Commandant!"

Knecht guffawed; they all did. They knew *her!* Daughter of General Sir Arthur Burdwynd, Bart., of Flanders battle fame, she would run Jeff ragged if she arrived here and found he had stayed behind from important duty merely to greet her here at Erfoud!

"Oui! Name of God, yes!" Commandant Knecht laughed. "Daughter of Mars, that one! *Eh bien?* Go, then! If it is very important, I shall send her on with the aviator to—*ouff!* What a rendezvous!—our old camp near Dar-el-Beïda. The *avion* can come down there. . . *Va-t-en, alors!* Here is the instrument. Watch the sky, my friend, while you are using it! The Sheik Taïb ben Saïdan goes with you, Sergeant. His people live in a *ksar* on the plateau of the Gheris, so he knows the region. But woe to him if they catch him!"

That was a warning to Ike that he had an intelligence officer to look after as well as the British lord—and maybe his girl too. Quite a handful of responsibility, but Ike was a substantial old cowman, long, lean, leathery, and had a handy way about him in pushing his raids through

without too much worrying over what might happen. His homely common sense told him that the only likely place to make this raid succeed was down the plateau between the Ziz and the Gheris. It was high and barren ground, that *ksar* of the Ouled Saïdan the only building of importance on it. No one would be up there save a few goatherds. The steep escarpments on both sides made the top invisible a short distance back from the rim. It followed that his squad could get far down into the Tafilelt without being seen by either the date-growers of the Ziz or the desert tribesmen, who had their tents and pasturages far and wide out from the west bank of the Gheris.

"Permission to get goin', sir? I aims to do this here stunt backwards, Commandant. You git yore map; only we makes her from the Gheris end back to Tighemart. Down the plateau from here is the only way to git thar without a dog-fight the hull way, if you asks me, sir."

"Excellent!" Commandant Knecht approved the reversal of his plan after a second's consideration. "And the Lady Diana? She will have to land in the old field we cleared near Dar-el-Beïda—six miles from where you will be! *Quelle théâtre, hein?*" He grinned on Ike and then all, facetiously.

"Mebbe," said Ike, chewing. The lady was already becoming a nuisance—but she was Jeff's girl. "We can helio from the plateau rim, sir. The pilot can bring her over and drop her somewhere near us, if he's any good at all. We'll fix it up somehow, sir."

"*Ouff!* You casual Americans!" Knecht agreed with an eloquent shrug. "But you are fertile in inventions, I send her on to Dar-el-Beïda, then, if I cannot persuade her to wait here. The rest is in your hands, Sergeant Ike. . . . Dismissed!"

The squad saluted and went out to saddle their mounts. Presently seven chestnut Barbs and a led horse were clattering out the gates of Erfoud. They picked their way along the high mountain flanks instead of riding down the zigzags to the valley below. Ike's plan was to strike down the slopes of the Atlas between the headwaters of the Ziz and the Gheris, sweeping out on the plateau that divided the two rivers. The led horse carried two automatic rifles slung in boots on the rear and far side of a pack-saddle, a hundred pounds of ammunition packed securely atop. It gave the squad a combat fire equal to a whole platoon of riflemen. And Ike had no illusions about this map-making being any peaceful proceeding. They were sure to be discovered, and Sultan Belkacem's cavalry sent up against them. The thing to do, then, was to "slap 'em down with the sho-shos" and get on with the map.

IT was high noon when the route-step trot of the squad, with its swinging cadence of clinking canteen and curb-chain and creak of saddle-leather brought them near their objective. A scant ribbon not a mile wide, with empty space beyond both rims of it, was the backbone of this plateau. Its terrain was all stratified rocks, isolated by rain and wind to make bad going for the horses and impossible landing for any plane. Not a living thing moved on it. A grim gray *ksar* rose on its western brow far to the south, Ksar Ouled Saïdan. A grim clan lived there; the sheik who rode alongside Ike was one of them. A traitor, his people regarded him; a far-seeing intelligence officer, who had dreams of peace and order among his people under the French, he was known to the General Staff.

"Thus far and no farther, ya Sergeant!" he warned Ike, and checked in his stallion. "There be watchmen in the towers of that *ksar*. They cannot tell who we are without glasses at this distance, but—"

A gesture of his lean brown hand. Nearer would bring discovery, a messenger sent in haste to Tighemart. At present they were just a blob of riders as seen from that *ksar*, possibly one of Belkacem's own patrols.

"Okay, Sheik," said Ike cheerfully. "We done well, so fur. Not ary a shepherd! God-forsaken ground, at that, whar even a goat couldn't nibble a toothful. Dismount, gang! Hide them hosses. Bill, you sets up them sho-shos on the flanks, and take Mora an' Mr. Dee for belt men. The rest of us go with Jeff."

ORDERLY activity ensued for a time, while each man led his horse to some convenient crevice between rocks where he could not be seen. The sho-shos were lugged over to the eastern rim overlooking the valley of the Ziz to the east below. A view of that great hostile oasis opened out as they crawled through the rocks and peered out from various concealments. Dense green palmeries ran for thirty miles up to Erfoud on its mountain. The shining ribbon of the Ziz threaded through the valley below, frowning walled towns and *ksars* dotting its banks. A red cube like a domino, with a minaret rising out of it, was Tighemart, that great town of red mud walls built in 1894 by the Khalifate, now headquarters of Sultan Belkacem. Beyond it, dimly distant, were the white falls of Dar-el-Beïda, scene of hot fighting during the first Tafilelt campaign. They looked in vain for that dot in the blue coming down from Erfoud that would be the plane carrying Lady Diana. Not yet; but when she did come, it would be way over there where even helio could hardly reach.

Jeff was already taking bearings with his compass and beginning a sketch map from this end. The road beyond Tighemart was clear, a narrow white ribbon that passed the town on the north, wound over to the big market center of Bou Am, then crossed the Ziz in a caravan route that zigzagged up the escarpments to reach the plateau some distance to the north of them. They had crossed that route coming down, a mere lane of camel-tracks, too stony for artillery.

Jeff shook his head. "A bit seedy, that route, Sergeant!" he reported. "Fancy hauling artillery up it! I'd say we'd do better at the old well. There must be the ruins of an ancient bridge across the Ziz there."

He pointed it out, Ben Akki, that great well that is all that is left of the great city that once ruled all Morocco and half Spain. In 1818 this same Confederation of the Aït Atta stormed and took that city. A hundred and twelve years ago it was; they had left not one stone standing save the curb of this well. It rose like a black dot below, its curb six feet above the flat sands and casting a crescent shadow of its own. Ike knew that the French proposed to rebuild that town and install the boy Khalif of the Tafilelt in it. The thing would need a fort guarding it; but it needed still more a redoubt with two batteries of seventy-fives up here, along the west rim of the plateau. With them commanding the waters of the Gheris, the Confederation would be peaceful—and remain so!

And just then the sheik came hastening through the rocks. "On thy life, ya Sergeant! A *chaut-chaut* over on the west rim, and quickly! A *harka* of the Aït Khebbash is crossing the Gheris below!"

Ike chewed stolidly. Hell generally *did* pop loose whenever they started out to do some simple thing like making a map! He was not surprised to hear Anzac Bill hail, almost at the same instant: "Cavalry moving out from Bou Am, Sarge!"

Ike chewed some more. This was the Tafilelt, so what more could you expect? Tourists were buying leather

cushions and pocketbooks and ladies' hand-bags up north at this moment, little knowing that all that bright-colored leather came from here, the famous Filali leather. A curious sort of place, the Tafilelt! Those enormous pasturages, extending for miles westward from the banks of the Gheris, furnished the raw leather; the populous palmeries along the Ziz dyed and tanned it; caravans bore it north. It was all managed, somehow, by the accommodating French—while a state of war existed. Bizarre situation, where industry and war got on side by side, selling to the enemy with one hand and attacking his soldiery with the other! In point of fact, the French had no quarrel with the Filaliens themselves, but with these unruly tribesmen, whose sultan defied the rule of Fez and France alike and was now holding the Tafilelt with an iron hand.

Ike pulled a straw and picked his teeth, considering. Jeff had to have time for his map, hadn't he? And he had to locate a route up these escarpments, every foot of which must be gone over to make sure there were no impossible breaks. Ike could see that the plain below was practicable from the well Ben Akki to the foot of this plateau. Some shovel work by the Légion would lay a ribbon of road almost as fast as the guns could be hauled. He was not so sure of these cliffs and breaks.

Ike chucked away the straw. "Let 'em come up, fer all of me." He grinned hard-eyed upon the excited sheik. "We got 'em on a elegant skyline from here. Bill, you face one of them sho-shos west an' stand by." He turned to Di Piatti. "Count, you run the other automatic. Spray them Bou Am birds good when they gits out on the plain. The rest of us does a *parti* down these slopes when Jeff is ready."

Hell's Angels laughed grimly as they grasped the significance of Ike's homely strategy. It would be something in the nature of disturbing a hornet when those *harkas,* coming out to gather in a mere squad of the Légion, stepped on these two buzzing automatics! The long cavalcade of Arab horse was winding out from Bou Am as they watched. Jeff went on laying in his map from the topography spread out below. The squad gazed with critical interest as the leading files began to cross the Ziz. Belly-deep, the water rose there, grew no deeper; then the leaders were floundering out.

"Thar's yore ford, Jeff!" Ike called. "Reel polite of 'em to show us, I'll allow. *Sho!* 'Twon't take the boys an hour to fill in there!"

JEFF marked it on his map. The caravan route crossed some distance above, but this ford was evidently the ruins of an old bridge, as it lay directly between Bou Am and the well. As Ike had said, a bit of fill would pass the guns wheel-deep without obstructing the river.

Prat! Tac-tac-tac! Bill had let go with the automatic. Ike swung about and saw heads vanishing below the western rim, a line of turbans ducking down. Then more appeared, to right and left, flanking their position. He sighed. "Oughtta let them come nearer, Bill! But 'twould hev been plain murder."

Bill grunted. He thought that way about it himself. Tactically he had thrown away an advantage, but the Légion had a grim chivalry of its own. "Going to be interesting, now," he chuckled, "if you don't mind."

Ike didn't. They would have a party with the Aït Khebbash coming snakewise through the rocks, but it was all in the day's work. *Zing!* The first bullet of that party had come over. How they loved it, this stalking the Roumi, each man for himself! The broken surface of this plateau would be alive with them presently. The Légion was used to it, gave a bit better than they got.

What they were *not* used to was an airplane, bearing a female, horning into their job. Ike swore as the hail, "Plane yonder! Northeast, Top!" came from Calamity Cyclops, the bullet-headed little sharpshooter of the squad.

"Damn that gal!" Ike muttered under his breath. To Jeff: "Hyar she come, son. You start actin' pretty with that map, or she won't see you a-heeroin' it, and won't give you no citation for one of them D.S.O.'s."

Jeff scowled as his eyes puckered on that distant black speck in the blue; then he blushed redly, for Hell's Angels squad was regarding him with wide grins.

"You rotters!" he snapped. But there was rapture in his eyes. A lump rose in Hell's Angels' throats as they saw that look. They had each known it, once, long ago. They were in their forties now, hard-bitten, workful, doing their job for the world's civilization with a grim zest; but never again the rapture of young love for them.

"How about a li'l parade, fellers?" Ike suggested. "That pilot's got a range-finder that can see things twenty miles. Jeff, here, oughtta be layin' down levels or somethin', so she kin see him work under fire. Two of us hold the map for him, while he struts his stuff. Time we went down the hill, boys, if we're ever goin' to!"

THEY all guffawed as Jeff snorted: "Poisonous lot! You'll have me wavin' a silly flag, next, so she'll be sure to see me! I say, Sarge, that formation down there looks promising. This strata incline is six degrees—"

Pow! Zang! That slug smote rock and showered chips and spatters of lead all over them. Di Piatti felt of his nape-cloth with his free hand. The other was on the grip of the automatic, and finger on trigger he bore its muzzle on that oncoming horde of tribesmen below, galloping out from Ben Akki.

They were everywhere in the broken barrens of the plateau, and creeping in little by little. Ike could stop any Aït Khebbash rush with that automatic, *provided* it was manned. . . . The Great War had taught him how vulnerable a machine-gun was to infiltration on the flanks.

"Let's go, fellers," he said. "You all through, Jeff? Count, you stay here and spray that mob below, at a thousand yards. Down the hill, boys!"

The mob below was a beautiful sight as they galloped across the flats between Ben Akki and the foot of these escarpments. Spirited horses, chestnut and gray; picturesque riders, in fluttering burnouses, who waved long rifles and captured carbines; some were tossing them up with gay abandon and catching the pieces as they rode under them. The news that a squad of the Légion was at large in the Tafilelt seemed to have gone all over the oasis by the native mouth-to-mouth telegraph. Belkacem had certainly been prompt to send out two *harkas* after them! Judging from the numbers, there was little hope of escape out of this enveloping movement, once it closed in around them. Ike was not worrying about escape, just yet; he had a map to make. The squad followed Jeff down a long natural ledge of the same incline as the strata. Cleared, it would make a road for the guns in a brief time, with a regiment of men laying and filling.

Tac-tac-tac-tac! Di Piatti had opened up a withering fire from the rim above. The *harka* below leaped bodily, as if struck by an invisible, deadly hailstorm. Horses and men crashed down in dust and confusion. The stream of bullets moved on inexorably across their front. Ike could trace the Count's aim by the sudden destruction. He clicked his teeth regretfully, for he hated to see horses die, the innocents! For a time that *harka* was in the wildest confusion. They had expected rifle-fire, but not this storm that kept on and on unceasingly! And then the automatic above shut off abruptly.

Ike looked up anxiously. Anzac Bill was setting up his machine-gun hurriedly to get into it too, Mora helping him. Ike had left Calamity up there to guard the Count, but—this shutting off just when they had them breaking! Was the gun jammed?

"Criswell, you git up thar on the jump an' see what ails Mr. Dee," he ordered his corporal. "Wait up, Jeff—"

Whoom! That was a terrific rending concussion that drowned his voice. The hillside quivered as if smitten by an earthquake. A cloud of rocks and splinters was ascending over the rim in an immense mushroom of brown smoke. Ike looked up wildly at the menacing sky filled with flying missiles descending. He knew instantly what had happened. A chance Arab slug had crashed through the ammunition on their led horse, setting off all the fulminate in the primers. That horse had been well bedded down; it argued pretty close up for the Aït Khebbash. He was really worried about Di Piatti now. And there was no more ammunition for either automatic.

"Whoosh!" snorted Ike, dodging falling rocks. "Who wouldn't be a sergeant in the Légion! . . Dig in, Bill, you'n' Mora. Hold fire with that gun. Gotta go up and see about this!"

JEFF had gone on down the ledge, map-making imperturbably, as Ike turned. He was out of sight around a bend in the cliffs. Ike looked over-shoulder at the *harka* below as he toiled upward. It had recovered and reformed, was now in a long line of horsemen reconnoitering their position in open order.

"Top-kick shore does git handed some tough layouts in this outfit!" Ike groused with exasperation. "Have to let the durned map go and hold the rim, that's all," he decided. "Recall that Jeff-boy."

Ye-ee-ow! A bullet ripped by frightfully close as Ike's head rose above the rim ledges for a look-see. His rifle leaped to shoulder in a return snap-shot that got his man —a bunch of rags above the hummocky terrain of that plateau top, and not seventy yards off. The tribesman went over backward as if pushed, and Ike stood still looking for more. He chewed solemnly as his hands worked the bolt mechanically. A horse's head raised near by whinnied at him—his own mare, who had winded him.

"Git down, y'old fool!" Ike cursed her affectionately. "Where's them birds all at?"

The automatic gleamed in a nest of rocks near by, but no one was manning it. Ike sidled toward it, his rifle poised, his eyes scanning the plateau for heads. He seemed all alone in the center of Africa, but he was not. Below the rim he could hear continuous rifle-fire from Bill and Mora holding off that *harka;* up here were a quantity of men—playing a deadly hide-and-seek with each other. He had plenty of company, of sorts!

Wham! Ike had fired again, saw his bullet-dust rock close by a head that was not a Légion kepi—which head ducked down. And then three heads popped up in a gleam of white nape-cloth and red cap-rim. Criswell's bronzed face turned toward him from a point some distance beyond where they had parked the horses.

"What's the word, Top?" he called over. "Gun's busted. Gas lever hit by a piece of rock. We're keepin' them off the hosses."

Bang! Calamity had nailed one the instant his head appeared. Now that he was up, the little sharpshooter stayed up, his shoulders clear above cover. Ike looked at him woodenly. An idea was emerging, and that was that if he could get Bill up here with the other automatic commanding everything in sight, the rest of them could smoke out these Aït Khebbash and there would be a chance to get away.

"You aint no orniment, C'lamity," he said, "but you is pow'ful useful whar you is. Hold 'em, while I bring up the gang. We've made all the map the Lord's goin' to let us!"

Calamity sat down. He was a tactical advantage worth several automatics, with that lightning shooting of his. And there was Ike backing him. The Sergeant's spirits rose. One quick movement to horse, with Bill covering them, and he would pull his command out of this yet!

But he had reckoned without his stubborn Englishman. Jeff was nowhere to be found when Ike reached the rim and was yelling below for them all to come up: Jeff had started in to make a map, and when John Bull undertakes anything, he is not to be deterred by a mere trifle like a *harka* of tribesmen! Ike saw that those people were now established on both his flanks, scattered up the hill-slopes and sniping vigorously. They would make a junction with the Aït Khebbash above and have him surrounded again if something was not done right sudden.

"Yeeay, Jeff!" Ike bellowed through cupped hands. "Retreat, damn you!"

No answering hail. Jeff was preoccupied or something. Ike swore luridly. He couldn't get his unit together without Jeff; if he left them as they were, it would end in individual dog-fights and everyone get wiped out—and no map at all to show for it.

"Dam'f I aint like a cow-critter straddlin' a barbed-wire fence—cain't do no good with either end!" Ike raved. *"You, Jeff! Come up!"* His yowl brought not even the crack of a rifle in response. Ike could visualize that rifle still strapped over Jeff's nonchalant shoulder and both his hands occupied with compass and pencil. Well, he was right; the pestilent map *was* what all this was about, wasn't it? They had to have *something* to show Knecht!

Anzac Bill's grim iron visage looked up at Ike from where it hovered over the automatic.

"Better rush the horses down here, Sarge, and bust out on the plain, hadn't we?" he called up. "Here comes that plane."

Ike became suddenly aware of it, in all the turmoil of perplexities over extricating his command that had driven it out of his mind entirely. Low over Tighemart it was buzzing. As seen from here, its black dot was hardly distinguishable against the dense greenery of the palmeries. It had reached the landing-field near Dar-el-Beïda, found no one below, and the aviator was now following the main road, hoping to pick them up somewhere along it. He would be over Bou Am in a few minutes more.

IKE eyed the group of *harka* horses left out on the plain to cut off escape that way. About a score of them. The rest were on either flank, their mounts picketed on the sands at the foot of the slope, their riders climbing from rock to rock and being potted at by Anzac Bill and Mora. The squad had a good chance of breaking through by attacking that group, picking up Jeff on the way. Even then they wouldn't be anywhere—with the whole valley of the Ziz to fight back through. But the plane could help.

"Hot idee, Bill," he called down. "Bring up the shosho quick and cover us. T'other gun's broke. Hustle, fellers!"

They ran up the gun under a hot fire from both sides. Ike turned to find Calamity still an ornament of the scenery and squibbing off a snapshot, generally fatal, when anything showed above the rocks. "Jim!" he called to Criswell. "Git them hosses ready. We'll vamoose down the hill."

Kepis showed up, the sheik's turban. Bill and Mora came laboring over the rim, hove the broken gun out of

its nest and set up theirs. The stage was all set for their break. And they hadn't much time left! Ike swung a last glance over to the plane. It was about on their level, over the well Ben Akki, and its buzz could be distinctly heard now. He had a stock of bombs, Ike hoped. The girl was there to release them.

"Squad, mount—*yeeow!*" Ike bellowed. The horses themselves scrambled to their feet at that well-known order. There was an eruption of Aït Khebbash all through the rocks, Calamity's rifle ringing rapid fire, the chatter of the automatic, a flinging of legs over saddles. Ike waved them vigorously past him as the animals reached the rim, then slid down to the ledge below in showers of dust and stones. Valiantly the Aït Khebbash exposed themselves, but the automatic biffed them down in bursts of sputtering flame. Criswell leaped past with Bill's and Mora's mounts led by the bridles. Ike saw them cascade downward, then touched up his mare.

"Hold 'em for a rush, Bill!" he said. "Bust that gun an' come a-singin' when she runs outa ca'tridges."

YOU could depend on that iron man Anzac Bill to cover their retreat! Ike slid his mare downward on her haunches. He was abandoning their one defensible position for a chance, but it looked good to him. The hillside was buzzing with slugs as the gang worked down that ledge that would some day be a route up for the seventy-fives. They fired back from the saddle, then came under the protection of a cliff and disappeared around the bend. A black and shining thing whirled over the rim and fell below in a clatter of steel on rock—Bill's ammunitionless automatic, thrown as far as it could be hurled. Shouts from him and Mora above. Ike started his mare down the ledge. His command was united and moving again, a weapon of offense, presently. All except Jeff! Meanwhile a gleaming bomb was streaking downward from that plane, now passing over the group of horsemen. *Bong!* The sands flew up in a geyser that exploded those Arabs into flying units and left ragged heaps piled around its crater. Ike urged his mare faster.

Brrrrrrrr! The plane was coming on straight over them. It zoomed to top the rim above; heads leaned over its cockpit, shouting unintelligibly. Then distantly—*whoom!* That was a pill for the Aït Khebbash massing on their abandoned rim position. Ike thrilled. He had seen that face leaning over the second cockpit—hers! The air had howled with slugs all around that plane as it passed over, but *she* had not let the pilot take any safe and sane altitude!

"Some gal!" muttered Ike with his heart popping. "What you birds haltin' for?"

He had caught up with the rear of the squad. They were strung like flies along that pestiferous ledge, and Criswell in the lead called back: "No go for the hosses, Top! She ends here in a break."

A nice little cliff, a fifteen-feet drop, terminated this formation. Men could make it, but not the horses. Jeff had; Ike could see his boot-prints below where he had jumped. And he couldn't get back again this way—which might explain why he had not come up—and might not. Ike cursed rabidly. Everything gone flooie again!

"Whaddye say, Ike? Turn back an' try another one?" Criswell asked.

Ike hammered the air with an explosion of profanity. "Don't look too healthy, that there idea, Jim," he said. "Them hosstyles is onto our fix. Lookit 'em come!"

The *harka* was gathering more and more units as snipers from the hillside rode out to join the survivors of that group. Yells of fierce delight broke from them as they took in the Légion treed on its ledge. They were too wary to concentrate, for the plane was coming back. They wheeled and scattered, each man for himself, but all heading purposefully toward the foot of slopes nearby that would give excellent sniping cover if you would pick off these Roumi crowded on this ledge. Soon they wouldn't have a horse left.

Brrrrrrrr! The plane soared back over the rim, banked, circled, reconnoitering their situation. It looked rather thick to Ike. He had made the horses lie down, and the squad was building what poor breastworks could be assembled out of rocks and rubble dug out of the bank above. They had to stick it here, for a while anyway, till he could see some way of getting both horses and men out of this. To continue on foot was fatal; no squad of infantry could get out of the Tafilelt from here.

There seemed to be an argument going on up in the plane. The girl was gesticulating forcibly at her pilot, commanding something; he could be seen shrugging his shoulders eloquently, and apparently, swimming, with both hands off the stick, as the plane banked about. Ike knew that gesture of protest inseparable from the French. One plane would be of no particular help here, so he wanted to go back to Erfoud and bring back a squadron of them. It would not take him half an hour to make the run. The squad could hold out that long. The girl did not want to abandon them for one minute, and was saying so with shaken fist!

And just then Jeff appeared. He was crawling, dragging one leg after him, his rifle still strapped over shoulder. He crept to the opposite edge of the break and stopped as they all yelled at him, and Di Piatti and Anzac Bill jumped down into the gully to go to his aid. They were floundering some distance below as Jeff spoke for the first time. "Topping—route, Sarge!" he reported, gasping. "Clear down—all but this break. Blighter pinked me—back there." He fell over weakly with the effort to stay up on his hands, and lay looking up at the plane.

It had shut off its motor and was banking down silently. Di Piatti and Bill had reached Jeff and were giving him brandy. Ike wondered what Jeff's girl up there was making of that tableau. He felt for her the heart-break of anxiety that must be hers. They had joked him about doing spectacular stunts under fire for her benefit; this was the reality! A desperately wounded man, a blood-stained map in his pocket, who had crawled with untold agony every foot of the way back to rejoin his command.

The Légion was quick at unbuckling belts to make a rope. Di Piatti and Bill had lifted Jeff across the gap, their feet scuffling in the treacherous slide-rock. They made fast the lowest buckle, and Jeff was hauled up. He seemed in a coma from the strenuous handling as they laid him behind the rude parapet being hurriedly made.

MEANWHILE the familiar crash of spattering lead and splintered stone began ringing again in their ears. The tribesmen had got within range on the lower slopes and were commencing the process of smoking them out. A horse screamed, kicked out whole sections of breastwork with its hoofs, lay still. The squad groaned. One less "giddap," if they were ever going to get out of this alive! Then the plane came whiffling over them, low down, its motor still silent. It zoomed up again with a motor burst, but something had fallen in their midst, dropped with a true aim. Ike picked it up. A scrap of pad paper, wrapped around her jeweled wrist-watch.

"Get back from the break, Sergeant," he read. *"Am bombing the rocks above it. D.B."*

Ike's heart leaped. Now, who'd have thought of that! Gosh, but she was a quick thinker!

He looked up at the rocks in question. They hung beetling and massive over the gap, tons and tons of them, the gully below washed out by rain-action. Why, there was where the engineers would go for fill, first thing; only they would do it with blasting dynamite instead of dropping a bomb. Ike blessed her hastily and then ordered out his gang. "Scatter, you birds, prone, along this ledge. The hosses'll have to take their chance. I'm packin' Jeff. Soon as she fills up that there break, each man mounts an' makes it the best he kin. Hyar she comes!"

They wriggled along the ledge, watching over-shoulder the plane coming back. It had shut off again to give her every chance. The tribesmen were mystified over what it was all about, but they were letting go at her enthusiastically with slugs that ripped through the wings and smacked the fuselage. They could hardly miss that plane low on the hillside! Ike prayed for her—and its propeller. One chance shot landing there—

THE pilot banked till his wing nearly touched rock; then a bomb fell in a streak of light. *Boom!* Cliffs leaned majestically, then began to fall. An appalling rumble of tons upon tons of rock cascading down the slope shook the whole hillside like an earthquake. It was all dark and dust and raining fragments around Hell's Angels for a time. They cowered and endured; then the air cleared, and Ike jumped to his feet.

The landscape had changed considerably! Where had been an impassable gap, smooth with the hollow of loose rubble, was now broken rock in an actual hillock that filled it solid. He yanked his mare to her feet, flung Jeff over-saddle and mounted. "Git, gang! Foller the plane!" he yelled back, and then was busy guiding the mare over the roughest rock-pile she had ever put foot on.

Down the sloping ledge on the other side he rode as fast as she would go with Hell's Angels clattering after. As Jeff had said, the route was clear; it joined the talus of the plain at the natural dip. It was nearly half a mile of extent before they were spattering sand on level ground. The plane was taxying some distance farther on, taxying swiftly toward them, having made a last bank in their direction before landing. Southward the sands around Ben Akki scampered with little flying Arab figures regaining their horses.

The plane came to a stop, and the girl got out. Tall, slender, a figure of Diana herself was Diana Burdwynd in those aviation togs. Her pilot was busy with the thin barrel of a machine-gun covering any nearer approach of those tribesmen, so Ike slowed his mare to a walk and the squad closed up behind him.

She came on in a long, easy stride. When near enough for him to distinguish that regal face with the cool gray eyes he had paid homage to once before in the hospital at Fes-el-Bali, Ike did her the honors of the cavalry arm.

"'Tenshun, squad! Dismount!" Ike barked. Stirrup-leather creaked. The swing of legs over-saddle and soft thump of boots on sand. Bill helped Ike lift Jeff down, still limp and semi-conscious.

"Right dress! *Front! Salute!*"

She would appreciate this, Ike felt. They were giving her the honors due a commanding officer. She returned their salute, then smiled on them all. Jeff was now leaning against Ike's shoulder, but was taking his own weight on the one good leg himself and coming out of his stupor.

"I aint took too good care of him, ma'am," Ike reported, "'cause he was too many for this ole cow-punch' most the time." Out of Jeff's tunic breast-pocket he drew the pad with that map on it. It was thumbed with gory prints where Jeff had had to attend to first-aid in a hurry before putting it away; otherwise it was a clear and careful piece of cartography.

The girl looked at it as if it were a thing beyond price, which it was. Her eyes glowed on her hero with this token of his valor on him.

Then Jeff opened his and said, weakly: "Old-home week, what? 'Lo, Di, old thing."

Hell's Angels guffawed. It was precisely what he had said when they were all gathered around his cot at Fes-el-Bali: Jeff, the incorrigible, casual as ever!

The girl shook her head at him. "I'll take him if you don't mind, Sergeant," she said in that vibrant contralto voice of hers. "The map would be safer in the plane too, don't you think? We'll guard you out of the Tafilelt."

"Shore, ma'am," Ike agreed. "This squad wants to thank you for dumping that there mountain onto us, don't we, boys?"

She laughed. "Priceless, Sergeant!" she told Ike. "It seemed the thing to do. —Can you walk, Jeff, old dear?"

"Right-o," said Jeff briefly.

They made a move to help, but Ike stopped them with a look. It was better so; the way he and she would want it. They hobbled off, those two children of Mars, she supporting him with her lithe strength, he stumping with one foot. Hell's Angels stood at salute. Ike had heard vaguely of the Valkyries. He felt that he was seeing one now. Those stirring old legends of heroism, and chivalry, and warriors carried off the field of battle by warlike maidens!

"'By, Hell's Angels! 'By, Ike—God bless you!" called back Jeff from the cockpit, after that hobble was over and she had made him comfortable on the seat. She waved at them, standing up in what room was left. The plane started off with a rush, chattered from its machine-gun as it taxied southward, then rose in a long curve.

Hell's Angels mounted silently. They had lost Jeff!

"He shore was one he-man, that kid!" sighed Ike as they put their horses to a fast trot up the valley of the Ziz. "An' him now Lord Austen. . . And that gal, boys! Wonder what she come down here for?"

SOME two months later they learned. But the valley of the Ziz was no place to do wondering in at present. Its palmeries came out, in places, to the very foot of the slopes so that every mile of it there were skirmishes, with the watchful plane circling overhead and discouraging the larger patrols with a timely bomb. But she saw them through; not till the zigzags of Erfoud came in sight did the plane leave them, to stop once at the *poste,* and then continue on in a vanishing speck over the mountains north to Ksabi.

Knecht, of course, was delighted to welcome them back; he already had that blood-stained map as a treasured momento of Jeff and of Hell's Angels' latest exploit in the field of glory. He said nothing about why she had come to Erfoud. One of those diplomatic secrets, perhaps.

And then one day Ike spied a brief item on the page of a torn copy of Anzac Bill's London *Times,* already a month old:

WAR OFFICE NOTICES.

> Appointed Fourth Lord of the War Office, Lord Austen, who was formerly a soldier in the French Foreign Legion. It is said that Lady Austen herself went on a special mission to Africa, in connection with his release, to persuade him to accept, His Lordship's preference being entirely for active field service—

Ike looked up, mollified and partly convinced. "Well —he come from a good school, anyhow!" he said.

Free Lances in Diplomacy

"The Cloud in the Orient" leads to gun-play and a strange international drama in England—and reveals Mr. New in fine form.

By CLARENCE HERBERT NEW

Illustrated by A. E. Briggs

AS the car raced out upon the flying-field at Le Bourget, the man inside glanced back through the little window, but could discover no other machine following, except the ones he had just passed. Jumping out and shoving a few bills into the hand of his driver, he ran into the Bureau to ask if there was a seat in the plane just leaving. Being told that there was just one rear seat for Croydon, he took it, scrambled into the bus and heard the door bolted behind him as he reached his seat. Glancing out of his window when they were up a hundred meters, he saw a high-powered private car tearing across the field. From this car there hastily emerged a man who wanted a plane for London, but had to be satisfied with one for Belgium where, with luck, he might make a reasonably quick connection for Croydon. Before leaving, however, he sent three telegrams. . . .

In the plane, well on the way toward Amiens, the first man drew a Paris paper from his pocket and started looking over the headlines, holding the sheet well up before his face so that the other passengers had no chance for seeing what he looked like, even if they had been curious—which air-passengers are not, there being plenty to interest them on the terrain below. Grainger knew as well as if he had seen it done that his pursuers would be telegraphing ahead to have some one at the Croydon airdrome when his ship came down—but their knowledge of his appearance was vague at best, and he intended to make a few alterations on the way. When the plane was crossing the Channel and the attention of other passengers was concentrated upon two of the western ocean liners directly below, he stepped aft into the compact little toilet-room with its wash-basin and mirror. Here he soaked off the dark beard which had been stuck upon his face; then, with a small powder-atomizer, he sprayed his hair and eyebrows with a very fine white dust which stuck to them tenaciously. Some dust, of course, had fallen upon his coat-collar and—suspended in the air of the little cubicle—had drifted upon his hat. This he carefully removed with a small stiff clothes-brush. As they would be landing within another twenty minutes, he put on his topcoat and carefully adjusted the hat upon his now almost-white hair.

As he climbed down out of the plane at Croydon, two men—who had obtained passes to meet arriving friends just outside the Customs lines—were looking for some one of such entirely different appearance that he scarcely got a second glance from them as he went through the building with his hastily purchased suitcase, and picked a taxi-driver whom he knew by sight. When they were driving north toward the West End, the driver turned about and looked searchingly at his fare, who had addressed him by name but whom he couldn't seem to place at all.

Grainger smiled, passed him a cigar, and lighted one himself as he said:

"I don't know whether you'll get me inside a house before the trouble begins, Bunter, but I fancy we'll both do better for a smoke—couldn't get one coming across. —Right! On His Majesty's Service! It's been rather a scratchy time so far—and I fancy it'll not take those bounders more than a few minutes to decide I must be the chap—and be after us like a streak. Not a chance for makin' Downing Street—they're sure to have somebody waitin' there now. Possibly our best bet would be one of the clubs? No—wait a bit. . . . I have it! Drive like blazes for the Trevor mansion in Park Lane—Marquess of Lyonesse, you know. Once inside, I'm safe—that's the best-policed block in the city."

Crossing Westminster Bridge, Grainger looked back, saw a car race into a traffic-jam, and by masterly jockeying, get through to the front where it was ready to spurt ahead as soon as the P. C. on post blew his whistle.

"Fancy you'll have to step on it, Bunter—they're after us, back there! Take every short-cut you know!"

As they approached the Marquess' celebrated mansion in Park Lane they were about a block ahead of the pursuing car. Handing Bunter two sovereigns and telling him to come along later with the suitcase, Grainger sprang from the running-board and ran toward the front veranda. But instead of attempting to get in the front door, he swerved left and disappeared around the corner of the house just as the pursuing car raced up—a stream of bullets from a submachine-gun following him so closely that one of them cut along the scalp at the side of his head. When he reached the shelter of the servants' entrance at the rear of the building and was hauled inside by the Afghan *khansamah* who had hurried from the front of the house to admit him, blood was running down over his coat-collar and shirt.

Taking him into the pantry, the servant put a thick strip of absorbent cotton over the wound to stop the bleeding—sponged off the coat and shirt with cold water—and then, remarking that the *dacoits* assuredly would have got him had he attempted getting in by the front door, escorted his charge into the big library where the Marquess, Marchioness Nan and two of their friends were having tea. The Afghan had not the remotest idea who Grainger was—nor had the handsome elderly man who courteously rose to greet him—but the shots had been heard and the arrival anticipated of somebody looking for sanctuary. That sort of thing was not unknown.

As the Marquess smilingly came forward with outstretched hand, he was searchingly examining not only the other man's features but the general shape of his head, ears, shoulders, height and way of carrying himself. In a second or two, he nodded.

"We've not met so many times, sir—but I fancy you'll be Captain Henderson Grainger. And you'd also be—Eh?"

Something prompted the Foreign Office man, on the spur of the moment, to make a little test he had heard mentioned more than once in the Service.

"Not quite positive, are you, Marquess? Do you know—I'm just wondering whether it might not be possible for one of those bounders who are always tryin' to eliminate wealthy and prominent men to gain admittance in just this way to your home—get near enough to carry out his purpose, as I am now, in the seclusion of your own house. Eh?"

"With what, my dear chap? Selim has had ample time to relieve you of any weapons you had when you came in—an' I'll wager you didn't even know when he did it! Little trick he patiently learned in the bazaars of Kabul and Peshawar. —Might lay his gun on the table, Selim! Then—from the moment you entered the room he hasn't been more than two feet behind you. Earl Lammerford and Prince Abdool—whom of course you know—each have a hand on a gun in their pockets. It would be sheer impossibility, as long as your two hands are in sight, to have made a single motion toward eliminatin' any of us before you were stopped—you wouldn't have got into the room unless both of your hands had been in sight. . . . Satisfied? Ready to answer my question?"

"Satisfied—and very much relieved, Marquess. Because it did look to me for a moment as if you were rather taking a chance. And I fancy that K-94 would answer your question. Doubtless you've heard that number mentioned, somewhere—"

"I could have given it to you—but we like to follow an automatic formula when strangers drop in upon us out of the blue. —I say! . . . . . Have you any other wound but that graze, old chap? You're lookin' a bit done—I shouldn't have kept you standing! Sit down here an' have a spot of brandy—keep quiet until you're rested."

"Nothing serious, I fancy. There was a knife in Batavia, just before I managed to get away, that went in a bit too deep for comfort—but the mechanic was a good first-aid man, an' patched me up until I struck a proper medico at Cairo. The last few hours have been a bit strenuous—taken it out of me a little. Now—in this F. O. business it's necess'ry, as you jolly well know, Marquess—His Lordship of St. Ives havin' been Dean of the King's Messengers some years back—to get whatever information one has had the luck to pick up, into the F. O. vaults at the very first moment it can be done. I'll wager that the bounders who have been after me half around the world telegraphed ahead an' have men hangin' about Downing Street right now. I'd not be able to get into the building on foot—would be shot if I drove up in a taxi. If I run off a report on one of your typewriters, is there any way you can get it in?"

"Oh, aye! Knowin' you're in the house, anyone from here would be attacked if he attempted visiting Downing Street for a day or so. But I have private wires, underground, into Number Ten and the Under Foreign Secretary's office—instruments concealed behind the wainscoting—no chance for tampering with the outfit. You can code your report and telephone it in. Or—as we're more or less affiliated with the Service—give us what you've picked up before you send it. Then there'll be five of us to see that the facts are filed if anything happens to you. What?"

"Aye—that's the only sensible thing to do. It's like this, d'ye see. All of us who have been detailed out East have been makin' allowances for the 'game behind the game' all along the Asiatic coast—particularly along the railway lines controlled by three diff'rent spheres of influence. Moscow kept denyin' for some time that they were concentratin' troops along the Manchurian border—but we've not missed a brigade, nor a battery, nor an air-force. They now admit they've more or less concentration there, but say it is entirely defensive—against inroads by Chinese communists and Hondo forces chasing that sort of raiders. The Hondo Governm'nt is openly accusin' the Red Army of preparing for an invasion and occupation of Manchuria. All this on the surface—meat for discussion at Geneva. Underneath, a much deeper game is bein' played—a possible secret *entente* between Moscow an' the Hondoans. Point's this: Moscow is in position, if they wish, to lend the Hondoans billions—when they can't get a war-loan anywhere in Europe or America.

All three sank to the ground unconscious, lungs full of gas. . . . One of his companions helped lift the inert figures.

They are now developin' material for munitions and armament-plants in isolated districts. Eventually, they mean to jack up their railway systems so as to make those plants accessible from any part of the country—but at present the Trans-Siberian isn't in shape to handle any serious amount.

"So a fleet of possibly twenty fast cargo-boats has been purchased in various parts of the world and kept trading,

presumably, under the former ownership—until such time as the boats may be wanted for munition-carriers. Those boats can get a serious amount of arms and munitions out into Eastern waters before anyone suspects what they're carryin' or where bound. The underlying scheme is still more or less in the air—and no amount of espionage in Hondo or Soviet territory will turn up any information, because there won't be any conferences between the two Powers in either country. They're taking no chance of being spotted in any such way as that—"

"You mean that the conferences will be held perhaps in some other part of the world?"

"That is what, even now, is coming to a focus here in London. Ever hear of Georges Witzcherin? He's an exceptional linguist. Has lived in London several years, off and on. Passes for an Englishman anywhere. Is frequently seen with one of the Vladowski Frères in the club where all three are members—but very rarely visits their bankin'-house on Queen Victoria Street. Yet we happen to know that he has an account with them under another name an' has passed millions of rubles through it. Next—consider the most correct, popular an' commercial Baron Shibunaki, of an old Hondo family—one of the Elder Statesmen an' all that, though he never is seen mixin' in politics himself. Known as a business wizard—chairman of several important Boards. Chunky, well-built man, quietly but exceedingly well-dressed—looks like a London Stock Exchange or Wall Street man of almost any leading nationality. He will be here within a week—an' he'll not be stoppin' at the Embassy, either—prob'ly not goin' near it at all—mixin' with clubmen and Board Directors most of the time. While he's in London, Count Itomachi will be here also, with his handsome daughter and his Parliament'ry secretary. They'd meet the Baron occasionally at various London houses, but only casually. And there will be a certain Stefan Obrenovitch here—connected with the Moscow Foreign Office in some capacity not generally understood. Witzcherin won't be seen with him anywhere.

"But on a certain evening—or perhaps two or three certain evenings—those four men will be in a private room in the St. John's Wood house of Sophie von Elkhardt, a Brandenburg Countess who has made a name as a portrait-artist. She has lived and worked in London since before the war, and has a wide circle of very decent acquaintances—in fact, is supposed to occupy an unassailable social position an' be received by the best people in the country. For years, however, we've had the suspicion in Downing Street that she's a spy, a tool of some other Governm'nt—perhaps Berlin, perhaps one even more unscrupulous—but we've never obtained one shred of evidence against her. Whatever she may have done or be doing, she's dev'lishly clever about it. Very good! Sometime soon, a certain docum'nt will be signed or initialed, in her house, which will be held binding upon the two Governm'nts—merging the milit'ry knowledge an' equipm'nt of the one with the vast resources of the other, both developed an' undeveloped. There may be nothing showing on the surface for some time—Hondoans may attack an' kill supposed Muscovites in Manchuria or just outside its borders. But the game is bein' played under the surface all the same—and if it's not blocked one way or another it's the most serious menace the rest of the world is facing at present."

For a moment or two, nobody spoke. The Marquess put his half-smoked cigar into an ash-tray and filled an old briar pipe; he walked up and down the room as his mind flashed from one devastating possibility to another. Marchioness Nan lay back in her big chair with closed eyes—thinking that no sooner did there come a time when they might all relax and enjoy a little well-earned peace in their later years, than it seemed as if the demon of unrest and diabolic upheaval obtained a new lease of life and murderous activity. All four of them knew only too well the possibilities of a combination between clever Oriental planning and such a wealth of undeveloped resources as the Muscovites had to offer.

Presently the Marquess began summing up:

"Prob'ly what you consider the most diffic'lt part of your problem, Grainger, is really the simplest item in the whole proposition. I mean getting hold of whatever docum'nt is either signed or initialed in that house an' either exhibiting it as proof before the League or else taking it out of the house long enough to make three or four negatives of it, an' then returning it to the pocket we took it from. Submitting it to the League is no more than a gesture because the League itself is impotent—but it will at least warn every nation of what it may expect from the Hondoans and Siberians unless they are blocked effectively. This part of the proposition we'll be able to pull off ourselves, I fancy, with the assistance of some F. O. men outside of the house to prevent police or other interference. The second point—those munition-ships—I fancy we can also handle if you give us their names, the dates they clear, an' their destination. (Aye—it'll be rank piracy if we're caught—but that's only a detail!) If the situation reaches a point requirin' really drastic measures, we can

get rid of those concentration-camps on the borders. But after all that, the secret treaty will still exist—an' Siberian resources are almost inexhaustible. The most dangerous feature in the whole proposition is the inevitable effect upon the Chinese. If they are left alone to build up a modern nation by leisurely and healthy developm'nt, we've nothing to fear from China for centuries to come. On the other hand, if a nation of four hundred and fifty millions is suddenly welded into a cohesive fighting mass—from sheer necessity, in defending their lives and their country —easy conquest will go to their heads like hard liquor and we will have a Yellow Peril which is likely to sweep over half the world."

"AREN'T you a bit overconfident about getting possession of that agreem'nt, Marquess?" Grainger demurred. "You've got to find out the exact date an' hour when it is to be written and signed—which in itself will take some doing. You must be on the spot at that moment —with force enough to handle a number of just such thugs as those who fired at me when I came in here. Those two Governm'nts are certain to have their representatives amply guarded when any such transaction as this is being put through. You'll get no assistance from our own Governm'nt for a dozen diff'rent reasons—we've no evidence to justify a search-warrant or breaking into that house, if that proves to be the place where things are happening. Frankly, you know, I can't see the element of simplicity about it—anywhere!"

"There'll be three or four guards inside the house—aye —I agree. But not outside. In any deal as big as this their first precaution will be to give the visits of those four men the appearance of bein' purely social—prob'ly other friends invited in for dinner and afterward goin' on elsewhere—leavin' the four alone with the Countess, the thugs an' her servants. When the Hondoans leave there will be a couple of thugs waiting to go with them in each car—but nobody hanging about the streets. It's a fairly well-policed quarter, you know. An' after they get into their cars, with or without the treaty, we certainly have no idea of attacking them. A hint to Scotland Yard will prevent their cars from parking in front of the house before the hour they expect to leave—will enable us to go and come without any interference beyond what we strike in the house. Now, in regard to yourself, Captain—what do you figure on doing?"

"Askin' you to put me up for the night, if you will—then watching my chance to make a break for it tomorrow."

"An' quite possibly gettin' done-in before night! No, we can't waste good men in any such way as *that*. We'll get you down to Croydon in the forenoon without bein' spotted. Then I'll take you down to Trevor Hall in South Devon, where nobody can get at you. —Might be a pious idea to have an undertaker's wagon fetch a coffin here in the morning an' take it away again an hour later; then that tough lot will be fairly certain they got you as you came in. If you're supposed to be dead for a while it makes you that much safer—but you'd best not show yourself around London for a few weeks at least.

"I'd suggest that you keep in touch with the F. O. by phone while you're restin' up. Get all the data you can about the Countess' household an' the movem'nts of those cargo-boats. For now—you'd best get a hot bath an' a night's sleep. Breakfast any time you like before noon."

Next morning, the Marquess flew to Devon with Grainger. As the plane came down upon the long narrow concrete apron leading from the edge of Scabbacombe Cliffs into the heart of the forest, he called the F. O. man's attention to the solid rock, with its top-covering of soil in which the trees were growing, which formed the cliffs for miles along the shore.

"You'll notice, Grainger, that there are no shops or laboratories in evidence. Even if you searched all through this thick forest, you'd find none. But the rock under your feet is honeycombed with large machine-shops, foundries, assembling-chambers, chemical, biological and electrical laboratories—all so far below the surface that aërial torpedoes from bombing-planes wouldn't blast into the rock a quarter of the way down to them, and all reached from a single big lift-shaft so well guarded that you couldn't go down in the car unless with one of the superintendents after being passed by one of us up at the Hall, two miles from here. We have a few emergency exits in case of fire or explosion, but no outsider could discover where they come out, or could get through the steel gates protecting them. The Admiralty and Downing Street know, of course, that we do a lot of experimentin' for the Royal Navy and Air Force—have given us a duly authorized status as a Naval Reserve Station. But we do a lot more than that, which is not understood even by the Governm'nt. It is generally known that the War Departm'nts of every world-power are constantly experimenting to develop new an' more deadly weapons of warfare—new methods of defense against anything so far known. But all such experimentin' is necessarily handicapped by the fact that it must be done by men of their own Governm'nts, Armies or Navies—or some of their nationals who are given tempor'ry status as such—all working for the customary Governm'nt pay which, even with bonuses, is no great inducem'nt for really able men. So we hunted the world over for the very top-notch men in various branches of science—offered 'em five times the salary they could get from any university or Governm'nt, with bonuses equal to a year's pay, an' the best equipm'nt they could buy, to work with. Consequ'nce is we have with us, here, the twelve best men known in their various branches of science—the most perfect lab' and shop equipm'nt that exists anywhere on the globe—and we get results that would cause a world-wide sensation if they were made public. Lammerford, Prince Abdool an' my own family own, legally, everything developed or discovered on this estate—but the scientists have the privilege of voting with us when it comes to a question of what disposition shall be made of any particular discovery or invention—whether we offer it to the Governm'nt or hold it in abeyance for some greater emergency."

AFTER dinner that evening, when Grainger had met all of the scientists and some of the Marquess' own staff, he was taken into a small library-annex in the east wing of the Tudor buildings which clustered around the older Norman keep, and shown a window of laminated glass set in one of the walls. Beyond this was an air-tight chamber lighted by electricity—furnished with divan, chairs and table against the wainscoting—a few small Persian rugs on the mosaic floor—rounded hospital-corners where walls and floor joined, so that it could be washed out with water or disinfectant, or sprayed from a fire-extinguisher. Handing the Foreign Office man what proved to be a steel container six inches long, three wide and two thick, with a screw-valve in one end, the Marquess told him to examine it but under no circumstances to loosen the valve in any way.

The container was lighter than it looked, yet obviously of great pressure-resisting strength. Then a silk curtain was drawn aside from the laminated-glass window, which they all knew was impervious to gas or bullet—and Sir Harry Archer was seen in the chamber with a plate of sliced chicken. A handsome old dog followed him in and began to eat the chicken when the plate was put upon the

floor. Sir Harry then drew from his pocket one of the steel containers, which he placed at the other side of the room. He held his nose tightly, unscrewed the valve—and walked out, locking the four-inch-thick door with a compound-lever. On the opposite wall of the room there was a clock with a long second-hand—to which the Marquess called Grainger's attention.

"Watch that second-hand, Captain—and then the dog! You'll notice that the little container is lying on the floor about fifteen feet from the dog, with the valve pointing toward him. As the gas inside is under a pressure of twenty pounds, that valve acts as a nozzle projecting a jet of the gas directly toward him—in fact, it will reach him before there is any noticeable amount of gas between the container and the wall. Now! .... Look at the dog! Just under five seconds since Archer opened the valve."

For just a second the dog jerked up his head, as if there was something wrong with the chicken he was eating. Then his hindquarters settled down; his head began to droop. Slowly he sagged down, and rolled over on his side, motionless.

"Eight seconds, altogether. We're making this test as much for our own information as yours, Grainger — because we don't know as yet how quickly a person or animal will come out of the influence if taken at once into fresh air. Now Sir Harry is opening an air-duct and switching on a powerful electric-blower. If the dog remains in that chamber until the gas dissipates naturally, he'll be unconscious for upwards of five hours—but with fresh air in the room we figure the time as possibly half that. One of our lab' men shut himself up in there and released a container of gas—took four hours and fifty minutes before he moved. He had a splendid pair of lungs! I'll admit that I'd rather not have tried the experiment myself, because I'm getting to an age when the old heart may get a bit wonky under what might be called abuse—but he'd been developin' the stuff, and was morally certain that it couldn't hurt any healthy person. You noticed the weight of that container? A man might carry six of them, if wearing a top-coat; or I fancy he could handle four, without the top-coat—at night. We tested the stuff on guinea pigs—deciding that one container would put at least four persons out of business in an ord'n'ry-sized room in ten seconds—so you see what three men can do if each carries no more than two of the flasks. Well—I'm flyin' back to Park Lane at once. Tomorrow afternoon, I'll call you up and see what data you've got over the phone from the F. O."

The Marquess and Earl Lammerford climbed to the roof as soon as they got flash-signals that all was clear.

Just before dinner, the next evening, Earl Lammerford was chatting with an old Foreign Office *attaché* in the smoking-room of the Carlton Club in London—and casually happened to inquire the identity of another member who sat talking with a guest who might have been Balkan or Asiatic—though it needed a close glance to be sure he wasn't English, so thoroughly had he the appearance of a London financier.

"The lighter-complexioned chap'll be George Wetchen—been a member here since before the war, though he sometimes doesn't show up for a year or more. Fancy he may be of Welsh extraction — or possibly Continental. Runs to clothes a good bit—but he's nobody's fool. In fact I'd consider him rather exceptionally competent in anything he starts to do, in spite of his joking an' ragging. The man with him, I've not seen in this club before—but I've an impression that he may be quite an influential Hondoan — Count Itomachi, if I'm not mistaken in the man. Has a very handsome daughter. Stoppin' at the Ritz, if this chap is the one I have in mind.—Hmph! .... They're not talkin' loud enough to be annoyin', and this isn't the reading-room—but I fancy old General Burgoyne will begin to cough and rustle his paper in a moment or two—he's sittin' quite near 'em! By the way, where's the Marquess—abroad somewhere in his famous yacht? I could have sworn he was comin' toward me on Regent Street last week—but when I took a second look he wasn't anywhere in sight. Eyes gettin' a bit old, I fancy! What?"

"Lyonesse was in London this morning, at all events—fancy he may be dining here this evening. You seem to have noticed one of Trevor's peculiarities, Castlereagh. If George wants to be invisible, he can practically do it, on a bet, though we're not quite sure that it isn't usually done unconsciously when he's preoccupied—that gives his face an entirely different expression, and he carries himself with more of a stoop. Prince Abdool, of course, has the well-known Pathan and Hindu ability to appear an' disappear at will—it's supposed that, like the jugglers' tricks out there, it's a question of mass-hypnotism. So it's quite possible that he's taught the Marquess a good bit of it; the two have been as thick as blood brothers for years. Anyhow, if George has the feeling that somebody is watching or following him, annoyingly, he simply

disappears—leaves the other party looking foolish. I've seen him do it dozens of times—and for that matter, pull off something of the same effect myself, occasionally—but not with the absolute confidence Abdool an' George have that it's going to work. Next time you spot either of us on the street, you might test it out. I'd like to know how good I am at it."

Lammerford knew that the Marquess was somewhere in the club at that moment. He'd not seen him come in, but knew that he expected to find Mr. George Wetchen there—whom they both knew must be the Muscovite secret agent, Georges Witzcherin—and that he would be quite likely to have as a dinner-guest, not the urbane commercial magnate, Baron Shibunaki—whom he probably wouldn't meet except at somebody's house—but the lesser Hondoan, Count Itomachi, with whom he would be arranging for the conferences at the St. John's Wood house a few days later. The Count, it is true, was a Hondoan peer of higher rank and social position. But in the pending negotiations, he was the lesser factor.

When the Marquess had entered the club, fifteen minutes before, he approached the coat-checking window with his knees slightly bent—which took inches off his height—and a sort of scholar's stoop, with slightly bent head. Had anybody looked closely enough to recognize him they would have thought he was suffering from a slight attack of lumbago—and forgotten it the next moment. But nobody did look closely enough to recognize him. His walk and manner were those of old General Burgoyne. The General was a bore; members looked the other way when, out of the tail of one eye, they saw him approaching. As he shuffled into the smoking-room with his rubber-tipped stick, Trevor saw the Muscovite and Hondoan, having a round of cocktails before going in to the dinner they had ordered. Taking a copy of the Daily *Mail* from his pocket the supposed General sat down within three feet of Witzcherin and unfolded his paper so that it completely shielded his face. The Muscovite, however, did not even glance at the elderly man reading in a near-by chair.

AS the Marquess had anticipated, the conversation between the two was in Russian, which isn't so difficult a language to speak as it looks—while either Hondoan or Chinese, on the other hand, requires an amount of concentration which discourages most of those who attempt to master it. While the Marquess didn't speak Russian as fluently as Prince Abdool, he understood it well enough to follow any Hondoan who spoke it, and now didn't lose a word of what he heard.

When the Marquess had picked up rather more than he really had hoped to get, he folded up his paper, got on his feet, and shuffled out of the room as he had come into it. In the hall, however, he straightened up and suddenly became quite unmistakably the Marquess of Lyonesse as he stepped into the dining-room. Greeting the headwaiter in his usual pleasant manner, he walked along to where a couple of chairs had been tipped against a table decorated with flowers and the club's best plates.

"Who's this reserved for, Humphrey? Women aren't supposed to dine in this room, are they?"

"Oh, rather *not*, M'Lud Marquess! It'll be Mr. Wetchen and a foreign guest—an Oriental gentleman, I fancy."

"Hmph! .... Doin' him rather well, I'd say! Table in the corner next to 'em isn't reserved—I can have that, I suppose?"

"Oh, quite so, M'Lud. I'll put your own waiter, Jukes, on it."

In all the years Witzcherin had been a member of the club he never had heard another member speaking Russian to a guest—so he unconsciously assumed that he was the only member who did speak it, and supposed himself completely safe in using it with his Hondoan guest. As the Marquess already was eating dinner at the corner table when they came into the dining-room—reading his paper between courses—there was no indication that he knew for whom their table had been reserved. And even had Witzcherin recognized the man at the next table he would have used no more caution in talking Russian with Count Itomachi than he had been using ever since the Count sent in his card upon arriving at the club. They both avoided mentioning any names or political connection in what they were discussing—but they did speak of probable evenings when they expected to be dining with friends in such or such a place, and that certain other persons might be sounded out as to their understanding of various matters, if they chanced to appear at those places among the other guests.

NOBODY without the Marquess' knowledge of what was afoot would have been able to get a connected idea as to what they were talking about. But as it was he finished his dinner with more definite information than the F. O. men probably would be able to get. Strolling over to where Lammerford and Castlereagh were dining, he chatted with them for a moment—then went out into the lounge for a cigar, while he waited for the Earl. Later, the two left the club together, got into Lammerford's car, and were driven up through Regent's Park to Henry Street on the slope of Primrose Hill.

This was a neighborhood filled with artists' studios and "Bohemian" quarters of various sorts. Not far below the Avenue Road the car slowly passed the small house and studio occupied by Countess Sophie von Elkhardt. The house was semi-detached, with a brick wall in front and a strip of garden at the side running back to where a single-story brick studio was built on at the rear. Back of this there was a bit more garden, the width of the lot—then another brick wall separating it from that of a house on the much narrower Charles Lane.

Taking from his pocket a large-scale assessor's map of St. John's Wood, the Marquess asked the chauffeur to drive around through Charles Lane, while, switching on the lamp in the ceiling of the car, he studied the measurements of the two houses and lots. There was no difficulty in locating the Charles Lane house which stood in the rear of the Countess' property on Henry Street because the numbers of all the houses were marked on the assessors' map. Lammerford suggested that it might be worth while to ascertain whether the other house was occupied or not.

"I looked that up when I got the map," Trevor replied. "It's not occupied at present; but will be in the morning—I took a six months' lease of it."

"Do you fancy the Hondoans will have any of their men hidden in the grounds while they are conferring inside?"

"Aye. Didn't think so at first, but I do now—because the best place for the conference is that brick studio. It has solid walls an' roof, except for the skylight on the north side toward Charles Lane, and the single entrance-door—a small and very strong one. It's fitted up as a living-room as well as a studio—small bath, divan-bed and dinner-table—telephone into the kitchen, study an' upper servants' quarters."

"Get anything important at the club tonight?"

"Oh, rather! Witzcherin is dining with the Countess Monday evening—Itomachi drops in unexpectedly with his daughter about nine or ten. On the following Wednesday, Baron Shibunaki dines there—goes out to the studio afterward to inspect some of her work—buys some of it as a blind. Stefan Obrenovitch turns up with a couple of women artists who compliment the Baron on his taste.

There'll be introductions all round, though the Baron has met Stefan before an' had a few *sub-rosa* deals with him. Then on the following Saturday night, when a good part of London goes to the theater, the Countess throws a dinner-party at which the four men will be among the guests—and they wouldn't all be there together unless they intended to stay afterward for that momentous conference. Mind you—there were no names mentioned in what I heard—but the dates were. The rest of the story I've filled out from what Grainger told us—but I'll wager I'm right."

Neighbors in Charles Lane saw a couple of vans drive up next morning with enough handsome furniture to make a small family comfortable—but failed to get a glimpse of the small family, unless they happened to be all men, using the house as a club. There was a buxom cockney woman who seemed to be a housekeeper, and a man who might be a chauffeur and butler. Four men came later with suitcases, and two more without luggage.

Around on Henry Street, four of these men interviewed the P. C.'s on that beat, murmuring certain words and numbers which informed the constables that they were Foreign Office men—whom the P. C.'s had received instructions to assist in any way that was not too flagrant a violation of city ordinances. These men explained that they would be gaining access to the Countess' grounds from the rear, and for purposes of identification would show three short flashes from their electric torches in case there were any doubts about figures seen in the dark. In case of anything which looked or sounded like a serious fight, the constables were to assist if signaled. And no cars were to be given parking privileges along that block for more than five minutes. . . .

Nothing happened in or around the Countess' house during the following six days which was not known to those in the Charles Lane house in the rear. No thugs had been seen sneaking about the gardens until Saturday night. Then three powerfully built Russians came silently along the path from the kitchen door after dark, and stood whispering by a large clump of hydrangeas, behind which squatted a dark figure. The watcher silently adjusted a small gas-mask over his face, then opened the valve of a gas-container and extended his arm through the bushes until it was not more than eighteen inches from their faces. They got the full volume of the jet under twenty pounds' pressure, and all three sank to the ground, unconscious, in less than twelve seconds—but since it was in the open air, the man behind the bushes came around and held the nozzle of another container against their noses until their lungs were full of the gas. A low whistle brought one of his companions who helped him lift the inert figures and deposit them against the wall behind the row of bushes.

While two of the F. O. men remained to guard the grounds against other possible Russians or Orientals, the other two stole quietly into the servants' door and heard that the plan for the evening had been changed; the dinner-party was to include nobody except the two Hondoans and the Russians. This of course simplified the Countess' dinner arrangements. Instead of having in extra servants she could manage with her cook, serving-maid and butler.

By nine-thirty dinner was over and the five were seated in the studio with paper, typewriter and fountain-pens.

THIS was the opportunity the F. O. men had been awaiting. The two women-servants were in the kitchen—the butler in his pantry—and two Hondoans, who hadn't been in evidence up to then, were on guard in a second-floor room overlooking the roof of the studio. The kitchen door was pushed open an inch or two and a steel container gently placed upon the floor with the valve open. When the women had lost consciousness, this procedure was repeated in the butler's pantry and in the upper-floor room. Then the door was pulled shut and the key turned in the lock. After a minute or so, they went into the various rooms and closed any windows that happened to be open.

Meanwhile, the Marquess and Earl Lammerford had come over the rear wall, placed a ladder against the studio-building and climbed to the roof as soon as they got flash-signals that everything was clear. Crawling silently along to the skylight, which had been opened by a gear-rod from below, they could distinctly hear even a whisper through the pocket microphones they had fetched—an early patent of Trevor's.

The party of five were seated at a table almost immediately below, at the north side of the studio—the easel being placed to catch the north light at the other side of the room. Obrenovitch was typing—with purple copying-ink upon sheets of parchment—the final wording of the agreement, and the four presently affixed their initials with certain code-words after them which made the documents as binding as they would have been with the signatures of the Government heads themselves. Shibunaki carefully folded one of the parchment sheets and stowed it in an inside pocket of his dress-waistcoat. Witzcherin did the same with the other. While they were occupied with this, two little steel containers came down silently from the skylight on the ends of light fish-lines. . . . Five minutes afterward, Lammerford slid down into the room on a rope, secured the treaty notes, unlocked the door, and came out into the garden.

IN ten minutes more Prince Abdool, the specialist in photography among the Free-Lances, was making copies of the notes in a room of the Charles Lane house—two by micro-photography which magnified the type eight times, and two by ultra-violet rays taken in the dark to get exact timing in the exposure. Just to make sure that he wasn't losing any part of what they had taken so much trouble to get, he then made six more exposures with a short-range anastigmat lens and a five hundred-watt projection lamp.

The documents themselves were carefully returned to the pockets from which they had been taken, with no marks upon them to show that they had been handled. The studio was thoroughly ventilated with open door and skylight—then the door was bolted on the inside and Lammerford climbed the rope to the roof, removing by the light of his flash all traces which might indicate that anyone had been up there. All of the gas-containers had of course been carefully retrieved after use. The thugs in the garden were placed so that each one woke up in a different part of the grounds without the least idea what had happened to his companions—and when they compared notes, they lied stoutly, each one claiming to have been awake and on duty the whole evening—and to have seen nothing unusual. This naturally befogged the principals in the affair still more, after they woke up in a locked studio with their documents intact. The Hondoans on the second floor had seen nothing unusual, nor had the servants—for not one of them dared to admit that he or she had been asleep or unconscious for a while.

Copies of the photographs were filed in the vaults of the Foreign Office, and the Honorable Secretary frankly told that it would be useless to suppress them, as the originals were always available.

A month later, a large cargo-boat bound from Petrograd to Nagasaki with machinery—subsequently proved to have been arms and munitions—was torpedoed at sea by a mysterious destroyer. Soon after, eight other craft shared the same fate. And some of the Chancelleries began to wonder whether Geneva really had teeth after all!

The climax of this fascinating novel—the story of an Anglo-American aviator's daring flight to a secret mountain-girt city; of the strange civilization he found there; and of the astonishing adventures that followed.

By EDGAR JEPSON
and SIDNEY GOWING

The Moon Gods

The Story So Far:

"WHO *is* Carthage?" said Billy Elsom, looking up from the radiogram—which read:

"Meet Carmania fly me to lost Carthage city mountains North Africa your own terms Benj. J. Budge."

The celebrated Anglo-American aviator Captain Nicholas Dering looked at him without surprise and said: "Carthage was an ancient African city—nearly smashed the Romans. But who is Benjamin J. Budge?"

"You don't know who Benjamin J. Budge is?" cried Billy in incredulous accents. "Why, he's Baby-carriage Budge, the baby-carriage king. Sells a baby-carriage every twenty-seven seconds. Has made scads of money."

Soon thereafter Dering was closeted with the newly arrived plutocrat—who explained that he had been born in a little Canadian town called Carthage; that all his subsequent life the ancient Carthage had held a special fascination for him; that now when wealth gave him leisure he proposed to pursue his hobby—for he had learned that before the fall of ancient Carthage, seven thousand soldiers had escaped into the Hinterland bearing with them the sacred veil known as the Zaimph. More, he had trustworthy information which made him believe that descendants of the Seven Thousand still lived in a secret city in an inaccessible mountain range some five hundred miles southeast of the Atlas. . . . Thus it happened that a few days later Dering's plane, with his mechanic Billy Elsom and his strange passenger Benjamin Budge, winged its way southeast across the desert mountains. Thus too it happened that the inhabitants of the ancient mountain-girt city, of Megara—cut off by earthquake cliffs and chasms from the outside world for nearly two thousand years—beheld one day a winged dragon, bearing gods from the moon, alighting in their classic marketplace. . . .

Budge and Dering and Billy were well received in this really splendid ancient city—had the time of their lives, in fact. The queen Rhodopis made a dead set at Dering, but Pyrrha the high priestess of Aphrodite smiled on him also, and was more to his taste. For Rhodopis was a cruel harridan—as Dering discovered when he rescued from chains and torture her discarded lover Micipsa. Budge was in ecstasies at the fulfillment of his life's dream in discovering the survivors of old Carthage; nor was his joy diminished by his achievements in trading a stock of ten-cent-store pearls for real gold and jewels; by his success in teaching poker to the local business men; or by the attentions of Simætha, high priestess of Tanit. And Billy Elsom spent happy hours in the society of Arisbe, another lovely priestess.

But a dark cloud of war loomed savage on the horizon. For though Megara was governed by the Canaanite queen Rhodopis, it was divided into three hostile factions: the Greeks, who worshiped Aphrodite, and—led by the archon Sophron and his daughter the high priestess Pyrrha—held the ascendancy; the Carthaginians or Canaanites, who worshiped Tanit, goddess of the moon and were led by Eloul the high priest; and the black slaves, who worshiped Moloch and were loyal to Schebar the priest of Moloch. And now the Canaanites schemed to overthrow the Greeks by arming the blacks and then inciting them to rebellion; the more intelligent Greeks would defeat the blacks, but would be so weakened that the Canaanites could destroy them. Schebar, priest of Moloch, had been persuaded to revolt; part of his price was possession of Pyrrha, to be offered up as sacrifice to Moloch. But spies had brought word of this conspiracy to the Greeks. *(The story continues in detail):*

"I SAW that durned Zaimph last night," Budge calmly informed Dering one morning. "I nearly brought it away with me, but that dodgasted Eloul butted in."

Nicholas stared at him. "You went to the Temple of Tanit, and Eloul let you get out?" he said in no little astonishment.

"Well, he didn't exactly *let* me get out. I came out,"

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

Budge shot out his hand toward the auctioneer and cried: "I bid a pearl!" On his palm lay a glistening jewel from a world-famous "five-and-ten" emporium.

said Budge, and grinned. "I guess I mussed their temple up a bit!"

And he proceeded to tell how he had bribed Simaetha, the high priestess, with a gift of ten-cent-store pearls; how she had led him by dark and secret stairways in the temple walls to the holy of holies wherein was domiciled the fantastic idol which represented the moon goddess—a place only the high priests were allowed to enter. He had seen the glittering mysterious Zaimph draped about the image and had been about to make way with it, when Eloul and his followers approached; he had made his escape by setting off a gas-bomb, shooting up the place and rushing out carrying Simætha in his arms during the subsequent confusion.

"Hot stuff!" said Nicholas in admiring accents. "But I'd better tell you how things stand. I've had permission to do it; only I must have your word you won't tell a word of it to a soul—especially to Simætha!"

"Sure, I won't," said Budge.

So Nicholas told him at length of the plot against the Greeks and Queen Rhodopis.

Budge gave him close, frowning attention; at the end he said: "Those rich are sure out for big business, and it's a mighty fine proposition. But of course I don't stand for all this bloodshed and making slaves of people. It may be the way they do business over here; but it isn't the way it's done in God's country, and I don't stand for it. They must drop it, and we've got to help make them."

"That's my idea," said Nicholas.

They talked the matter over at length but found no way of making Eloul and his friends drop it. Even if they did make them drop it now, they would be at the throats of the Greeks as soon as the plane had gone away.

"Business is business," said Budge, "but that's carrying it too far."

"Much too far," said Nicholas.

Micipsa, who had become devoted to Nicholas, finished the exercises which his new master had prescribed to restore his prison-wasted body. He manifestly enjoyed a fine vitality, for already he was another man.

"We shall have you fit to fight for your life in another week," said Nicholas, smiling at him.

Micipsa smiled back at him, a slow, stiff smile. And then somewhere in the palace, somewhere near, a woman screamed agonizedly.

"What's that?" said Nicholas sharply, starting to his feet.

"It sounds like a slave," said Micipsa in a tone of indifference.

Nicholas was out of the room and along the corridor to the Queen's suite, while Budge bolted into his room for his pistol. The guards at the entrance to the Queen's suite made way for the racing Nicholas. He ran through two long reception-rooms, to find in the corridor beyond, a group of girl slaves looking through a door ajar. Through that doorway came the screams. He burst through the group into the room, one of the Queen's dressing-rooms.

In the middle of the floor lay a T-shaped cross, and three men knelt beside it. Two of them held down a screaming girl, whose tunic had been torn half off her in her struggles. The third had nailed her right hand to the cross and had seized her left hand. A few feet away stood Rhodopis, watching the writhing victim with cold eyes in a face distorted out of all womanly semblance. About the room stood half-a-dozen of her ladies and as many slaves gazing at the tortured girl with eyes so indifferent that they must have looked on a like sight many times.

As the hammer rose again, Nicholas fired. It was a lucky shot: it caught the executioner's forearm just below the elbow.

Nicholas strode across the room, gripped Rhodopis by the shoulder and shook her till her teeth chattered. Her hard eyes grew soft with tears of pain.

"What's this? What are you doing?" he cried fiercely.

She clutched at his fingers, digging painfully into her soft flesh, and stammered: "She—she b-b-broke the string of my lovely p-p-pearls, and they f-f-fell all over the floor."

Without loosing his grip,—though in his anger he was unaware how hard he was gripping,—he shouted at the three men: "Go!"

They went at once, the two unhurt helping their wounded companion. Budge came through the door.

Nicholas shook Rhodopis again, with no less violence.

"You stop this kind of thing! Stop it!" he said, and sent her flying into the arms of her ladies.

"What the hell's this?" said Budge.

"The custom of the country, apparently," said Nicholas savagely.

He dropped on his knees by the moaning girl. A bag of

tools beside the cross. He found a clumsy pair of pincers and slowly drew out the nail. The girl winced and moaned but lay still.

Rhodopis rubbing her bruised shoulder, stared fascinatedly at Nicholas' set face and blazing eyes.

THE nail out, Budge picked up the girl and carried her to Nicholas' room. Nicholas took a first-aid outfit from his suitcase and dressed the wound. When he had bound it up, she fell into a deep sleep of exhaustion.

Budge and Nicholas were looking down at her when Sophron came into the room. He looked down at the girl and said: "What has happened?"

Nicholas told him.

"The Canaanites are savage brutes. We don't treat our slaves like that," he said sharply. Then he frowned thoughtfully at Nicholas and added: "So you shook Rhodopis! Well, you have done her a service, if you really hurt her. But it will make things more difficult, for I'll wager she will insist on marrying you and making you King of Megara. I know her—well. I might have been King of Megara myself. But we do not marry barbarians."

"And I am plighted," said Nicholas.

"It is on the knees of the gods," said Sophron gravely. "But now be doubly on your guard against her. To get you she will stick at nothing. She'll very likely join forces with that cursed eunuch."

He made a sign to Nicholas to get Budge, who was laying a silk coverlet over the sleeping girl, out of the room.

"He knows. You can speak," said Nicholas.

Sophron hesitated; then he went on: "We are in a difficulty, and I came to discuss it. Just before the festival of Moloch there is the annual fight of the champions. Every year fifty of our best fighters fight fifty of the best fighters of the Canaanites, most of them picked from the Sacred Legion. They fight till the fifty champions of one side or the other are killed, or disabled, and have run away. It is a brutal business; but the blood-letting has certainly prevented many civil wars, and we get rid of fifty hot-blooded sons of the rich every year with the loss of about thirty men. But this year we do not wish to lose thirty of our best fighters before the Feast of Moloch. In heavy armor they will destroy many more Canaanites than in the light armor of the champions. But we cannot devise a way of stopping the annual contest. We must not seem afraid."

Nicholas frowned, considering.

"If we refused to let our champions fight, it would encourage those cursed Canaanites to fight far more bravely on the Feast of Moloch," said Sophron.

Of a sudden Budge's face lit up, and he said: "I got it! Say, Sophron, how would it be if we Moon Gods forbade this fight for the championship and ordered another kind? Captain Dering says those Canaanites have fallen for us good and hard: so what we say goes," said Budge.

"Another kind of championship?" said Sophron.

"Yes. A football championship," said Budge, and explained the game.

"We Greeks would like it very much," said Sophron smiling. "But the Canaanites love blood."

"Well, they got to do without blood," said Budge firmly. "We Moon Gods forbid bloodshed. And anyhow it won't do to get this Canaanite crowd bloodied up before the big fight comes on. A football game is what they'll get and nothing else."

"It will serve our purpose," said Sophron, smiling cheerfully. "After all it will be something new, and a new thing makes the mob happy."

"Right," said Budge. "And say, boys, we'll give them such a game as never was! We'll take most of the Square and play fifty champions a side."

So it was settled, and Sophron was to bring the hundred champions to the hoplites' drilling-ground to learn to kick a football.

Then Budge said: "I'm going along to the slave-market. I aint seen it yet. I got to do something about those slaves I won in that poker-game. I may get an idea in the slave-market."

They went out of the palace together; Nicholas went with Sophron; Budge, followed by his human winnings in the poker-game, went to the slave-market. Schaoul, his purse-bearer, and one of Budge's winnings, carried a bag containing a thousand *kikars*.

On their way to the slave-market in the southern quarter of the city Budge and his retinue, swelled by a train of some eighty persons of leisure, came out of a long golden street into the square in which stood the Temple of Moloch. A perfect cube, seventy feet long, seventy feet broad, and seventy feet high, built of square blocks of black marble, it was a black patch in the golden city, gloomy shrine of a dreadful god.

On the other side of the Square was the slave-market, a commodious building, admirably equipped for its purpose, with rooms for the slaves to sleep in that they might be rested and look their best, if they had come from far away in the country, and with baths and tiring-rooms for their final toilet before the sale. In a half-circle in front of the auctioneer's desk were five rows of cushioned seats for wealthy customers. Humbler bidders, and the crowd of spectators who were there for amusement, stood packed together beyond them. Beside the auctioneer's desk was a block of stone four feet high, up to which the slaves mounted by steps that the buyers might see them clearly.

The five rows of seats were nearly full and the crowd was large, for it was a good sale and had been well advertised. Not only were the usual slave-dealers selling some uncommonly good lots, but two of the chief slave-breeders had come in from their farms with the pick of the year's stock. Gisco was there, and Iddibal, and about forty of the rich, and Schebar, the High Priest of Moloch.

ALL the first lots were children, and to the disgust of the auctioneer they fetched low prices, for the slave-breeders had arranged with one another which lots they would buy and were not bidding against one another. Most of the children looked scared, but presently a small boy of twelve ran lightly up the steps and stood on the block, smiling gayly. At seven *kikars* the dealers dropped out of the bidding; one of the breeders dropped out at ten, the other at twelve; the bidding became a duel between one Hasdrubal Barca, and the buyer for Tanit.

The bidding rose slowly till the buyer for Tanit bid twenty *kikars*. Hasdrubal scowled and shook his head.

"Hasdrubal's beaten!" cried the onlookers joyously.

Hasdrubal scowled round at them; the buyer for Tanit smiled an arrogant smile; the auctioneer raised his gavel.

Budge, who had gleaned the information that Simætha desired this lad for a page-boy, decided to bid.

"Twenty-five!" he said in his rich and ringing voice.

The buyer for Tanit jerked round and glared at him; then he said: "And a half."

"Thirty!" said Budge.

The buyer for Tanit glared again and turned away. Down came the gavel.

"The Moon God wins! The Moon God wins!" cried the crowd and roared with laughter.

The next lots were of little interest—field-slaves and house-slaves, dealers' stock. Heavy and stolid, they looked to care little who bought them; they hoped dully for good

masters and mistresses; they did not expect to get them. They were bought by buyers in the crowd. Then a haggard woman of thirty mounted the block with a little girl of six holding tightly to her faded gray tunic. That woman was not dull; her harried face was full of fear and anxiety: what kind of mistress would she get? One who would be kind to the child?

It turned out far worse than she had expected: a burly middle-class woman in the front of the crowd called out that no housewife wanted to be bothered with a slave's brats; the lazy hussies found plenty of things to waste time over without having brats to look after. A murmur of assent followed the observation.

The auctioneer smiled an agreeable smile and said: "By all means—by all means. I'll sell them separately—the woman first."

He had made his escape by shooting up the place and rushing out, carrying Simaetha in his arms.

The woman wrung her hands, and a long, low moan, scarcely heard for the noise of the chattering, jolly crowd, issued from her lips. She raised her eyes to the bright sky, and slow tears rolled down her thin cheeks.

There were few bidders for the woman, for there appeared to be little strength in her, and she was on the point of being knocked down to the burly woman for three and a half *kikars*.

"Ten for the two," said Budge who had looked on with grim eyes.

The burly, hard-faced woman protested loudly that mother and child were to be put up separately, and part of the crowd supported her. The auctioneer yielded to the clamor: the woman must be sold first and then the child.

"Right," said Budge. "Six *kikars*."

The burly, hard-faced woman glared at him and was silent; the gavel fell.

"Two for the child," said Budge.

There was no other bid, and the gavel fell again.

A slave hustled the woman down from the block and along to Budge. It was a good three minutes before she could get into her anguished mind the fact that she was not parted from her child. Then she dropped in a crumpled heap, still holding the child.

Budge laid the woman out flat, and when she came to, he gave her a cup of wine Schaoul bought from the buffet. The wealthy men in the seats and the middle-class crowd watched him in an immense astonishment, amazed that he should even touch her. When she rose, gazing at him with eyes that shone with inexpressible emotion, he patted her on the back, pulled an empty chair out of the row, and put her into it.

The crowd fairly gaped at him; only in the eyes of some of the slaves was there a dim understanding.

Somewhat upset by Budge's strange behavior, the auctioneer resumed the sale and presently came to the cream of it—ten young girls from the farms of the slave-breeders, picked out of the scores of working-slaves for their prettiness, trained to sing and dance and play the flute and the seven-stringed Phœnician harp, and to dress and keep house.

Budge looked at the girls with a fatherly kindness but compassionately. Innocent and light-hearted young creatures, their entry into the world seemed to him as unfortunate as it could be; he foresaw for them bitter disillusionment—helpless slaves. An idea came to him; he turned and considered the retinue of slaves he had won at poker. They were all picked men, as the slaves of wealthy men would be, young men between twenty and thirty, and intelligent; many of them would have risen to the stewardship of great households. His idea became a purpose.

"Who are going to buy these lots?" he said to Schaoul.

Schaoul nodded toward the group in the back row and said: "Those scum—the keepers of the dancing-halls. They will buy most of them. They form a ring and outbid any single bidder, so that few bid against them. They have another auction afterward among themselves," said Schaoul.

"They do, do they?" said Budge.

"And the High Priest of Moloch is going to buy three of them to sacrifice to the god of blood," said Schaoul.

"The hell he is!" said Budge.

Smiling agreeably now at the back row and now at the other rows, the auctioneer made a little speech. Here were ten of the finest lots it had ever been his privilege and pleasure to sell, ten of the finest lots that ever came under the hammer. He set forth their charms and accomplishments, then beckoned to the first of the ten lots to mount the block.

"Put 'em up in a bunch," said Budge in firm accents.

The auctioneer hesitated and looked round the crowd and said: "If the other purchasers are agreeable."

A number of other purchasers said they were not agreeable; there was indeed a storm of protests. When it had passed the auctioneer, who wished to oblige the Moon God but was mindful of the fact that the dealers were regular customers who would be bringing slaves when the visit of the Moon Gods had passed into the realm of legend, said that the lots would be put up one at a time in the order in which they were listed, and Budge said no more.

A girl mounted the block; the auctioneer dwelt at length on her charms and accomplishments; the first bid was for twenty *kikars*.

"Twenty-one," said Budge.

The bidding went on briskly; at forty-five and a half *kikars* the lot was knocked down to Budge.

The second lot was knocked down to him for forty-six and a half *kikars* and the third for fifty and a half.

The fourth lot took Schebar's fancy and he came into the bidding. He bid proudly, in a tone of opulence, five *kikars* at a time. Budge's: "And a half," came monotonously, but surely, after each bid; it came when Schebar had bid fifty-five *kikars*, and that lot walked, smiling, to Budge. He bought the fifth lot, the sixth lot, and the seventh lot for fifty and a half *kikars* apiece, and the humorists of the slave market, burning to make their jokes and get their laughs, but in too great awe of the death-dealing Moon God to shout them, had to mutter them to those near them only.

When the eighth lot mounted the block it flashed on Schebar that there were now only three more lots to be bought; he must buy all three, or his sacrifice would be asymmetrical. Also it flashed on the dancing-hall king that, if he did not buy them, he and his colleagues would be short of new talent for the new season. They came into the bidding, both with five-*kikar* bids. Budge bought the lot for sixty and a half *kikars*. Schebar's blood was up and so was the blood of the dancing-hall king. But eighty-two *kikars* brought the ninth lot to Budge.

The ring was furious; Schebar was furious.

And then the loveliest girl mounted the block. The crowd murmured admiration; Budge thought she was almost lovelier than Simætha. There came a curious grunt from Schaoul, who was paying for the last lot. Budge looked up at him to see that he was staring at the girl and his face was working strangely.

"What's the matter, Schaoul?" he said.

"It's my—my little sister. I haven't seen her for years," said the slave, and his voice was shaky.

"Don't you worry," said Budge in reassuring tones.

The auctioneer was in no hurry to start the bidding. This lot had not been on view, and he was letting surprise do its work. There was a bustle in the middle seats, and half a dozen heads of wealthy men came together. Then Gisco moved along the row to Budge.

"Seven of us have put up twenty-five *kikars* apiece; one of us buys her; then we throw the dice for her. Will you put up twenty-five and make the eighth? Two hundred *kikars* make it certain that we shall get her," he said.

Budge smiled amiably at him but shook his head, saying: "I never like to leave things to chance."

"As you will," said Gisco, and he moved back to his seat, looking puzzled.

"And this," said the auctioneer, "is the finest lot that has come under the hammer for ten years. Shall we say fifty *kikars?*"

"And a half," said Budge.

So the bidding went. At ninety-five and a half there was applause.

"And a hundred!" cried Schebar, his face purple. His eyes blazed with excitement.

SLOWLY the bidding rose to a hundred and fifty *kikars*. The dancing-hall king went out; the ring groaned. The others went on. Sanballat bid a hundred and seventy-five.

"And a half," said Budge, and Sanballat went out.

Schebar and Budge went on.

"Two hundred!" yelled Schebar.

Budge hesitated. The girl, her lips parted, her nails driven into her palm, stared at him with imploring, terrified eyes. Schebar looked at him, felt that he had him beaten, and laughed like a hyena.

Budge shot out his hand toward the auctioneer and cried: "I bid a pearl!"

He opened his hand; on his palm lay a glistening jewel from a world-famous "five-and-ten" emporium.

"Oo-oo-er!" said the crowd.

Bang went the gavel—and the lot was Budge's!

BUDGE led his train to the buffet and gave the girls cakes and wine, for those for whom Schebar had bid were still pale and shaken. Presently they were chattering and smiling: like most of the slaves, they lived in the present, for in the future there was no security.

The owners of the dancing-halls came past in a body, scowling. The leader, as repulsive a slouching ruffian as the eye could rest on, came along with a moneyed swagger. One of Budge's lots was in his path; he gave her a shove which nearly knocked her down, and came on, glaring truculently at Budge. Budge's right arm came round like a flash; his large palm landed on the ruffian's cheek and ear with the sound of a whip-crack. He would have pitched over had not Budge's left arm swung round quite as quickly and his no smaller left palm landed, quite as hard, on the other side of the rascal's face and straightened him up. For the first time in his life he sprinted, howling like a dog. The crowd cheered.

Budge left the market at the head of his train. As he came out of the gates of the slave market, he was accosted by Schebar, who said with an air: "I am Schebar, the High Priest of Moloch."

"Pleased to meet you," said Budge politely but with no warmth and without stopping.

Schebar fell in beside him and said in the tone of one making a self-evident statement: "You do not want ten virgins."

"You said a jugful. But I got them," said Budge.

"I need three of them for the festival of the mighty god, Moloch—the last three you bought. I will give you four hundred and fifty *kikars* for them."

"Nothing doing," said Budge, smiling at him amiably.

Schebar was taken aback, but he persisted.

Budge stopped short, his face grave. "Say, High Priest, did you ever think of pearls?" he said.

"No," said Schebar.

Budge gave him an unwinking gaze. "Think of them," he said solemnly. "Consider them! Give your mind to them—to them and to Moloch. Moloch has no pearls—not a single pearl. Do you think Moloch does not think of pearls?"

Schebar blinked.

Budge laid a hand on his shoulder and said with yet deeper gravity: "You bet Moloch thinks of pearls, Schebar! 'Why haven't I pearls?' he says. 'Why has Rhodopis, who is a mere mortal and a woman at that, pearls—and I haven't a pearl at all? That's what Moloch is saying, Schebar."

Budge's solemn tones troubled Schebar.

"Virgins? What are virgins to a mighty god like Moloch?" Budge went on more solemnly, and his gaze grew more intense. "How many virgins have you sacrificed to him?"

"Altogether? Only thirty," said Schebar after a short calculation.

"Thirty! *Only* thirty?" cried Budge. "Why, Moloch's fed up with them—fed up to the brim! Do you know what he's saying, Schebar? He's saying: *'Enough! I've had enough! I'm fed up! No more virgins for me!'*"

Schebar perceived that that was what Moloch was saying, so impressive was Budge. He did not perceive this clearly; the oppression of Budge's insistent eyes and insistent voice was too heavy.

"Pearls, not virgins! Pearls, not virgins! That's what Moloch wants," said Budge, and his voice fell into trou-

As the hammer rose again, Nicholas fired. It was a lucky shot; it caught the executioner's forearm.

bling singsong. "Has Tanit got any pearls?` Not a pearl. Has Aphrodite got any pearls? Not a pearl. Have you ever seen one of these lovely pearls?"

"No," said Schebar, a trifle uncertainly.

Budge drew three pearls from his pocket and held them out on his palm.

"Look at them," he went on. "Look how they glisten! Did you ever see ordinary pearls glisten like that?"

"No," said Schebar.

"No more did I," said Budge. "Ordinary pearls don't —only these pearls! And I tell you, Schebar, that they're something *like* an offering—better than all the virgins in the world! They're what Tanit would like, and Aphrodite. They're what Moloch wants."

"How much do you want for them?" asked Schebar.

"I hadn't thought about the price," said Budge. "To one of the rich, to Iddibal for example, it would be seven hundred and fifty *kikars*."

"It is too much," said Schebar firmly.

"But this is different," said Budge. "I want to stand well with Moloch—anybody would. What's more, I like you, Schebar; I've taken a fancy to you. You're one of those men who know their own mind. When you see a thing you want, you go for it—baldheaded! I can see you do. So to you and Moloch they're six hundred *kikars*—four hundred down and the rest in thirty days."

"Done!" Schebar said with decision.

Budge gave him the pearls; he opened his robe and unfastened the bag from his girdle and handed it to Budge. Budge handed it to a slave and shook hands with Schebar warmly. They parted with expressions of mutual esteem.

Budge went on toward the palace, wearing an air of content. He had made Schebar happy and prevented him from spending his money on virgins to sacrifice. Also he had reduced the cost of his kind deeds by twelve thousand dollars.

As he came to the gates of the palace, Billy, strolling back from the gardens of the Temple of Aphrodite, met him.

"My hat! What pretty girls!" he said with warm admiration. "Yours?"

"Sure," said Budge with modest pride.

"Starting a harem, I suppose. Well, it's the custom of the country; there are some who can stand the tropics and some who can't," said Billy sadly.

"Not on your life, I'm not starting any harem!" said Budge with some heat. "I'm going to marry these girls to these boys and set them free, and give Megara the finest beauty-parlor in Africa!"

CHAPTER X

THE mid-day meal lacked cheerfulness. Rhodopis came to it in a frowning majesty and did not relax. Never before had a man laid his hand on her save in the way of kindness—and she was very angry with Nicholas.

But Nicholas was at a loss: what was the proper course to follow for a guest who had shaken his royal hostess and thrown her across the room? In England he would, of course, pack up and go. But in Megara— Even in Megara he could hardly come to lunch as if nothing had happened!

Budge was not depressed by the frowning majesty of the Queen; he talked about the institution of slavery, and in particular about her cruel treatment of the girl who had broken the string of her necklace.

The Queen paid very little heed to his talk; but all of a sudden she turned on Budge in a passion and cried: "But why all this to-do about slaves? Why shouldn't I crucify a clumsy slave like Taanach? I do not understand!"

She rose and went into the garden, followed by her ladies. Budge did not follow her; he went up to Nicholas' room to make sure that Taanach was being tended. He found her asleep, and Micipsa, whom Nicholas had left in charge of her, set his mind at rest. He went on to the house of Sophron.

As he had expected, he found Nicholas with Sophron; they had had a busy morning inspecting men drilling and the toiling armorers and swordsmiths and makers of spears, considering the points to be defended and the best methods of defending them. The ends of the streets where the southern and western quarters of the city met were easily defended; the weak point was the side of the western quarter facing the Square, for there the Canaanites could

use their crushing weight of numbers, and there the eight thousand maddened negroes and the mob would make their weakening attack. Nicholas' experience in the war enabled him to make useful suggestions, and he was to spend the afternoon training picked men to use the two Lewis guns which formed part of their armament. Unfortunately they had only two thousand rounds of ammunition.

At the coming of Budge they stopped talking of the coming fight. Gossip had already brought word of Nicholas' rescue of Taanach. This was inexplicable to them.

"You are a strange people, troubling yourselves like this for the sake of slaves! We do not understand it. But I—I like it," said Pyrrha.

"Slaves are human beings," said Nicholas rather shortly. "And this cruelty must be stopped."

"If we win, we will make the Canaanites treat their slaves kindly," said Sophron.

"You'll have to stop slavery altogether," Nicholas insisted.

"It can't be done. There must be hewers of wood and drawers of water," argued Sophron. "Thousands could not earn high enough wages to feed themselves."

"Then let them work for their freedom. They'll learn to work all the better for that," said Nicholas.

"If we win, you shall do it," said Sophron finally. "But now all things are on the knees of the gods."

Nicholas sat beside Pyrrha. . . . "A beautiful pair," said Eloul suavely. "If only the gods mated with mortals!"

THE conspirators, though they knew that the Greeks were drilling and hard at work making armor and weapons, were not sure whether they knew of their plot, for the Greeks were always drilling, and the archons had stated that they were fitting out the hoplites with armor and swords of a new pattern, a thing they did about every twenty years. The chief men of the rich left nothing but the fighting to the soldiers; to all the other preparations they applied their business talents. But they made no change in their manner of life, so when Budge later came to the Bath of the Rich, he found his friends waiting to play poker.

When the game was over Budge told them firmly that there was to be a new kind of contest, a bloodless contest, for the championship this year. They showed no pleasure at learning it. The fact that it was new seemed to console them little for its bloodlessness, and they did not grow much more cheerful when he assured them it would make them laugh far more than killing. . . .

Next day Budge spent a busy morning selecting the teams who should oppose one another in the coming championship. First he picked fifty from among a hundred young Greeks. He thought it well that the teams should not come into the great Square on the day entirely ignorant of the game; and before making his choice, he divided the hundred into two sides of fifty each and set them to it. He bothered them with no rules forbidding them to strike or kick one another, and the game was such an enjoyable sight that he let them go at it for an hour before he made his choice. Then he spent an even more enjoyable hour with a hundred young Canaanites, for they proved players of the wilder kind. Eleven of them had to be replaced after the game.

Nicholas left the palace soon after breakfast and spent the morning with Sophron, inspecting the preparations to repel the Canaanite onslaught. Billy went with him as far as the plane, and after an hour's work on the engine went in search of Arisbe. Nicholas left Sophron soon after noon and betook himself to the Temple of Aphrodite, where Pyrrha showed him the shrines of the goddess. He was surprised to find no statues of her in those shrines—only pictures, in front of which were altars.

"It is strange that you have no statues of your goddess," he said. "In ancient Greece, three hundred years before your ancestors came here from Carthage, there were some of the greatest sculptors the world has ever known, and they carved chiefly statues of gods and goddesses."

"No, we have no sculptors; there are none in Megara," replied Pyrrha. "Like Aphrodite, Tanit too is represented only in paintings. There is a figure of Moloch, but it is made of bronze plates; his face is a painted bronze plate, and his arms are of bronze plates jointed and hinged to draw the victims into the furnace over which he stands. All the fine work in all the crafts is done by the Greeks; the Canaanites are poor craftsmen; in fact, they're dolts—outside of business."

"Then it is no wonder that they wish to enslave the Greeks. I suppose they mean to collar their industries and exploit them."

"They have not enslaved us yet, and they will not enslave many. Most of us know that it is better to be dead than a Canaanite slave, and the old men have been told off to make sure that the women and children do not fall into their hands alive," she said quickly.

He stared at her, hardly believing his ears. Truly, under the beauty and splendor of this golden city there were sinister depths!

At four o'clock he went back to the palace; the majordomo stopped him in the hall and told him that the Queen awaited him in the garden. Nicholas was not pleased to hear this, and before going to her he went up into his room, filled the magazine of his automatic, and put two clips of cartridges into his pocket.

He found the Queen in the shady and sheltered nook in which they had spent the other hours. As he came into it the gloom vanished from her face, and she dismissed her ladies.

But she greeted him coldly. "Why have you deserted me?" she asked.

"After our last meeting I did not know whether you desired to see me," said Nicholas.

She looked at him with somber eyes and said impatiently: "Of course I desired to see you! You children of the Moon pass all understanding. What is a slave girl to you?"

"Nothing," said Nicholas. "But we do not allow women to be hurt."

"But you hurt *me!*" she cried. "Are you not going to ask to be forgiven?"

"Well, no," said Nicholas coolly. "If I again caught you treating a woman cruelly, I should again shake you."

It was very plain to her that she would get no further on those lines, and she said with a penitent air: "I am beginning to see that I was wrong."

Nicholas doubted it.

She bade him sit down, and he sat down on the bank beside her, very ill at ease. She told him mournfully that she had missed him and that the hours of his absence had been empty and dreary. Then to his great astonishment and discomfort she burst into tears and threw her arms round his neck, declaring that she loved him and he was treating her cruelly.

Nicholas was wholly at a loss how to deal with this situation. "I—I like you very much," he said lamely and untruthfully.

"Ah, you love some other woman!" she cried fiercely. "Who is she?"

It was plain to him that Pyrrha had in Eloul all the enmity she needed, that it would be senseless indeed to make this cruel and dangerous creature her enemy also.

"There's a girl in my own country," he said.

She gazed at him with gloomy eyes and said scornfully: "A Moon girl! A pale, cold creature like yourself! What use is such an one to you? What you need is warmth—passion to melt your cold heart as Melcarth melts the snows of Agash. You must love me! You *shall* love me!"

CHAPTER XI

NICHOLAS came back to his room, wearing the strained air of a man who has been wooed by a lovely woman who does not charm him.

Micipsa had found a heavy sword—doubtless a sword which had been hanging on the wall of one of the reception-rooms—and had been hard at work trying to recover his old skill in the use of it, for a cushion, hanging from a beam, was cut and pierced, and beads of sweat were rolling down Micipsa's face.

"Don't overdo it," said Nicholas.

"I will not. But I must lose no time. Trouble is coming, and it is coming soon," said Micipsa gravely.

So Micipsa knew! Well, he *would* know; he belonged to one of the leading families of the House of the Barcæ, and had been going about as he liked.

"The Greeks are my friends," said Nicholas quietly.

"You are my master and my friend. Where you fight, I fight," said Micipsa simply.

Budge, dressed for supper, came in, as the Hymn of Tanit rose from the roofs of the eastern and northern and southern quarters of the city in an immense volume of sound.

Budge said gravely: "I sure don't like that. These guys put their hearts into it too hard for me. They'll scrap like hell. We came to this city at the wrong time," Budge went on in a grumbling tone. "What we wanted was a quiet time for a holiday, and now it's going to be all spoiled. This scrap coming on threatens to muss things up for months, and what do I get out of it?"

Nicholas thought for a few seconds; then he said: "With any luck you ought to get the Zaimph."

"Great Scott! That's a fact!" cried Budge, and the discontent vanished from his face.

"I can't promise it to you. But I think you ought to have it for coming in on the side of the Greeks, and I'll do my best to get it for you," said Nicholas. "Have you seen Simætha since she showed you the Zaimph?"

"Sure," said Budge. "She was around last night, dancing. She's a nice li'l girl, Simætha!"

Sophron, who was supping with the Queen, came quietly through the doorway; he glanced at Micipsa—who was quick to interpret the glance, and went out.

Nicholas turned to Sophron and said: "Budge is very much interested in the Zaimph, and if we win, he wants it as his share of the spoils. Is there any reason why he should not have it?"

"The Zaimph? I was forgetting the Zaimph," said Sophron quickly. "If he dares to take it, he shall have it. *I* would not touch it for all the rubies in Megara. I do not meddle with the gods, and it is said that she always slays those who see the Zaimph. What might she not do to those who touch it?"

"I guess she won't do anything to me," said Budge. "Besides, I've seen it, and I'm still moving around and taking regular nourishment."

"Yes. Why shouldn't you have the Zaimph since you do not fear it?" said Sophron, looking at him thoughtfully. "But why should you wait till after the feast of Moloch? Why should you not have it now—tonight? Nothing would shake Eloul as badly as to lose the Zaimph; nothing would so daunt the Canaanites."

Budge hesitated; then he said: "But I couldn't just steal it."

"It wouldn't be theft. It would be an act of war," said Sophron.

"Sure it would. I never thought of that," said Budge with an air of relief. "But Eloul has ten men of the Sacred Legion guarding the entrance to the passage to the underground temple night and day, and ten priests in the shrine of the symbols, guarding the Zaimph itself."

"But he has surely no guard in the shrine of the Zaimph?" said Sophron.

"Nary a one; no priest except Eloul dares set eyes on the Zaimph. But if they hear anyone in the shrine they're going to risk r'iling Tanit, and dash in and knife him," said Budge, who had full information from Simætha.

"Then all he has to do is not to be heard," said Sophron.

"I'll be silent, all right," said Budge.

AS they went down to the great hall to supper, the talk fell upon the change that the Greeks were making in their armor. Sophron described the new breast-plate and back-plate and spear with such an air of good faith that he shook the belief of the Canaanite notables present that some rumor of the plot had come to the ears of the archons.

Then Budge said: "It's mighty strange that you folks haven't bows and arrows. You had your archers when you fought the Romans."

"There are stories," said Adherbal, "and I have seen pictures of archers in a papyrus that has been in my family since we came to Megara. But no one has ever seen a bow, for there is no wood in the country that will make bows. All of them were tried hundreds of years ago."

"Oh, well, you have ways of killing one another as it is," said Budge.

"Who talks of our killing one another? We do not kill one another!" said Adherbal, looking round with suspicious eyes. . . .

In all politeness Nicholas could not go before he had danced with the Queen, and since he wished to keep her in as good temper as might be, he danced with her twice before he slipped away to find Pyrrha.

An hour later Nicholas returned. He made his way

through the throng of guests in the hall and went upstairs, where he found Budge and Sophron. Budge had already changed into plus-fours.

"This is the gun to stop a rush at close quarters," he said, as he dropped a small pistol into his jacket pocket and picked up his attaché-case.

Nicholas wished them good luck, and they left. A hundred yards from the palace a waiting slave came from under the trees, carrying two Canaanite robes and headdresses. They went into the deep shadow by the trunk and put on the robes over their clothes.

"A bit hampering," said Budge, drawing the robe over the attaché-case.

"I'm used to it. I've worn one often," said Sophron. "Of late years it has not been safe for a Greek to go openly about the eastern and southern quarters of the city in his own dress."

BRISKLY they walked to the end of the Square, turned left and were in narrow streets of tall houses, each of which held many families; but now the houses were dark and silent, and the streets were empty. Making a circuit, they came to the back of the Bath of the Rich, where Sophron knocked at a small door—three quick knocks, a pause, then two more. The door opened and a man peered out at them.

"Abdalonlim," Sophron requested.

Abdalonlim came, and they went through the door down to the basement.

"The quarters of the deaf-mutes," said Sophron to Budge.

Abdalonlim, carrying a small lamp, led the way along a long, narrow passage, and up into the Bath itself. They crossed the great chamber. On the other side of it Sophron took the lamp from Abdalonlim, who went quickly back to the door at the top of the steps to the basement and through it and down them. When he had disappeared, they went into the side chamber, and Sophron drew the curtain across the door carefully. He crossed the room to a picture of a hunting-scene painted on the opposite wall, and placing his hand on the head of a lion crouching to spring, he pushed hard. The six-foot slab of marble on which the picture was painted, revolving on a pivot, opened inward revealing a narrow flight of stone steps that went down to the very foundations of the Bath.

Sophron motioned to Budge to go first; then he followed, stopping on the steps to push back the slab into its place, and showing Budge the bronze handle by which it could be pulled open. They went down the steps into a cold, dark passage, the air of which was none too fresh.

"The architects, the contractors, and the foremen of the gangs who built the new Bath of the Rich and the new Temple of Tanit on the sites of the old ones, eighty years ago, were all Greeks—only the labor was Canaanite—and they took advantage of it to give us access to our enemies' very heart," said Sophron. "We have not far to go to the secret shrine of Tanit."

"If we don't smother on the way. This air is foul," said Budge doubtfully.

"It is better breathing when we come under the temple. There is a shaft in the wall there and the fresh wind from Agash blows down it. Go quickly," said Sophron.

Budge went quickly, but even so he was staggering, with bursting lungs, before they came into fresher air, and they both leaned against the wall, drawing in long, relieving breaths.

About the middle of the temple they came to a flight of stone steps that rose upward in the wall.

"The walls of this temple seem just honeycombed with these passages and stairs," Budge observed.

"These run up to the top of the temple, and there is an entry onto every floor—one of them into the very treasure chamber," said Sophron.

They went on to the end of the passage. Sophron tapped a bronze handle, set in the wall, and said: "Here is the entrance to the secret shrine. The rest is for you to do. I do not meddle with the gods; I will not see the Zaimph: I will not touch it."

He blew out the lamp.

"But I've got to use my torch," said Budge. "For I must see what I'm doing. You step along the passage, so you can't see anything."

Sophron moved down the passage. Budge slipped off the robe that hampered him, gripped the handle, and very gently and slowly pulled the slab round and looked through the opening into pitch-black darkness. The sound of voices came through the curtain, closely drawn across the doorway of the shrine of the symbols.

He felt in his pocket and made sure that the butt of the small pistol was ready to his hand; then he switched on the torch. The ray fell on the shimmering veil and strange figure of the goddess.

He stepped through the opening and ran the ray over that strange iridescent fabric which was the Zaimph. He saw that it was not fastened anywhere, but draped over the bronze pegs fixed in the wall. He marked carefully how it hung, switched off the ray, and stepped quietly to it; his upraised hand found the delicate fabric, and he began to draw it very gently off the pegs. It came smoothly, and he gathered up the folds as it came.

Then it seemed to stick. He still pulled gently, but he pulled too hard. The farther folds had fallen round the ebony torso of the goddess; it overbalanced to his pull, and fell to the floor with a bang that sounded to him loud enough to wake the dead.

There was an outcry in the shrine of the symbols, but the Zaimph came clear; Budge clasped it in his left hand, dropped his right into his pocket, and snapped out the pistol.

Then the curtain was torn aside from the doorway; a group of heads dark against the dim light in the shrine of the symbols filled it; Budge jerked up the pistol and pulled the trigger, and a charge of stinging, blinding ammonia shot from the muzzle into the faces he could not see.

There was a choking and a gasping, a scuffling and a squirming; Budge jumped through the opening in the wall and closed it and sneezed.

"Have you got it?" asked Sophron.

"Sure I got it!" said Budge; and deftly he rolled up the Zaimph and thrust it into his attaché-case.

CHAPTER XII

THERE was confusion in the shrine of the symbols. Those of the priests whom the ammonia had struck staggered about gasping, and upon recovering their breath, howled dismally, believing themselves blinded for life. The others clamored to know what had happened to them, what they had seen. But they had seen nothing; blindness had smitten them out of the darkness.

Then two of those who had escaped the ammonia recovered their wits enough to rush up to Eloul's chamber and tell him that they had heard a noise in the secret shrine, and that blindness from out of the darkness had smitten five of them. Eloul raced down the staircases and into the passage from the main shrine, calling the guards

at its entrance to follow him. He rushed into the shrine of the symbols to find five of the priests moaning lamentations for the eyesight they believed to be lost, and the others cowering in fright. Through the doorway of the secret shrine he could only see the darkness.

Savagely Eloul checked the lamentations, and soon learned what had happened. It was plain that something, a presence that smote with blindness, lurked in that darkness. But what was this presence?

What was to be done?

Light was his first need. He sent for lamps, and set them in front of the doorway of the secret shrine. The soldiers, careful not to look into it, pushed them over its threshold with their spears and lit it up.

Eloul approached the doorway gingerly, his hand up to shield his eyes. He saw the torso of the goddess lying on the floor and the wall, against which the Zaimph had hung, bare.

A strangled cry came from his parted lips. But he had to believe his eyes: the Zaimph *had* gone!

He shook with dread and horror and dismay.

No human hand had taken it. That was sure. It must be—it must be one of the gods from the Moon! Yes—the great god Budge!

He stood staring, sick at the appalling loss. Then he perceived that there was only one thing to do: hush it up, in any way, at any cost.

"Have you got it?" asked Sophron. "Sure—I got it!" said Budge; deftly he rolled up the Zaimph and thrust it into his attaché-case.

He pulled himself together, went to the doorway, and said in a steady enough voice: "There is nothing wrong. The goddess herself blinded those priests. Not even they, priests as they are, may look into her shrine. Officer, take your men back to the entrance of the passage."

He entered and drew the curtain and heard the soldiers file out of the shrine of the symbols. Then he prostrated himself before the fallen torso, and after a long prayer, beseeching the goddess to forgive him for laying hands on her sacred image, he raised it with reverent hands and set it back on the black stone. Then, with hands raised high, he invoked her dreadful vengeance on the thief.

He went through the doorway and drew the curtain across it, and without a glance at the moaning priests, went back slowly, still shaken, thinking hard, along the passage and into the chief shrine. Already a Greek painter had restored the picture of the goddess damaged in Budge's previous raid; the altar had been repaired; the scattered offerings had been gathered together and heaped up beside it. Eloul crossed the shrine to the bronze gong beside the main entrance and beat on it. The scores of priests and priestesses in the temple and its precincts came hurrying from their beds to its booming, and ranging themselves in their hierarchy before the altar, waited silently for his message.

He mounted the altar steps and standing on the topmost, said: "Priests and priestesses of Tanit, Holy Queen of the Night, there has been a miracle, great and wonderful. The mighty goddess has blinded five of her priests who dared to look into her secret shrine, though the shrine was dark and her image and the Zaimph were hidden. Go through the city in procession, singing the Hymn of Tanit, and tell the people."

In ten minutes the procession was marshaled, and the Hymn of Tanit broke out on the silent night, waking the sleeping city, and swelled by the devout from every house it passed.

Eloul went back to his chamber, wearing an air of crafty satisfaction. But presently his face was again blank, as he pondered the loss, and the weakening of the power of the goddess. Would it bring misfortune and failure?

He called to the young priest who waited on him: "Fetch me the Keeper of the Records!"

Magdassin, the Keeper of the Records, was an old man and slow, but at last the young priest ushered him into the room.

"Magdassin, there is a matter I wish to know: It might be that the Zaimph should one day be stolen. In what manner should the mighty goddess, Queen of Heaven, be appeased?" said Eloul in careless accents.

"The Zaimph could never be stolen. The hand of the thief would wither from the wrist," said Magdassin.

"But surely there is a legend that it was stolen and a virgin brought it back—hundreds of years ago—before the Zaimph was brought from Carthage," said Eloul.

"Yes. But it was stolen by the magician of the South, the mighty black one. There are no such magicians nowadays," said Magdassin in a quavering but confident voice.

"Nor such virgins," said Eloul sourly.

"It will be in the book of the Ordinances of the Gods—if indeed there *be* any way of appeasing the goddess," and Magdassin, and he tottered out.

But Eloul did not sleep. Why had the children of the Moon stolen the sacred veil? Had they taken it to rob the Canaanite Megara of her luck at this crisis in her fortunes? Truly they were over-friendly with the cursed Greeks. Yes; it was the Greeks—those cursed Greeks!

Eloul lay still, and let his crafty mind work. For hours he heard the Hymn of Tanit rising and falling throughout the city. At last he found the way. He laughed. . . .

Dawn came, and with the dawn Magdassin.

"Chief Priest of Tanit the Queen of Heaven, I have found the appeasement," he said with quiet pride.

Eloul raised himself on his elbow, smiling: "What is the manner of it?" he said eagerly.

"The noblest virgin in Megara must be sacrificed to Tanit at dawn," said Magdassin.

"Sacrifice a virgin to Tanit!" cried Eloul in stupefied accents. "But only the children of Moloch sacrifice virgins or children to their bloodthirsty master!"

"Ah, but if the Zaimph be stolen, all things change," said Magdassin confidently. "And only by the sacrifice of a virgin can Tanit be appeased. It is so written in the book of the Ordinances of the Gods."

Eloul sank back on to the couch and yawned. He must not seem eager in the matter.

"And what is the manner of the sacrifice?" he said carelessly.

"The virgin must be thrown into the sea at daybreak, for Tanit is also the Queen of the Sea and Ruler of the Tides—whatever those may be," said Magdassin.

"And how should we do that when we have no sea? The sea is hundreds of miles away—as the story goes," said Eloul.

Magdassin sank feebly into a chair and wrinkled yet more his furrowed brow. "As I see it, and I am the Interpreter of the Ordinances, the sacrifice will appease the goddess if the maiden drown," he said. "Tanit rules all waters. Therefore she rules the cisterns. Throw the virgin into the water-chute from the aqueduct, and she will drown—and the Queen of the Sea and Heaven will be appeased."

Eloul considered the pronouncement for a few seconds; then he said gravely: "You are a man of good counsel and very wise, Magdassin. Should the Zaimph ever be stolen, that is what I will do. But your rest has been broken, and you have worked many hours; you are weary. Drink!"

He raised the flagon on the table beside his couch and filled the cup to the brim. With a word of thanks Magdassin raised it to his lips, and slowly he drained the cup.

"And who is the noblest virgin in Megara?" said Eloul idly.

"Pyrrha, the daughter of Sophron and High Priestess of Aphrodite. She is a descendant of the Eupatridæ of Athens, and they are older than the House of the Barcæ," said Magdassin.

"You know everything, Magdassin," said Eloul in a sleepy voice. "But you are weary. Sleep."

Warmed by the wine, the old man rose and went out on firm feet, with his head in the air.

"And by tomorrow you will have forgotten everything that has passed. That wine is full strong for so old a head," thought Eloul.

He smiled again, an evil smile, and then he frowned. It would be difficult to get the girl before the Festival of Moloch. Yet Tanit must be appeased at once—before the struggle began. The frown suddenly cleared from his brow. . . . It would not be difficult to get the girl—he would appeal to Rhodopis!

CHAPTER XIII

BUDGE sneezed again and gently packed away the rest of the Zaimph into his attaché-case and closed it, while Sophron watched, almost incredulously.

"And that's a good night's work," he said in a tone of immense satisfaction. "It ought to jolt that yellow-faced guy good and hard."

"I should be surer of that if I knew how that crafty eunuch was going to try to get round it," said Sophron doubtfully. "He is sure to suspect you and try to get it back; and he will stick at nothing."

Abdalonlim was waiting for them in the basement, and before they went out into the street he made sure that it was empty. They came back to the Square briskly and presently handed over their Canaanite robes to Sophron's slave, who was waiting for them in the dark shadow of the tree. They walked to the palace calmly, and at the gates Sophron bade Budge good night.

Budge went up to his room and drew the curtain across the doorway, took the Zaimph out of the attaché-case and dwelt on its beauties with gloating eyes. Of a sudden the priests and priestesses of Tanit, marching in procession out of the gates of her temple, broke into the great hymn. It startled him.

He turned sharply to the window, frowning. What did that mean?

Quickly he folded the Zaimph, wrapped it in a fine silk coverlet from his couch and packed it away at the bottom of a suitcase. Then he went to the window and listened to the hymn of Tanit awaking the city, with thousands of voices swelling its volume. It was still roaring when he fell asleep.

HE was awakened early next morning by sounds of hammering, and went to the window to see hundreds of slaves raising low stands round the sides of the Square for the poorer spectators of the football match for the championship of Megara. At noon the brilliantly garbed crowd began to flock into the Square, and under the rough shepherding of the hoplites was marshaled to the stands. At two o'clock the roofs of the buildings round the Square began to fill with the yet more brilliantly arrayed wealthy families, Greek and Canaanite. At a quarter to three, amid loud acclamations from the crowd, which being in a good temper welcomed any opportunity of shouting itself hoarse, Queen Rhodopis took her seat on the raised throne on the edge of the roof of the palace. On either side of her throne sat the Suffetes, the archons, the members of the Grand Council, and the heads of the House of the Barcæ. Immediately on the right of the throne were three seats. On two of these sat Billy and Budge; the seat of Nicholas, next to her, was empty.

Rhodopis looked at it and frowned. She turned to Budge and said sharply: "Where is Neek?"

"Search me!" said Budge, in Canaanite, but he did not look toward the Temple of Aphrodite.

Eloul, who sat on her left, leaned forward and said: "Surely, great Queen, that is the young Moon God sitting beside the High Priestess of Aphrodite on the roof of her temple."

Rhodopis turned sharply. Nicholas sat beside Pyrrha, on a dais of the roof of the Temple of Aphrodite. The two were talking earnestly and smiling at one another.

"A beautiful pair," said Eloul in suave accents. "If only the gods mated with mortals, now! But of course it may be that Moon Gods do."

"What do you mean?" said Rhodopis sharply.

Before Eloul could answer the question,—and he was in no hurry to answer it, for he wished his words to sink in,—a burst of shouting greeted the entry onto the field of the rival teams. They were a fine sight: the Canaanites in orange tunics, the Greeks in blue, a hundred fit and hard young men.

The Greek captains won the toss; the two teams fell into the formation prescribed by Budge; he kicked off, and the game began. It was a furious game, for the Canaanite formation went to pieces on the instant and every one of them raced for the ball and pursued it in a body all over the ground, yelling, the three goal-keepers—Budge had trebled everything and still had men to spare—well to the fore. There were tremendous rushes, tremendous scrim-

mages. For five minutes the crowd watched the game in silence; then it began to yell, and the Canaanite team in close array went, screaming, through the Greek goal-posts, the hidden ball somewhere in the middle of them.

The Greeks quickly adapted themselves to these shock tactics, and kicking off, charged in their turn in a body and rushed the Canaanites before they could get together, kept the ball, and took it through the Canaanite goal. After the next kick-off the Canaanites were ready for them, and there was a great scrimmage; the Greeks at last came through with the ball into the unguarded Canaanite half with a clean run to the undefended goal, and again rushed the ball through the posts. The crowd was now really yelling, and the booming Iddibal danced madly on the roof of the palace.

So the game went—furious scrimmages, furious rushes, the steadier Greeks scoring two goals to the Canaanites' one. Not till the second half did the game settle down and the backs come into play behind the line, or rather the body, of forwards, and single players could show their merit. All the while the crowd was finding it more thrilling than the old sword-and-buckler fights of the champions; there was less blood, but so much more movement! It yelled itself hoarse. Football had come to Megara, and it had come to stay.

Probably Rhodopis was the only spectator who did not enjoy the game at all; she was glad when a long and final burst of shouting and howling announced the victory of the Greeks, and the Greek team and the Greek crowd broke into a roaring pæan of victory; for she was impatient to have the truth from Eloul.

She turned to him and said sharply: "What did you mean by what you said about the Moon Gods mating with mortals?"

Eloul looked round the crowded roof. "This is no place to talk," he said.

Queen Rhodopis rose and moved toward the staircase, her ladies falling in behind her.

"Way for the Queen! Way for the Queen!" cried her chamberlain, and the throng drew aside, leaving a clear path for her and Eloul.

On the first floor she bade her train go on to the great hall and entertain her guests, then turned along the corridor with Eloul to the wing in which she chiefly lived. She led the way into a room that overlooked the gardens. She clapped her hands, and a slave brought wine.

ELOUL slowly emptied his cup; then he said: "And you did not know that the Moon God Neek loves that cursed girl?"

"He does not!" said Rhodopis firmly.

"Then those who keep watch for me lie," said Eloul calmly. "But when a young man—I mean a young god, though in love the gods are as men—spends every free hour with a lovely maiden,—for no one can deny that that cursed girl is lovely,—it is natural to believe that he loves her."

The face of the Queen had grown darker and darker in a scowling wrath as she listened to him; of a sudden she burst out: "Yes: you speak the truth, and you love to speak it! But the Moon God has deceived me and mocked me and lied!"

"And which of the gods regards the lies of a lover?" said Eloul cynically. "Why should he not lie?"

Rhodopis seemed to choke; then she said: "Yes, you are right. It is not the fault of Neek—he had to lie. It is the fault of that shameless hussy! That brazen High Priestess has stolen him from me!"

"It may be; it may not," said Eloul in judicial accents, watching her carefully. "It is full early to say that she has stolen him. But that she is trying to steal him is certain. Now, if she were out of your way—"

He paused, and she broke in furiously: "Out of my way! How can I get her out of my way? The High Priestess of Aphrodite—Sophron's daughter! How could it be done? You talk like a fool!"

"It has to be done," said Eloul calmly. "Sit down!"

He had dropped his usual gentle, half-sneering manner and turned to her a face full of hard purpose—the face of the man of force that he was. Dominated, she obeyed.

IN a harsh voice he said: "Before the sun is above Agash tomorrow, that accursed girl must die."

Her eyes opened wide, and she said quietly: "Eloul, you are mad."

"I am not mad!" he snapped angrily. "I am troubled. The Zaimph has been stolen."

"The Zaimph! *Stolen!*" she cried in unbelieving amazement. "It cannot be! No man in Megara, either Greek or Canaanite, would dare to risk the vengeance of Tanit."

"What a man of Megara might not dare, a Moon God might. And a Moon God has," he said somberly.

"Not Neek?" she said quickly.

"I do not know which of the three. It does not matter. It may have been Neek, for Sophron is behind it—as he or that accursed girl has been behind a score of affronts that have belittled Tanit in the eyes of the people and exalted her rival and enemy Aphrodite. Tanit is wrathy with us. That is certain. Tomorrow is the eve of the Feast of Moloch, and before the Feast of Moloch, Tanit must be appeased."

"How?" said Rhodopis.

"The noblest virgin of Megara must be thrown into the sea at dawn, and Pyrrha is the noblest virgin in Megara."

The Queen's somber eyes brightened with a sudden sparkle; she drew herself up and said haughtily: "What words are these? I, Rhodopis, the descendant of Hamilcar Barca, the conqueror of Rome, am the noblest virgin of Megara!"

"So?" he said coldly. "Then you would be the sacrifice to appease the wrath of Tanit at dawn tomorrow?"

"I would *not!*" she said with decision.

"Well, then?"

They were silent; then she said: "But the sea is far away. How could you reach it before tomorrow dawns? How could you reach it at all? Will the Moon Gods lend you their chariot to carry her to it?"

"The sea of Megara is the great cistern at the foot of the aqueduct. Magdassin, the Interpreter of the Ordinances, has said it. At dawn tomorrow I throw Pyrrha into the water-chute of the aqueduct, and she drowns. Tanit is appeased, and you are rid of her."

She gazed at him with eyes that slowly grew bright as she saw Nichols freed from the wiles of her rival and his course to herself clear, and she said: "You are a faithful friend, Eloul."

"I am a faithful friend," said Eloul in ready agreement. "But I need your help. It will not be easy for me to seize Pyrrha. It must be done secretly, for I do not wish to have to fight a thousand hoplites at the aqueduct. Moreover the people would learn that the Zaimph has been stolen, and that they must never know. You are the only person who can make it easy for me to seize Pyrrha secretly and sacrifice her without anyone knowing that she is in my hands."

"I? How?" said Rhodopis quickly and eagerly.

"Tonight you give the feast of the championship at the palace. Pyrrha is your guest. You will be gracious to her—but soon after midnight lure her out into the gardens.

It will be easy; the great hall will be hot with the dancing. Bring her to the door in the eastern wall. I will have a score of my priests waiting. They will bring her secretly to the temple."

"I understand; I will be sweet to her—very sweet. Why not? She dies, and will trouble me no more," said Rhodopis and she laughed softly and cruelly.

They stood, smiling at one another, well pleased.

A hush had fallen on the Square. The crowd was moving slowly out of it.

Of a sudden a great voice cried: "Be silent!"

"The voice of Sophron! I know it," said Rhodopis.

The hush deepened as the crowd halted; the great voice cried: "Tanit has lost the Zaimph! The Zaimph has been stolen!"

"And that's given Eloul the jolt of a lifetime!" said Budge in a pleased tone as Sophron drew the mouth of the megaphone from between the opening in the drawn curtains and stepped back from the window.

"It will surely give the dog trouble and keep him busy," said Sophron with little less pleasure.

A hubbub of excited cries rose from the Square, and the Canaanite crowd, dismayed and frightened, came flocking back, clamoring to know how and when the Zaimph had been stolen, what would happen now that the luck of Megara had gone, how could the thief be caught, how could the Zaimph be brought back?

"Curse Sophron!" snarled Eloul.

He turned from Rhodopis, and forgetting his priestly dignity, ran down into the gardens and through them to the door in the eastern wall and so came to the Temple of Tanit by streets clear of the crowd. He found the priests flocking into the main shrine, as troubled and fearful as the crowd itself. He walked quietly to the altar, mounted the steps and waved his hand for silence.

"This is a lie of the Greeks," he said calmly. "The Zaimph is safe in the secret shrine. Bring my robes. I will speak to the people."

A murmur of relief greeted his words, and the Keepers of the Robes hurried for them and brought one of those he wore in processions in honor of the goddess. Three minutes later he came out, with a score of priests behind him, on the roof of the first tier of the temple, a dazzling figure in the low rays of the setting sun, his tall headdress and cape a blaze of sapphires, the border of his white robe a blaze of rubies.

The crowd shouted. Again he raised his hand, and the crowd was silent.

"This is a lie of the Greeks," he said, and his shrill voice carried clearly to the edge of the crowd and beyond it. "Some follower of the Earth Goddess has tried to delude you. The Zaimph of the Queen of Heaven is safe in the secret shrine."

A DEEP murmur of relief came from the crowd, and then it shouted for joy. Eloul let it shout for a time; then he raised his hand again, and it again fell silent.

Then he said: "If anyone doubts that this is so and would see for himself, let him, if he does not fear the wrath of Tanit, come into the temple, and I will lead him to the secret shrine, and he shall look on the Zaimph and be sure."

The crowd, amazed at the offer, kept silence for nearly a minute; then a clamor rose. Most of them shouted that they believed; others muttered to one another that none but madmen would risk the wrath of Tanit. No one came forward to accept the offer; and presently, reassured, they began again to move out of the Square, on their way home.

Eloul's counter-stroke came, faintly enough, to the window of Budge's room in the palace; but they heard it.

Sophron said in careless accents that showed he was neither surprised nor vexed: "I told you the cunning dog would get out of it. There isn't a Canaanite in Megara who would dream of accepting that offer."

"Isn't there, now?" said Budge. "But say, Sophron, why did you megaphone that it had been stolen? What we agreed was that it was just an act of war, not stealing. I wouldn't *steal* a Zaimph—no matter how badly I hankered after it. 'Captured' was what you ought to have said —'captured'!"

"It was a slip of the tongue," said Sophron.

CHAPTER XIV

EVEN finer, that night, was the feast than that which had celebrated the coming of the Moon Gods, for it had been the custom since the founding of the contest for the championship, for the queen, or king, of Megara to give the chief feast of the year on that night, and the cooks and butlers had been preparing for it for many days.

The Moon Gods again sat on the right hand of the Queen, with Sophron and the Suffetes on her left, and again Pyrrha was seated next to the couch of Nicholas. Queen Rhodopis had had them placed side by side purposely. She would see for herself!

They made no display of their fondness, but their eyes told her their secret. She was sick with jealousy and anger. But she smiled on both of them, and her words were gracious. She told herself that she could afford to smile and be gracious, for after daybreak Nicholas' eyes would never again look into Pyrrha's, glowing with that light of love.

Eloul gave no heed to the talk of the Suffetes and Sophron; the crafty eunuch again watched the Moon Gods. Were they gods, or were they men? They looked like men—but no man had ever come and gone invisibly, like the thief of the Zaimph!

And what part would they play in the struggle with the Greeks? Neek would side with the Greeks for Pyrrha's sake. But there would be no Pyrrha. Budge should be on the side of the Canaanites: his friends were Canaanites—he had made no friends among the Greeks; and there was Simætha. He smiled craftily. And Beel? Eloul thought little of Billy—a young and foolish god! Yes, the Moon Gods were divided, and he had divided them. Whatever strange weapons they brought to the fight, those weapons would be used on both sides with equal effect; they would counteract one another. Eloul had only to appease Tanit and all would be well. His eyes rose, malignant and gloating, to the face of Pyrrha; he thought joyfully of how she would scream and choke in the depths of the great cistern.

Pyrrha turned and saw his eyes on her, and shivered at their malignity. Then, smiling, she said: "They tell me, Eloul, that you have offered to show the Zaimph to anyone who doubts that it is in the secret shrine. Will you show it to me if I come to the Temple of Tanit tomorrow? If *I* say that Tanit has not lost her secret veil, no one will doubt any more."

Eloul perceived in her challenge another affront to the goddess, and said sharply: "I will not! No woman may enter the secret shrine! No woman has ever entered it, nor ever shall!"

"You seem very sure of that," she said with a curious smile. "But surely the High Priestess of Aphrodite may enter it."

"Never!" Eloul almost shouted.

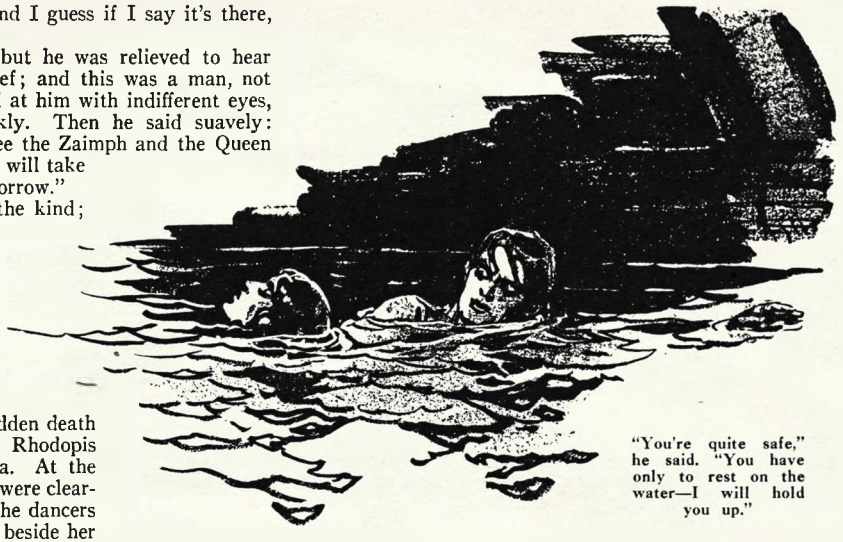
"What about me?" broke in Budge. "I've been hanker-

ing to see that Zaimph! And I guess if I say it's there, everybody will believe *me*."

Eloul was taken aback; but he was relieved to hear that Budge was not the thief; and this was a man, not an accursed girl. He looked at him with indifferent eyes, but his mind worked quickly. Then he said suavely: "Surely a Moon God may see the Zaimph and the Queen of Heaven not be wroth! I will take you to the secret shrine tomorrow."

He would do nothing of the kind; on the morrow he would have Budge told, whenever he came, that he was not in the temple—on the morrow and till after the Feast of Moloch.

The laughing, jesting guests feasted on, hour after hour, as if no shadow of battle, murder, and sudden death rested on that golden city. Rhodopis was most gracious to Pyrrha. At the end of the feast, while slaves were clearing away the tables to give the dancers more room, and Pyrrha was beside her in the midst of a group of ladies, while Nicholas was talking to Budge and Sophron on the other side of the hall, Rhodopis slipped her hand through Pyrrha's arm, and said: "A little air, ladies, before we dance again!" And they moved out of the hall and into the gardens in a body.



"You're quite safe," he said. "You have only to rest on the water—I will hold you up."

Rhodopis made no haste; talking quietly about the feast, she drew Pyrrha away from her ladies into the shadow of a clump of trees so deftly that they were not missed, and then toward the door in the eastern wall.

Pyrrha went with her readily enough. The fresh and fragrant air and the dim, starlit night, so soothing after the noise and brightness of the feast, fitted her happy mood; her mind was full of Nicholas, and this was the very scene for lovers' dreams. She would presently be with him, and they would dance.

The awakening came suddenly. A score of white-robed priests rushed out from among the trees that screened the door; a shawl, blinding her and preventing an outcry, was thrown over her head; a dozen skinny hands gripped her, preventing any struggle; a rope was wound quickly and tightly round her, pinning her arms to her sides, and the priests were hustling her toward the door.

In her relief and triumph Rhodopis lost her royal self-control. She laughed shrilly. "Fool!" she cried. "Remember, when you drown, that *I* shall be Neek's comforter —that I shall soon teach him to forget you!"

THRILLING with triumph, Rhodopis went quickly back through the gardens and slipped from the shadow of the trees in among her chattering ladies. A dance had just begun, and Nicholas was standing beside the door looking for Pyrrha.

"I will dance this one with you, Neek," said Rhodopis, smiling at him.

The lady was his hostess; the wishes of royalty are commands. He smiled stiffly and with no warmth, and they danced. Rhodopis seemed possessed by restrained exultation; she laughed now and again with no reason. It was a long dance, and after it she kept Nicholas beside her. He was hard put to it not to show his impatience. He had been looking for Pyrrha among the dancers and the onlookers all the while, and was astonished that he did not see her. As soon as Rhodopis let him go he went in search of her.

She was not in the great hall and he went into the gardens, and searched. He could not find her. He came back and asked some of the priestesses of Aphrodite and the Queen's ladies if they had seen her. None of them had seen her since midnight. He did not ask Rhodopis, the one person who could have told him where she was.

He went to Sophron and told him that he could not find Pyrrha, that no one had seen her since midnight.

"It may be that she was tired," said Sophron, "or her head ached, and she has gone back to the temple, or home."

"She would have told me," said Nicholas.

Still uneasy, he went briskly to the Temple of Aphrodite. The temple guards had not seen Pyrrha. He went into the temple and asked the priestesses on duty in the main entrance if she had returned. Seven of them, eager to oblige a lover, went quickly to find out. They were sure that she had not returned.

Still more uneasy, Nicholas hurried to Sophron's house. She was not there. He went quickly back to the palace to find Sophron. When Nicholas told him that Pyrrha was neither in the temple nor in his house, Sophron became uneasy in his turn.

"This is strange," he said gravely. "I do not like it. If any ill has befallen her, it would be Eloul's doing." He frowned. "I wonder whether the theft of the Zaimph has anything to do with this! I must try to find out whether it *is* Eloul."

He went briskly about it, questioning a score of people, but all that he could learn was that when the feast came to an end Pyrrha had gone out into the gardens with Rhodopis and her ladies; that she must have slipped away from them into the shadow of the trees, for she had not come back into the great hall with them. When he inquired of Rhodopis, she professed ignorance of this.

"I must get home and set my men onto this," he said to Nicholas in troubled accents.

"Wait for me," said Nicholas. He ran up to his room and put on rubber-soled shoes and armed himself quietly in order not to awake the sleeping Micipsa.

Leaving word that he was to be informed at once should any news come of Pyrrha, Sophron led Nicholas into the middle of the western quarter, where the poorer Greek citizens dwelt in small houses. One after another he had the masters of four houses awakened, and took counsel with them about Pyrrha; one after another they made haste, garbed in Canaanite dress, to the eastern quarter.

As the last one went, Sophron said to Nicholas: "I have fifty spies in the Canaanite city. Half of them have been on the watch tonight. If any of them have seen anything out of the common, I shall know it in an hour."

AS they went through the quarter they found women and older men everywhere at work; in the open spaces the fires of forges were blazing, and the clanging of hammers and the grating of steel on grindstones were loud in the night.

"They're hard at it," said Nicholas.

"The smiths and the older men and the women can sleep when the Feast of Moloch is over. The fighting-men must sleep now," said Sophron.

Passing the plane on the way back, Nicholas fetched from it two electric torches, and gave one of them to Sophron. They went into Sophron's house and put on the white robes and headdresses of priests of Tanit and waited. Presently the four spy-masters came one after another to report that none of the spies had seen anything uncommon in the eastern or southern quarter, and the Temple of Tanit had been as quiet as on any other night.

When the last of them had told his news and gone, Sophron paced up and down the room, frowning, for more than a minute; then he said:

"We ourselves must search. If Eloul has her, she is in the Temple of Tanit."

Nicholas rose with a sigh of relief—any action was better than this waiting!

Sophron buckled on a short sword under his priest's robe, and they set out quickly. They kept in the shadow of the trees till they came into the Canaanite agora, then crossed it and came by the streets through which Sophron had brought Budge, to the door of the slaves' quarters under the Bath of the Rich. There was no clang of hammers or grating of grindstones in the Canaanite city. It slept.

Abdalonlim came to the door. Sophron told him that Pyrrha was missing and sent him to ask the deaf-mutes whether any of them had seen anything out of the common since midnight, for, working by day, they were wont to prowl about the city after dark. He came back to say that one of them had seen a party of the priests of Tanit coming from the gardens of the palace, but they were huddled together and he could not say whether or not they had a prisoner with them.

"I wonder," said Sophron, frowning. "I wonder!"

They went through the Bath into the underground passage and to the basement of the Temple of Tanit. They did not go to the secret shrine, but up the staircase in the wall to the first floor. Slowly and gently Sophron drew open a revolving slab of marble an inch or two and peeped through the opening. The coast was clear; he drew his sword and keeping the blade hidden in the folds of his robe, stepped out into a corridor, dimly lighted by a lamp in the middle of it. Nicholas drew his automatic from his pocket and followed him. Sophron pushed the slab to, and they stood listening. From the end of the corridor came faintly the voices of women.

"Those priestesses never sleep at night," said Sophron. "Now you mark carefully the way we go, so that if anything happens to me you can go back to the passage quickly."

They went along the corridor briskly, as if they were on an errand, but met no one. The corridor turned to the right repeatedly; it brought them back to the entrance of the secret passage. They had explored the whole floor, listening at many curtained doorways, and peeping into many rooms. They went up the staircase to the second story and drew that also blank. In that story were three rooms with doors, all three locked. Sophron knocked at each of them; at two no answer came to his knocking; at the third a man's voice asked sleepily what they wanted, and the man came to the door and shook it; he was a prisoner.

They went up to the third story, in which were the chambers of Eloul and the higher orders of the priesthood, and about it Sophron moved very carefully. Outside the curtained doorway of Eloul's chamber he paused and listened.

They heard Eloul say: "When the rim of the sun rises above Agash, I sacrifice. Do not forget the veil and the wreath and the white robe. Magdassin says that they are in order."

There was a murmur of assent; and peeping through the curtain, Sophron saw the eunuch lying on a couch and three priests standing before him, evidently taking instructions about a point of ritual. Sophron plucked Nicholas' robe and drew him along the corridor. "Nothing to do with our errand," he whispered.

They searched that story as they had searched the one below; then they searched the fourth story, with no better fortune. Yet they had been within twenty feet of Pyrrha, imprisoned in an inner room with no door onto the corridor!

"She is not in the temple," said Sophron at last in disappointed accents. They were not long coming out into the open air, and made haste back to the palace, the Temple of Aphrodite, and Sophron's house. Pyrrha had not returned; there was no word of her.

"It will be dawn soon. Maybe she will come back in the morning," said Sophron; but he was frowning and there was little hope in his tone.

NICHOLAS walked slowly back to the palace with a heavy heart—full of fear for Pyrrha, but fear of what, he did not know. He came up to his room to find Micipsa awake.

"I awoke and found that you had not come home, and I was troubled," said Micipsa in a reproachful tone. "These are no times to be out late, unless I am with you."

"And I am grievously troubled," said Nicholas. "The High Priestess of Aphrodite is missing, and we can get no word of her. There are no times for a girl whom Eloul hates, to be missing."

"But Rhodopis can tell you where she has gone," said Micipsa.

"*Rhodopis?*" Nicholas cried in amazement.

"Yes; about midnight I was in the gardens and I saw Rhodopis and Pyrrha together."

"Yes; with Rhodopis' ladies," said Nicholas.

"No; by themselves—on the path to the door in the eastern wall. They went out of sight among the trees in front of it. Then presently Rhodopis came back alone," said Micipsa.

Rhodopis! Rhodopis should tell him on what business Pyrrha had gone. It was no time for ceremony; Nicholas rushed down the corridor to her room.

The drowsy guards sprang forward to hold the door, but when they saw who it was, they fell back, saluting, and he entered. He told the startled slaves that he must see the Queen at once, and he said it in a tone that sent them scuttling off to wake her and tell her.

Rhodopis had been a long while falling asleep, and the sudden awakening jarred her already ragged nerves. What had that fool Eloul done, that Nicholas knew to whom to come for information? Pyrrha's fate should not have been known for days; it need never have been known.

But she arranged herself in a becoming attitude and bade the slaves bring him in.

He came into the bedchamber, too full of his purpose to be surprised at being admitted to it, to find her lying propped up high on the pillows, her bare arms very white on the dark silk coverlet, her eyes bright with anger.

"Where is Pyrrha?" he said sharply and sternly.

"What is Pyrrha to you?" she said, no less sharply.

"She is my friend and a daughter of a friend," said Nicholas.

She glowered at him; then in faintly sneering accents she said slowly: "Well, you will never see your friend and daughter of a friend any more."

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"I have told you all you need to know," she said.

"You haven't told me anything I need to know. Where is Pyrrha?" he said, with enforced calm.

Suddenly she found his eyes daunting and understood how foolish she had been to tell him so much.

"I will tell you no more!" she cried.

"You will tell me everything," he said; he took a quick step forward and grasped her arm. "Tell me where she is!" He jerked her up into a sitting position.

At the look in his eyes, panic seized her.

"It is your fault—you stole the Zaimph!" she cried.

"I did not!" he snapped.

"Well, one of you Moon Gods stole it, and Tanit is angry. Her anger must be appeased. It can only be appeased by the sacrifice of the noblest virgin in Megara. *I* could not be sacrificed, for I am the Queen. And after me Pyrrha is the noblest virgin in Megara. She takes my place."

"*Sacrificed?* Where? When?" he almost shouted.

She winced; then she set her teeth—she would say no more, let him do what he would. Then she looked at the window and saw the brightening sky. It was almost daybreak; it was safe to tell.

"You are too late," she said.

"Where? When?" he shouted again, and shook her.

Again panic took her: "Eloul throws her into the water-chute—of the aqued-d-duct and she d-d-drowns in the g-g-great cistern—as the sun rises ab-b-bove Agash!" she said, stammering in a terrified haste to tell him.

He loosed her and ran out. He dashed into Billy's room and shouted to him: "Get to Sophron! Tell him that Eloul is drowning Pyrrha in the great cistern at sunrise!" He dashed into Budge's room and shouted to him: "Eloul is drowning Pyrrha in the great cistern at sunrise. Bring your slaves with ropes!" He dashed into his own room and said to Micipsa: "Take me to the great cistern! Quickly!"

Micipsa caught up his sword; they raced down the stairs and out of the palace. Nicholas glanced at the sky above the mountain. It was bright, too bright! They ran across the Square toward the southern quarter.

CHAPTER XV

PYRRHA'S struggles had assured her that she could not free her arms; the muffling shawl prevented her wasting her breath in questions to her captors. So she pondered on her plight. Of course she had been kidnaped by Eloul. But why? He must believe his vengeance sure; why had he not waited a day, till the Feast of Moloch? Was she a hostage?

Her captors hustled her quickly through the streets, and presently she knew that she was in the Temple of Tanit. They led her up to the third floor into an inner chamber, and left her. She moved about it gingerly, and presently her shin touched what seemed to be a couch. She slipped off a sandal and felt the object with her bare foot. It was a couch. She sat down on it; presently she succeeded in shaking off the muffling shawl and found herself in pitch darkness. For a while she tried to work off the rope which was wound tightly round her, and cutting her arms. The effort was vain, but she writhed and wriggled till it was less painful; then she stretched herself out on the couch and quietly went to sleep.

An hour later she was awakened, and two priests led her into Eloul's chamber. Smiling, and triumphant, he was waiting for her. She met his malignant stare with an air so cool, and eyes so serene that his fell before them.

But he said in jeering accents: "So, this is the end of your blasphemous mocking and affronting the Queen of Heaven!"

"What is?" she said coolly.

"Death, fool! Death!" he snarled.

She gazed at him, and her face grew scornful, but she said nothing, thinking the less she said the more she would learn.

"Yes. At last the mighty goddess punishes your insolence," he went on in a tone of malignant triumph. "When your foolish lover stole the Zaimph, he did not know the penalty you would pay for his crime. Tanit is wroth, and must be appeased. Do you know *how* she must be appeased?"

She gazed at him with incurious eyes.

He shuffled his feet in a sudden exasperation at her silence, then went on: "To appease her, the noblest virgin in Megara must be thrown at dawn into the great cistern to drown. You are the noblest virgin in Megara; that is your fate."

She laughed gently and said in taunting accents: "Great words, Eloul! But what will happen to Tanit and her High Priest if I drown? When my father hears of it, her temple will burn and her High Priest will hang."

He lost patience and turned to the priests: "Take her away!" he snarled. "Unbind her; let her rest and give her food and wine." He paused, and added with an ugly, twisted smile: "The gods like their victims sleek."

WHEN the priests had unbound her and gone, Pyrrha sat down on the couch and rubbed her arms ruefully. She knew now the peril she was in, and it was daunting. She herself could do nothing; but Neek and her father were at liberty. But how would they learn of her plight?

The door opened and a priest entered, carrying a lamp, a white robe, a white veil, a garland of white lilies. Curtly he bade her put them on, left the lamp, and went out. For a little while she did not stir; then with a sinking heart she slipped off the robe she was wearing and put on the robe of sacrifice, the veil and the garland. It seemed to her almost as if the action sealed her fate. Presently the priest came back, bringing food and wine. She was too wise not to make sure of being fit to take a chance of escape should one present itself, so she ate three of the cakes and drank a cup of wine. Then four priests led her down to the chief shrine.

Eloul and a dozen more priests were awaiting her, eight of them bearing the curtained litter in which she was to go. She sat bent forward in the dusk of the curtained litter, straining her ears for any sound of rescuers. She heard nothing but the clatter of the eunuchs' sandals on the hard road and now and again a muttered command from Eloul to hurry.

In twenty minutes they came to the cistern, a great building three hundred feet long and a hundred broad, covered by an arched roof which rose, twelve feet above the ground, from a wall ten feet thick, pierced with embrasures to let in the air and keep the water fresh. At its southern end the cascade, rushing down the chute from

the aqueduct, kept the surface always a-roil. The band of priests marched along the cistern to the foot of the flight of stone steps, which rose beside the wall of the chute to a platform at the mouth of the aqueduct. Here they halted and set down the litter.

Pyrrha stepped out of it. Hope had gone; her face was pale but dauntless—these Canaanite dogs should not see her flinch! They did not unbind her wrists, but closed round her. Following Eloul, she mounted the steps on steady feet. But for all her dauntless bearing the blood was running slow in her veins, and her limbs were cold.

Eloul walked to the middle of the platform. He turned, and said in a tone of immense exultation: "And here's the end of your mocking and scoffing, High Priestess of Aphrodite! So shall all the enemies of Tanit perish!"

She met his gaze with steady eyes in a scornful face, and he turned and looked at the mountain. Already the sky was bright behind it, and a line of gold marked its edge.

Eloul raised his arms to heaven and broke into a prayer to the faded crescent of the moon, low in the western sky. He besought Tanit to be no more angry at the theft of her sacred veil, but to accept this noble victim, and forgive.

Pyrrha's desperate eyes stared down the long road. Of a sudden, out of a side street, half a mile away, came two figures, running. On the instant, even at that distance, she recognized Nicholas, and on the instant she was all life and alertness. Eloul and the priests were gazing now at the shoulder of the mountain, watching for the rim of the sun to appear; the two who held her arms held them loosely. A jerk freed her, and she sprang for the steps. Hampered as she was by her bound hands, she was down ten of them before they caught her and hustled her, struggling with all her might, up to the platform again. The running figures were less than two hundred yards away now. They had seen her effort and her struggle. They were at the end of the cistern!

The rim of the sun rose above the mountain.

"The sun! The sun!" cried Eloul. "Throw her in!"

The words had barely left his lips when the priests flung her into the rushing chute; she sank, and vanished through the archway.

NICHOLAS was only half the length of the cistern away. He saw her flung from the platform. He sprang into the nearest embrasure and looked down at the water thirty feet below. Among the bubbles and the foam, where the chute poured into it, there tossed a wreath of lilies.

He dived sidewise for it, as Micipsa sprang into the embrasure, and Micipsa cried out. No one in Megara swam—there was no water to swim in—and to fall into the cistern meant death. Then he saw Nicholas come to the surface twenty yards from the wreath, as Pyrrha's head rose above the water not ten yards away. Three strokes, and he gripped the veil and her hair. She was choking and struggling; but with her hands bound, she could not hamper him. Easily he held her head above the water.

"Keep still! Keep still!" he repeated in an imperative tone.

Presently she heard his voice; then the meaning of his words came to her, but in her panic she could not for a while obey. Then it dawned on her that her head was above the water; she could breathe easily.

"You're quite safe," he said. "You cannot sink. You have only to rest on the water—I will hold you up."

She understood; her wits and her courage came back; she relaxed and was quiet.

The amazed Micipsa gazed down on them, hardly believing his eyes. The water did not harm Nicholas! He was moving about in it! He *was* a god!

With Pyrrha quiet, Nicholas was able to give his mind to getting her out of the water. He looked about him and found it easier than he had expected: at the end of the cistern opposite the cascade a flight of stone steps rose from the surface of the water to a door.

"I hope I'm not tearing your hair out," he said anxiously.

"No. It doesn't hurt—much," she said bravely.

He shifted his grip and held her hair more loosely; drawing her gently after him, he swam very slowly to the steps, lifted her out of the water and sat down, holding her in his arms, in speechless relief.

FOR a while they clung to one another, kissing and murmuring endearments. Then Nicholas unbound her wrists, and they walked up the steps to the door. As they came to it, Micipsa—who had recovered enough from his amazement to see what they wanted—ran round to the cistern, unbarred the door and opened it. They came out into the open air to find the long road empty. Eloul and his priests had had eyes only for Pyrrha and the chute; they had not seen the coming of her rescuer. Believing the sacrifice complete, they had hurried down from the platform, along the road, and turned into the first side street on the right, never dreaming that Nicholas was at the cistern. All of them were returning briskly by these devious ways to the temple. And Eloul's heart was swelling with triumph and joy; he had placated Tanit, and had seen the end of that accursed girl!

At once Nicholas perceived the eunuch's mistake, and it flashed on him that it would be an advantage to keep him ignorant of Pyrrha's escape. But how was he to bring her back to the western quarter unseen and unrecognized? They stepped back through the doorway of the cistern and debated.

Then round the corner of the side street at the left, down which he and Micipsa had run, came Sophron with Budge and Billy and a company of hoplites, at the double.

Sophron cried hoarsely: "Were you in time? Have you saved her?"

"I just managed it," said Nicholas quietly.

When they came to the end of their congratulations he told them of Eloul's error and said that he must be kept in error. They agreed, and after a little discussion they hit upon a scheme. The doors of the houses were opening and slaves with baskets were coming out of them on their way to early marketing. Then down the street came a stout, important citizen. He stopped to gaze with a frown of stern disapproval at the hoplites, for no armed Greek was allowed in the Canaanite city.

It was Sophron who asked him what he was scowling at; it was the three Moon Gods who fell upon him and pommeled him. How he had incurred their enmity and how he lost his robe and his headdress, whether they slipped off him or were torn off him, he never knew; but he found himself half naked and running as he had not run for years, and the great god Budge helping him with a cruel toe.

Five minutes later the Moon Gods and a slight Canaanite citizen, in a very loose robe, were marching up the road in the middle of a square of hoplites—and Pyrrha came thus to the western quarter, unseen and unrecognized.

AT noon next day a dull drumming arose in the southern quarter. It went on steadily and monotonously.

"The drums of Moloch," murmured Pyrrha, and she shivered, for even a sound night's sleep at home had not restored her from the shock of yesterday's terror.

Nicholas went in search of Sophron and found him making his last tour of inspection, in one of the streets that led into the broad road that ran between the western quarter and the southern quarter. Along the end of it were piles of hewn stone for the repair of the paved roadway.

"It is a good thing to know the exact hour of attack," said Sophron. "Half an hour before sunset slaves will use these stones to build a wall at the end of the street, and by half an hour after sunset the western quarter will be walled off from the southern, though probably Adherbal will attack only along the broad front of the agora, where he can make the most of his superior numbers."

"That's good," said Nicholas. "To look at your quarter, one would think that nothing whatever was going to happen. I never saw it quieter."

"Why not?" said Sophron. "Today our men are resting and eating good meals. The Canaanite legions are drilling; the mob is doing its usual day's work; the blacks are howling and dancing themselves weary, and most of them started very early this morning to make a long journey to the city. They and the mob will fight like fury as long as the wine spurs them on. But once it is out of them, they'll be good for nothing."

She lashed at his face. Nicholas ducked and jumped in with his head low. . . . She went down.

They sent back to Sophron's house, and were drinking a cup of wine when three spies came in from the eastern quarter to say that the priests and priestesses of Tanit were openly haranguing the Canaanites, urging them to vindicate the majesty of the Queen of Heaven, and destroy the unbelievers and scoffers and drive the rival goddess from the city, promising them great rewards. Scores of carts loaded with arms were coming into the city from the workshops, and the mob was arming.

Then Billy and Budge came from the palace. They reported that the House of the Barcæ was excited and perturbed; that a council had been held and the Queen's guard was under arms. They brought no word of Rhodopis, except that a slave had come to learn if Nicholas had returned. She was, indeed, a prey to grave misgivings. She had rejoiced when a messenger came from Eloul to tell her that all had gone well and the wrath of Tanit was appeased; but she was wishing she had sworn to Nicholas that she had had no hand in the trapping of Pyrrha.

She waited for Nicholas to come back to reproach her and give her an opportunity of defending herself, but the hours passed; Nicholas did not come.

Then came another thought. Eloul had kidnaped Pyrrha; why should she not kidnap Nicholas? Once he was in her power, she could make him love her. She sent for the captain of her guard and ordered him to take fifty men and bring Nicholas to her before midnight.

The captain of the guard saluted and went. It was no business of his to point out that in the circumstances, with Nicholas in the western quarter and the Greeks under arms, it was a very difficult order to carry out. It was his business to carry it out, and he cudgeled his brains for a way. They were astute brains, and presently he had it: the Moon Gods were with the Greeks; they would fight for them. The Chariot of the Gods—that was where he would find the Moon God! He picked fifty men with care, and just before sunset he had them waiting. . . .

Toward the end of the afternoon the angry hum of the Canaanite city had risen to a steady roar; the negroes were drinking and yelling, and the mob was growing hysterical. The drums of Moloch were now but a throbbing undertone in the great uproar.

The sun was very low in the western sky when Eloul came out on the roof of the Temple of Tanit, and went to the parapet and gazed over the city. The din below gladdened his heart; it was the roar of the avengers, who would bring him the fruit of his laborious years. There should be but one goddess in Megara, and one High Priest!

And then across the roof of the Temple of Aphrodite came a girl in a violet robe. She walked slowly to the parapet, and looked across the Square.

Eloul's eyes opened wide. He stared and stared again. It was—it was that accursed girl!

He broke into savage imprecations. Motionless, she gazed at him; he thought that she was smiling. Then out of their barracks and from every street streamed the orderly columns of hoplites. The sun set.

CHAPTER XVI

ON that instant the roar rose thunderously. The masses of yelling negroes, marshaled and guided by the priests of Moloch and the slave-drivers, began to move toward the great Square from the south; the yelling mob, guided by its appointed leaders and the priests of Tanit, poured into the northern half of it from the west; the Sacred Legion was forming before the Temple of Tanit; the other legions came marching slowly in columns on the heels of the negroes and the mob. Thousands of flaring torches illumined the advance.

The captain of the Queen's guard and his men slipped through the gardens of Aphrodite to the plane, surprised

and slew the dozen hoplites guarding it, and lay flat on the ground along the way Nicholas must come to it.

Nicholas and Billy stood on the steps of the Temple of Aphrodite with Sophron and the archons, watching the masses of negroes and Canaanites debouch into the Square. They were in no haste to get to the plane. It must not be used till the Square was full and the fight had begun. They had none too many bombs; every one of them must count. Not till the Square was half-full did they go down from the steps and take their way to the drilling-ground.

Micipsa was with them; he and Billy were separated from Nicholas and held back by a reserve company of hoplites taking up its position. Nicholas went on, knowing that they would follow him, and came into the drilling-ground some eighty yards ahead of them. Fifty yards from the plane he walked straight into the ambush; before he could draw his automatic a dozen arms had gripped him; he uttered but one half-choked shout before he was gagged and pinioned and rushed across the drilling-ground to the gardens of the Temple of Aphrodite.

Micipsa heard his cry, and said sharply: "That was Neek!"

They ran straight to the plane. Nicholas was being rushed along to the right of it, already a hundred yards away, hidden in the night. Just before they reached it Billy tripped over the body of one of its guards and fell to the ground. He picked himself up, ran to the plane and switched on the lights; they lighted up the bodies of the dead hoplites, and among them two of the Queen's guards.

Micipsa stooped over one of them and cried: "It is Rhodopis! This is her doing!" And he rushed away.

Billy stared after him. Then he climbed into the plane. It seemed best to stay by it; if Micipsa rescued Nicholas, they would come back to it; if not, it was useless.

NICHOLAS' captors hurried him through the gardens to the palace; arrived there, three of them took him up a side staircase, thrust him through the door of a chamber in the Queen's suite, and left him, still gagged, with his hands still tied behind him.

He gazed, scowling round the room; he strove to free his hands, but they had been too well bound.

He was still trying to break the cords when the door opened and Rhodopis came in—garbed in a leopard-skin, and carrying a whip with four lashes, fastened to a short handle; at the end of each lash was a bronze claw. She drew the gag from his mouth and stepped back, gazing at him with fiercely possessive eyes.

"You did not come to me, Neek. So I sent for you," she said in gentle accents. "Why did you keep me hungering for you all the dreary day?"

Nicholas looked at her, and his eyes were hard.

"You are blaming me for the sacrifice of Pyrrha," she went on more quickly. "It is not right. I am a faithful daughter of Tanit, and I must do as the High Priest bids me. Besides, Tanit was angry at the loss of her Zaimph—if I had disobeyed, she would have turned her anger on me, and her anger is terrible. Why should I destroy myself?"

Nicholas said nothing, and his face did not change.

"Do not look at me like that," she said in a pleading tone. "The goddess demanded the sacrifice of the noblest virgin in Megara, and I and Eloul are only her servants. We must do her bidding."

Of a sudden the note of the uproar in the Square changed; there came one louder, ear-splitting yell as the negroes and the mob surged forward on the Greeks. The struggle had begun!

Nicholas ground his teeth. What was he to do?

She waited for him to speak, then sighed sharply. "Do not look at me like that! I love you as no Pyrrha, or cold moon girl, could dream of loving. Love me, Neek, and I will make you King of Megara." In sudden abandonment, the tears streaming from her eyes, all pride and dignity lost, she sank down and clasping his knees, cried: "Love me, Neek! Love me!"

She might have been clasping the knees of a statue.

She realized that it was hopeless, and her mood changed; she sprang to her feet a raging leopardess, caught up the whip she had let fall, and muttered in a harsh voice: "So? You think I do not know! You think you tricked me with your tale of a moon girl! But I know! It is Pyrrha! And Pyrrha is alive and free!" Her voice cracked. "But it shall profit her nothing! If you will not love me, no one shall love you!" She laughed dreadfully. "You see this?" She drew the lashes of the whip through her left hand. "These lashes are clawed. I will cut out your eyes—I will cut the flesh from your face! You shall go into the world a blind and bony mask! Will Pyrrha love you then?"

She sprang forward and lashed at his face. Nicholas ducked, and jumped in with his head low. It struck her, stretching again at her full height to lash him, just below the ribs; she went down, the breath knocked out of her, writhing in the painful effort to get it back. As she fell, a small dagger from some fold in her leopard-skin tinkled on the floor. He sat down, leaned back and picked it up, and tried, twisting it about, to get its edge against a strand of the cords that bound his wrists.

The curtains before the right-hand window parted. Micipsa peered through the opening, then slipped through it and grinned down at the Queen, his face twisted by a spasm of hate. He dropped on his knees beside her, gripped her white neck with his strong hands and pressed his thumbs into her throat. She stared up into his savage eyes in terror.

Nicholas shouted at him, but to no purpose; then he got to his feet and fairly kicked him off her, but not before her eyes were starting out of her head.

"Cut these cords!" Nicholas snapped.

Still dazed with hate, Micipsa cut the cords clumsily. Nicholas dashed to the door and unbarred it, dashed across the corridor and the room on the other side to a window looking over the courtyard of the palace and the Square, and yelled: "Hey there!" at the captain of the guard.

He looked up, and Nicholas yelled: "Slay the Children of Moloch! The Queen commands it!"

A shout of joy came from the soldiers, chafing and fretting to be in the fight; the palace gates swung back, and with a roar the Queen's guards, eight hundred strong, charged out into the thronged Square.

CHAPTER XVII

BUT Nicholas did not wait to see them go; he rushed back, and with a careless glance at the sprawling body of the Queen, slipped over the window-sill and half-climbed, half-tumbled down the creeper, with Micipsa beside him. Micipsa took the lead and they raced through the gardens to the plane.

They reached it, and the impatient Billy, not many minutes late.

"Not very punctual, are you?" Billy grumbled.

"Plenty of time!" said Nicholas calmly, as he pulled his helmet over his ears.

The Greek hoplites had given some ground to the first rush of the maddened blacks, but now, locked with them in a swaying mass, they were holding their own, and pro-

tected by their thick armor, were inflicting heavy losses on them, aided by the machine-guns on the steps of the temple. The hoplites on the north of the Square were holding the feebler mob easily. But both negroes and mob were killing men who would be needed badly later.

The Megarian legions had advanced to the middle of the Square and were waiting at ease till the bulk of the negroes and the mob should be slaughtered, and the Greeks weakened by the savage struggle. The din was tremendous; and the throbbing beat of the drums of Moloch added their sinister and disquieting note to the tumult.

From the parapet of the topmost roof of the Temple of Tanit Eloul looked down and surveyed the battle with a thrilling heart. His confidence had come back; it was manifestly going as had been planned, and though the Greeks had not been taken by surprise, victory could only be a matter of a few hours. Plainly the Moon Gods could not, or would not, help.

THEN of a sudden came a new note into the tumult as the plane came roaring over the Temple of Aphrodite. The mob recoiled in a gasping hush; fear clutched at Eloul's sinking heart. He stepped back; the Very lights came flaring down.

Billy dropped the first gas bomb directly in the middle of the mass of blacks; the second fell between the Sacred Legion and the Legion of Agash. The plane rushed on over the Temple of Tanit and came back along the northern side of the Square. Billy dropped three bombs, two among the legions, one in the middle of the mob. The plane rushed over the Temple of Aphrodite, circled, and came back; Billy dropped two bombs among the legions and two among the negroes.

The din had hushed to a gasping, wondering murmur as the massed fighters paused to learn what the Moon Gods would do; the negroes and the mob recoiled a little from the Greek line. Then cries of affright, wild, animal cries, rose from among them as the smarting tear gas filled their eyes. Those cries rose in a crescendo, until the very heavens were filled with a dismal howling as of frightened, blinded beasts.

The battle was lost, the struggle was over. Eloul knew that the fruit of laborious years of intrigue and treacheries had been snatched from his teeth. He flung up his arms and shrieked imprecations at the plane, rising in spirals directly above his head.

At two thousand feet Billy loosed the big bomb. It was a fine shot: the bomb crashed through the roof of the temple within twenty feet of the furious eunuch, burst with a bang that drowned for a moment the dismal howling in the Square, and brought the two top stories crashing down in ruins, burying Eloul under tons of stone.

A piercing yell of horror rose from the crowded roofs of the eastern and southern quarters as the worshipers of Tanit saw the disaster to her fane. It died away, and again the dismal howling of the blinded fighters filled the heavens. . . .

The moon rose, silver and serene.

The battle was over; the hoplites fell back into the western quarter, out of range of the tear gas. It hung on the still, hot air, a faint breeze from the west driving it slowly into the eastern city.

His work done, Nicholas brought the plane down and landed on the drilling-ground. Pyrrha was waiting for him in an ecstasy of joyful admiration. No less overjoyed, Sophron and the archons came hurrying to express their immense gratitude. Nicholas found himself, as the wielder of these paralyzing and devastating weapons, the arbiter of the destinies of the city.

WHEN the sun rose, the Greeks were masters of the whole city. In the Square they were guarding the fighting force of the Canaanites, miserable, disarmed, helpless and hopeless prisoners. They held the barracks of the legions and every strategic point in the eastern and southern quarters. They held the palace, in which the disgruntled Rhodopis was nursing a very sore neck—for thanks to Nicholas, the Queen's guard was among the wretched prisoners in the Square, and from the palace they held the northern quarter. Already the order that the House of the Barcæ should disarm was being obeyed. They had rounded up the chief men of that House, the Suffetes, the "Big Three," and the leaders of the rich, and had them under guard.

There had been no more bloodshed and no looting. Nicholas had forbidden it. When he was assured that his order would be obeyed, he had gone quietly to bed.

He lay a long time, thinking deeply. Here was his chance, and he was going to take it! His chance and Pyrrha's—for he could not see her taken from this warm and sunny land of her birth to become but the wife of a stunting airman. Here was a bigger and better job for him—the right kind of job for Pyrrha's husband.

Power was in his grasp, and he was going to hold it. He saw that he had a busy, even toilsome, life before him—to deal properly with the matter of slavery alone would be the work of years—but he did not shrink. . . .

Dering talked the matter over with Budge and Billy. Young Elsom heartily approved, and volunteered to stay on as Nicholas' handy man. Clearly the charming Arisbe was a factor in his choice; but clearly also the prospect of a career in this fascinating city was alluring also.

But Budge, curiously enough, felt otherwise. The whole expedition had been his idea; ancient Carthage and its modern descendants had been his own personal hobby. But now he was fed up. He was determined to go back to the Budge de Luxe baby-carriage factory; nor had he any intention whatsoever of permanently forsaking the plump wife of his bosom, Mrs. Harriet Budge.

Nicholas agreed to fly Budge out to the Mediterranean port from which they had started. And here arose a problem: Megara lay within the territory of French influence—if not indeed within the actual French colonial boundaries. But none of them felt that this sequestered little commonwealth should be handed over to an alien power or made the subject of another of those international bickerings of which the intelligent world has become so weary. And Budge therefore, in a fine and unusual spirit of renunciation and self-effacement, agreed to keep his triumph a secret. He arranged to meet Dering once a year at the same Mediterranean port, for purposes of conference and mutual information; and they arranged a code whereby radio communication would be possible in case of emergency. Billy Elsom would take care of the practical side of that.

FOR the sake of preserving the idyllic peace of a certain long-lost city and of its people, names have been changed in this narrative and geographical exactitudes distorted. But you who have wondered what has become of a certain noted Anglo-American aviator, why he so suddenly dropped out of the limelight, may know that he has come happily into a private kingdom of his own, far from the maddening crowds of Europe or America: far from dismal talk of Depression and weary squabbles about Prohibition; and from the jealous plottings of selfish nations; far from the dusty theories of capitalism and socialism—far from a world made safe for democracy. . . . Let us respect his paradise.

THE END

Brains Does It

Frogface was in the jail-house when he should be leading a parade outside. Do you wonder that he got busy?

By ARTHUR K. AKERS

Illustrated by Everett Lowry

WITH nothing between them but bitterness and the bars of a jail cell, "Frogface" Reeves, dusky lodge magnate, and Marmaduke Brown, his shrimp-sized satellite, were in conference.

"Whut de Jedge say?" the knob-eyed Mr. Brown was trying to sort out a recently hectic past.

"Plenty!" snapped the portly Frogface from the inner and more confining side of the bars. "Whar you been, dat you aint know?"

"Comin' back. Aint no sense in both of us gittin' in de jail-house—"

"Aint no sense in none of us gittin' in—is *you* had no sense!"

"It wuz *yo'* notion," defended Marmaduke bitterly, "—us comin' over heah to Broylesville un-conscious, not lettin' nobody know who us wuz, to spy out de land befo' de big Grand Lodge meetin'—"

"And yourn to start in lappin' up dat square-face—"

"De first bottle, yeah; but dem last four quawts wuz yo' own idea."

"Who thunk up us goin' pleasure-ridin' in de white-folks' fire-truck after dat?" Frogface scored heavily.

"White folks aint ax who thunk it up—dey jest harvests you off de front seat when dey cotch you carryin' it out; told you, yo' big mouth, and all-time itchin' to be up front, gwine git you in a mess!"

"Got to have a boy wid some sense up front—dat huccome *I* gits dar," countered Mr. Reeves. Then the future blotted the past, with: "And me de Royal Rajah in de Grand Lodge!" Frogface groaned from the combined effects of law and gin, and a once-magnificent plaid vest hung loosely upon him.

"*Use* yo' head, 'stead of all time hollerin' around about how smart you is, maybe you aint git in de jail," muttered Marmaduke.

Mr. Reeves thought of something else, and his vest filled. "I's a big man," he re-stated an old platform, "and I gits around. Moreover, dey aint got me in here by my right name. And I aint never disappointed de women *yit*."

"Whut women?"

"All dem women comin' here to watch me ride in de big Grand Lodge pee-rade, dat who! Also, it sho is a break for de Broylesville gal whut dey elects be de Queen, too—"

"When dey locks you up—yeah!" agreed Mr. Brown.

"Gittin' to ride right wid me, wid eve'ybody lookin' at me," Frogface ignored small-fry and small-talk.

"Who she?"

"Aint hear who de lucky gal is yit—you mess up our

business so fast wid dem dumb notions of yourn."

"Trouble wid you, you done mistook noise for brains. When de lodge pee-rade gwine be?"

"Mawnin' of de tenth, shawt-dawg! Git smart in de head, like I is, and you aint have to ax so many questions!"

"And dis here de fifth," ruminated Marmaduke. "Look like to me, all de pee-rades *you* gwine lead, Frawgface, is back and fo'th to de rock-pile."

"Jest startin' to use my brains," rebuked Mr. Reeves coldly. "Runt like you aint even got none. Now, after you sees de Jedge for me—"

"Says *huh?*"

"Says unbat dem eyes and listen! You is gwine up to de Jedge's house and 'splain to him how I *got* to git out de jail—"

"Gits my eatin' vittles pushed in to me in a pan for three months, last time I mess wid no Jedge," demurred Marmaduke firmly. "Lets sleepin' Jedges lie!"

Frogface rose impressively. "Huccome you takes dat last ambulance-ride?" he queried significantly.

"Aint do somep'n whut you tells me do—"

"Ricollect dat while you's listenin'," recommended Mr. Reeves significantly. "Whut de name, now, of dat office you gits 'lected to in de lodge last time?"

Marmaduke fiddled with a loose plank in the jail-floor with his foot. That surrounded-feeling felt like it was coming over him again.

"*Calls* it Vice Rajah," he muttered resentfully. "Finds out after I gits it, it aint nothin' but new name for janitor de lodge-hall—"

"Vice Rajah's right! Meanin' you he'ps de Rajah when he git in a jam—"

"Or in jail!"

"—Wid whutever he aint got time to tend to, or too small-time for a big man like me to mess wid. Dat huccome you gwine proposition de Jedge for a furlough for me, like in old army: git myse'f out of here durin' de Grand Lodge, so I can lead de pee-rade an' pacify de women; dey 'spectin' it of me."

Habit gripped Mr. Brown by the spiritual collar, and impelled him Judgeward. But, once outside, he halted uneasily. He was in a strange town; a misstep now could mean a lockstep later.

"Brains, at ease, while us gits de lay of de land!" he issued himself an order in that department.

General inspection followed, beginning with the Broylesville jail architecture. This immediately cramped a boy's style, for instead of a big steel cage, set on a solid con-

crete floor in the center, such as Marmaduke was used to, this one had regular rooms as cells—steel doors opening on a central corridor, and the cells backed against the brick outer walls of the building. Frogface's cell was further unorthodox in being against a side wall that was set into a hillside. A Vice Rajah couldn't visit his incarcerated lodge superior through an outer window, for there was no outer window.

"Big man—and gits around, is you?" quoted Marmaduke as he recapitulated all this in his mind. "Well, you may be big, but looks like to me you gwine git yo'se'f a whole mess of rest in de hind laigs dis time! *Pee-rade rest!"*

Which, nevertheless, still left the Judge on a boy's docket. Lodge-loyalty dictated it, and the personal desirability of a whole skin reinforced dictation. Fail Frogface in this, and a smaller boy's ears got shoved down around his ankles when the Royal Rajah did get out!

"Fawward, *march!"* a dubious ambassador addressed his own feet.

Which orders resulted in a slab-footed little darky fetching up, hat in hand, before a shirt-sleeved young white gentleman seated strategically on a veranda, midway between an electric fan and a glass of something.

"Mawnin', white-folks! You de Jedge?" Mr. Brown violated his own better judgment. Old rabbit-foot fur in his back pocket wasn't feeling right.

"Yes. Why?"

"Boy in de jail-house down yander, suh, sont me ax you some'p'n. Craves hisse'f a furlough out de jail, for long 'nough lead de big lodge pee-rade—"

The Judge's chair tilted forward sharply. "You mean that big, loud-vested, frog-eyed, windbag from Demopolis that came over here, drunk, and drove our fire-truck six miles into the country?" he demanded.

"Yas suh," Marmaduke recognized the description, "dat him. He *is* kind of take de air—"

"I'll say he did! So much that he won't need any more air for a spell! Ninety days I said, and ninety days he'll serve. Now beat it!"

Marmaduke cheered. He had done his duty by Frogface now—and hadn't got anywhere. He felt lucky for the first time that day. And the thing to do with luck was to push it all along the line—beginning with breakfast.

"Gin'ral," he put this new feeling cautiously to test, "is you mind me nourishin' myse'f wid little eatin'-vittles, back in de kitchen?"

"What's the use of minding? I'm feeding half the county now, anyway!"

Mr. Brown didn't hang around the front getting up arguments. Not with the kitchen in the rear. And he perceived suddenly why the Judge's kitchen was so popular.

"Mawnin', good-lookin'! How about little mess of eatin'-vittles for de blind?" he unlimbered his old line to a new prospect.

"Who's blind, shawty? Look to me like you wuz jest raised under a table in de dark!"

Marmaduke saw he hadn't made anybody mad yet.

"I is," he consolidated his gains, "ever since I looks at you. Plumb dazzlifies me to see a gal so good-lookin' in de face."

"How you crave yo' aigs? You's little, but you sho kin lie!"

"Long as I c'n look at you, I aint keer whether dey's fricasseed or fried. Is dey suit de hen, dey suits me."

"G'wan, boy! Dis my last week to mess wid small-change like you, nohow. I goes on de Big Time *next* week."

"Huccome 'Big Time'?"

"Queen of de Grand Lodge meetin', dat whut! Jest 'lected. Me and de visitin' Royal Rajah rides right smack up front in de big pee-rade—"

Marmaduke met himself coming back, and practically ran over himself. So *this* was the Queen! Dumb, was he? Ideas thronged—inspiration—love at first sight. . . . The big parade coming on—and Frogface Reeves, the real Rajah, locked up incognito in the jail-house, while he, Marmaduke, was *Vice* Rajah— Why not? Revenge and rajahship fixing to get combined—downfall of the overbearing Frogface—dog-days at last for the perpetual under-dog, Marmaduke! All this was in his mind as:

"I looks diff'ent when gits my Rajah'in' robes on," Mr. Brown cast the die, introduced his inspiration to the light—and to his coming Queen. "Slaps a mean pavement wid my feets when I gits to marchin' behind bands, too."

Royalty-elect whirled incredulously. Seeing wasn't believing yet. "You says little boat-foot' runt like you gwine be de Rajah in de pee-rade?" she shrilled. "Tells me de Rajah big, stout, good-lookin' boy—"

"Big-*mouth* boy," corrected Marmaduke. "But regular Rajah gits detained. You's cookin' for de new one right now, honey—Ma'maduke Brown!"

"Well, aint keer whether you de Mamma-duck or de Papa-duck, you looks cute to me!" a Queen suddenly indicated that her conquest was complete. "Beca'ze, when de Rajah rides, I rides wid him. Name's Ca'line Hopper, and aint no 'countin' for my taste. Lap up dem aigs slow, fast-worker, while I's fotchin' you back some dem rheumatism bitters of de Jedge's! Got a jolt to 'em like a switch-engine at midnight."

Back out in the sunshine again thirty minutes later, Marmaduke untangled his feet from the bitters, and gave three cheers for rheumatism. Turn him loose on a deserted

"I looks diff'ent when gits my Rajah'in' robes on," Mr. Brown cast the die. "Slaps a mean pavement wid my feets, too, marchin'!"

island, he realized under liquid influence, and he'd win a popularity contest in a week. While, as for women, he was what Frogface thought *he* was. Witness Caroline the Queen, riding beside him on the tenth, while Frogface languished in jail where he belonged. Every dog might have his day; but Marmaduke, after long submergence, was fixing to have a month!

With all of which crowded into his mind, the five-foot Mr. Brown drifted gloriously toward the jail-house, stooping as he passed telephone poles lest he knock off cross-arms with his head.

Entering the jail precincts, he passed the easy-going jailer just leaving, his trusty horseshoes in hand. Which meant that visitors to the lock-up would not be disturbed for hours.

"You's not behind de plow—you's in de jail-house now!" caroled Marmaduke lustily, beneath his bitters.

"How you gittin' on wid de Jedge?" Mr. Reeves sniffed the aroma of his helper, and by-passed preliminaries. "When I sends you after somep'n, don't keep me waitin'."

"Boy, you aint *started* waitin' yit!"

"Don't mess wid me, dim bulb! When de white man say my furlough starts?"

"Aint start. Jedge say you's in here from now on twel de time up, jest like he tell you in de courthouse."

Frogface staggered incredulously.

"Is you tell him all de women 'spectin' me? Dat I 'bleeged to git out and lead dat pee-rade?" he persisted hollowly.

"Pee-rade aint pesterin' him; women neither. As for de Queen—"

"Leave de Queen out; I looks after her my ownse'f. I's a big man, and I cain't mess wid a jail-house but so long. Den I gits restless. I rambles right smart, den, too."

"Whut you mean, 'rambles'?"

"Means, one way and another, you cain't keep a boy wid brains in de jail-house. Dumb like you, dey stays in, maybe; but smart man like me jest naturally scheme hisse'f out de jug. And ends up leadin' dat pee-rade, wid de Queen alongside me."

Marmaduke gazed dubiously at the brick wall of the jail. Frogface sounded strong, but it *looked* strong. And, as long as it was—and the Judge talked like he did—Marmaduke had nothing to fear. He was as good as riding in that parade now, with Caroline, his new love, beside him!

"Beller round all you pleases, Frawgface,"—the bitters were still speaking. "De Queen done met *me* now."

Mr. Reeves' gasp indicated a center-shot.

"You means you done find out who de Queen gwine be?" he rasped.

"Means she done find out who de Rajah gwine be," corrected Mr. Brown and his bitters.

Bewilderment mixed with something else more dangerous overspread the fatty area used by Mr. Reeves as a face.

"Aint I de Rajah?" he demanded sharply.

"When you aint in de jail-house under yo' wrong name, you is," amended bitters and Brown devastatingly. "Says yo' ownse'f, when you git in a jam and cain't act, de Vice Rajah becomes de Rajah an' rides—"

Even in his elevated condition, Mr. Brown feared for his lodge chief—a boy swollen that far and that fast was liable to burst, in another inch!

"You—you—you—you'll pay for dis!" howled Mr. Reeves through his bars. "Only you aint gwine git nowhars wid it. Usin' de lodge-law on me when I cain't he'p myse'f! But whut makes me laugh, you so lame in de brains you think you gwine git away wid it. You aint never buck a smart man like me befo', whut use he head. Aint I tell you I gwine jest naturally scheme myse'f out dis jail-house? Aint got but four days left to do it in, but dat plenty for a big man like me, whut gits around. Rides wid de Queen on de tenth!"

Something about such certainty penetrated and partially sobered.

"Huccome four days mo', and de Queen pee-rades wid you?" Marmaduke questioned perplexedly. "White-folks say—"

"Done mess wid de white-folks too much now. 'Sides, turn yo' brains loose on jest one thing at a time, and you aint sprain 'em so bad. Done scum a scheme: Whut's on de other side dis jail-house brick wall behind me here?"

"Store," replied Mr. Brown succinctly.

"Settin' up off de ground on pillars?"

"Settin' right smack on de ground. Dis jail wall butts into de hill whut de street runs up."

Marmaduke was growing puzzled as he grew sober. Frogface was generally all dust and noise; but this time he was beginning to sound intelligent. And if he were—

"Hmph!" barked Mr. Reeves. "Dat aint so good!"

"Whut aint?"

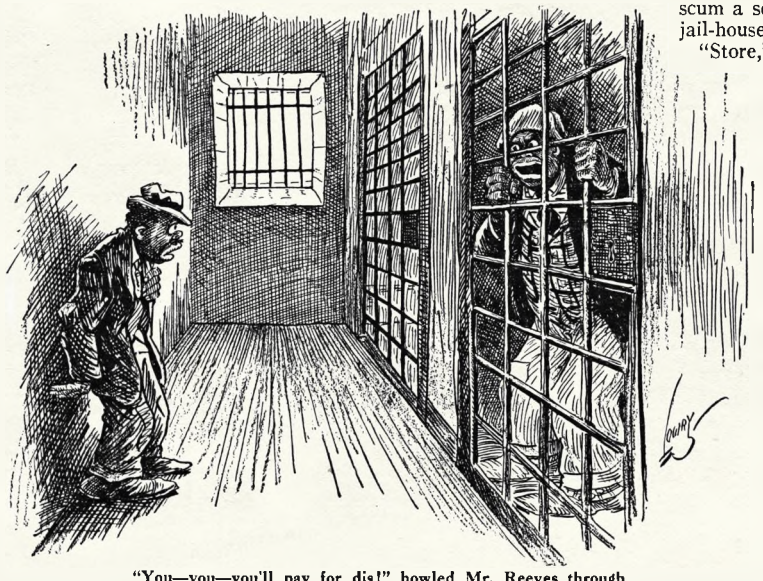
"Shet up! Whut dat oath of office you takes in de lodge?"

"Act as de Rajah when de Rajah git in de jail—"

"Shet up! You got de wrong one."

"Suppoht de const'tution, de in-laws, and de off'cers—"

"Halt whar you is! Done come to de idea. Gittin' yo' orders from yo' superior off'cer, de Rajah, now—to git on out and hang round one



"You—you—you'll pay for dis!" howled Mr. Reeves through his bars. "You aint never buck a smart man like me befo'!"

dem fillin'-stations in town. Is you can git a tip, pick it up—and can you git couple of dem tire-changin' irons, pick dem up too. Fotch 'em to me when visitin'-time start in de mawnin'. Jail-house blues aint fit my fiddle."

Marmaduke's brain died on second. "You aint gwine change no tires in here?" he hazarded hoarsely.

"Naw; jest my ad-dress—"

"Says *huh?*"

"Says I done looked, and you cain't keep a smart man locked up. Aint nothin' under dis old plank floor here cep'n plenty of room to hide de dirt—"

"Listen, louse! I is seen a half-witted cat bring in better-lookin' things dan you is—also bigger!"

"*De dirt?*"—bewilderedly.

"—From diggin' my way out of here!" cried Frogface.

The Vice Rajah reeled, without reference to his bitters. Just as he had got himself built up with bitters into a big man, Frogface had to upset his apple-cart, he moaned—thrust the second fiddle humiliatingly back into his hands. Vaguely he remembered the admiring light in Caroline Hopper's eye as he had outlined to her their coming joint glories in that parade; his bitters-born braggings that he, and he alone, was the real Rajah—

"Aint nobody in jail here but me," Mr. Reeves ruthlessly interrupted his sufferings, "and dey aint got *me* by my right name. So aint nothin' to gum me up when I gits out. Runs de place powerful loose, nohow: jail-house gent'man jest comes round meal-times. Rest de time he out pitchin' hawsshoes and sleepin' in de shade. While he doin' dat, I's gwine through dis brick wall here into de hill—starts tunnelin' wid dem tire-irons. *You* aint say nothin' 'bout it, beca'ze you knows I'll mess you up so bad wid a plank after I gits out, is you is, dat yo' own mamma aint know you widout lookin' at yo' thumbprints."

Marmaduke said nothing, in big doses. What a lot of big talk and bitters had got a boy into, while he was under a misconception that he was no longer the under-dog, was beginning to dawn upon him—also some inkling of what a Queen was expecting and he wasn't going to be able to deliver after Frogface got through the tunnel. . . .

Frogface thought of something else. "Whut's beyond dat store you say is settin' on de ground next door?" he demanded.

"Brick wall, alongside old gully, runnin' down to de big road," croaked Mr. Brown despairingly. Instead of being a Rajah, riding beside his new love the Queen, Frogface was fixing to make an accomplice—a law-breaker and a jail-breaker—out of him now, a co-conspirator against his own best interests, hog-tied with his own lodge-loyalty and accurate knowledge of what Mr. Reeves would do to him later if he faltered in his fealty now. His dream and his doom were about to collide!

"Suits me!" Mr. Reeves received news of the gully and its wall. "And, try double-crossin' me, tippin' off nobody whut I's doin', and first thing white-folks gwine ax is, *'Who fotch in dem tire-irons?'* I uses my head."

Headed off in a fresh place, Mr. Brown could not deny this.

"When I comes to de brick wall," continued his fraternal lord patronizingly, "knows den I's fixin' to bust through it, and into dat gully. I's a big man, and I uses my head, I tell you—specially when dey's a good-lookin' gal waitin' to do de queenin' wid me, on de fur side!"

"Ca'line *my* gal!" Marmaduke's betraying protest was midway between a sob and a squawk, as he saw the rest of his air-castles go tumbling before Frogface's scheme.

"*Wuz* yo' gal, you means—after she lays eyes on me! I'll 'splain dat to her—how you *thunk* you wuz de dawg, finds out later you aint nothin' but de flea."

EYES a-roll, walking stiffly, with a tire-iron concealed in each overall leg, Marmaduke Brown slid fearfully into the Broylesville jail corridor the following morning.

"Quit shiverin' in de summer-time, and shell out dem irons!" growled Frogface.

Marmaduke shelled.

"And open yo' mouth ag'in to mess up my business," warned Mr. Reeves, "and you's in a jam up to yo' eyelids! Double-cross me while I's tunnelin' out, and ninety days from now Ca'line be tryin' to remember de name de li'l fish-faced runt whut dey buried in yo' clothes. Now, stand back—dirt fixin' to fly!"

All day Mr. Brown stood back. All the pleasure of hanging around the Judge's kitchen had been amputated by the fact that only some thirty feet of earth and two brick walls separated a rajahship from a vice rajahship—with Frogface going through it fast. Love could survive a lot, but hardly the long laughter that would follow that exposure of Marmaduke as a mere upstart and impostor. Old bitters sure talked a boy into a mess. . .

Down in the darky district of the town, public preparations went nobly forward for the entertainment of and by the coming Grand Lodge delegates. Unaware that, incognito, greatness was already in their midst, rumors flew that the visiting Royal Rajah from Demopolis was eight feet high, that he had a penchant for taking his bitters straight and his women wild—indicating to the mourning Marmaduke that love had lifted Caroline's sights and loosened her

tongue. And, hearing which, he could bear less than ever the thought of the disillusionment that must come to her, should Frogface's tunnel scheme succeed.

Apprehensive return to the jail corridor that afternoon only brought forth that which Mr. Brown dreaded. Frogface was blistered of hand, but boastful of tongue.

"Tell dat Queen to smoke herse'f some glasses!" he ordered largely. "Gals see me in dat red Rajah robe, makes 'em snow-blind in de summertime, specially is dey been lookin' at wind-broke runts reachin' up to be Rajahs. Moles done come from as fur off as Vicksbu'g to git my style, diggin'! Old jail-house brick wall slows me down some, but I jest uses it to l'arn on. When I comes to de wall alongside dat gully, goes through it like a razor through a boy cotched wid six aces!"

"Keep on hatin' yo'se'f!" muttered Marmaduke inadequately, as his outlook darkened.

BUT another evening altered the tale and the total, and gave first foundation for Mr. Brown's slenderest hope, when there emerged from beneath the carefully loosened floor-planks of his ancient cell a new Frogface—one with blood in his eye and bunions on his palms.

"How fur you and dem moles git today?" Marmaduke angled apprehensively for the worst.

"How fur you say it wuz across under dat store next door?" Mr. Reeves counter-questioned savagely.

"Aint say. Looks like 'bout thirty feets—"

Frogface's groan ripped the summer air of his cell.

"Swell digger like *you* gits through thirty feets before breakfast," Mr. Brown took advantage of the bars between.

"Not wid all dem big rocks!" Frogface glared accusingly, first at his partner, then at his palms. Something seemed about to become Marmaduke's fault.

"Huccome big rocks?"

"Bedded in de ground under dat store, dat whut! Slows me down. Done come to one of 'em, and has to dig a fur piece, jest to git around it; den turn de tunnel straight ag'in. Sho is a mess, scratchin' dirt down dar in de dark—"

"*I* could lead de pee-rade for you—" hazarded dawning hope.

"*I* got too much respect for de Queen!" Frogface bit it off in mid-dawn. "Aint nothin' stop me when I starts, nohow. I's a big man, and I uses my head to scheme myse'f about. Tunnels by de tenth. Jail-house cain't hold me when I's roused."

Seeking surcease, Mr. Brown drifted numbly, to fetch up automatically at the kitchen door of the Judge who had started all his troubles. And in his misery he failed to take in all he saw there at first.

"Well, here come de Rajah!" Caroline the Queen greeted him happily. "All sot to ride! How de Rajah-business comin' on?"

"Hittin' on all eight," lied Marmaduke feebly. She would know soon enough if his current fears were realized.

"Dat's de way to talk! Aint got no use for fo'-flushin' boys whut puts out a big mess of lies and den cain't make good."

Marmaduke winced anew. Over by the stove something the size of a young mountain moved heavily.

"Meet my papa, Mist' Brown," Caroline interjected a new element into an already bad situation. "Mist' Brown my new sweet-papa," elaborated the Queen. "He done tell eve'ybody in town how he gwine ride at de head de pee-rade wid me day after tomorrer—Royal Rajah of de Grand Lodge!"

"Is, eh?"

Marmaduke remembered seeing this same expression on the face of some one who had turned up a flat rock in the woods and seen what was crawling underneath.

"Dat whut *he* say." Emphasis sounded as though even Caroline were weakening under the cold disfavor of her hulking parent's eye, as he took in the feet, the overalls, the architecture, and the bearing of Mr. Brown.

"Listen, louse!" the large and lowering Mr. Hopper seemed to reach some misanthropic conclusion at last. "I is seen a half-witted cat bring in better-lookin' things dan you is—also bigger! Is you any Royal Rajah, I's a loop-laigged snake wid yaller toe-nails. And is you aint, Ca'line here's de onliest gal I got. So I jest puts out one word wid you: Trifle wid dat gal, and I'll comb eve'y culvert in de country for you! Disapp'int her about nothin', and you cain't git dem big feet down fast 'nough and fur 'nough apart to keep me from cotchin' you. Which b'iles yo' business down to *make good* or *make time*. Mo' I looks at you, mo' you looks like postage-due on a empty envelope to me. Now, scarcify yo'se'f!"

Marmaduke "scarcified." Whichever way Frogface's tunneling operations turned out now, Mr. Brown was liable to be in bad. He and the bitters had put out too big a prospectus, with Mr. Hopper's recent pronouncement making backing-down even more dangerous than backing it up. Disappointing Caroline was bad enough; but disappointing her parent clearly called for lilies in a boy's hand. On the tenth he was going to lead either a parade, or a two-man race—with Papa Hopper in the rear only as long as a frenzied-footed Marmaduke could stay in front. Desperate thoughts of a timely tip-off to the jailer merely brought up harrowing visions of what would happen when Frogface finally did get out. No disaster to Frogface must be traceable to Marmaduke, not while Mr. Reeves continued to be his superior both in size and in lodge circles—which closed all doors to a saucer-eyed Vice Rajah, save the one leading to trouble.

Thus another day. In forlorn hope of cave-ins, underground floods, or other welcome disasters, Mr. Brown dragged himself jailward, to find Frogface just emerged from another hard day in the mines. Clay plastered him and optimism distinguished him.

"Craves me a yardstick, and make it snappy," he greeted his unwilling satellite.

"Yardstick?" Marmaduke's feet were fed up with fetching things to be used against him.

"To check up on myse'f wid. Scratches a mean clod. Done dug around dat big rock now, and a fur piece past it. When I tunnels, splatters tree-tops plumb to G'awgia! Dumb-bell like you, wid yo' big mouth, git in jail, he stays here: smart man like me jest passes through!"

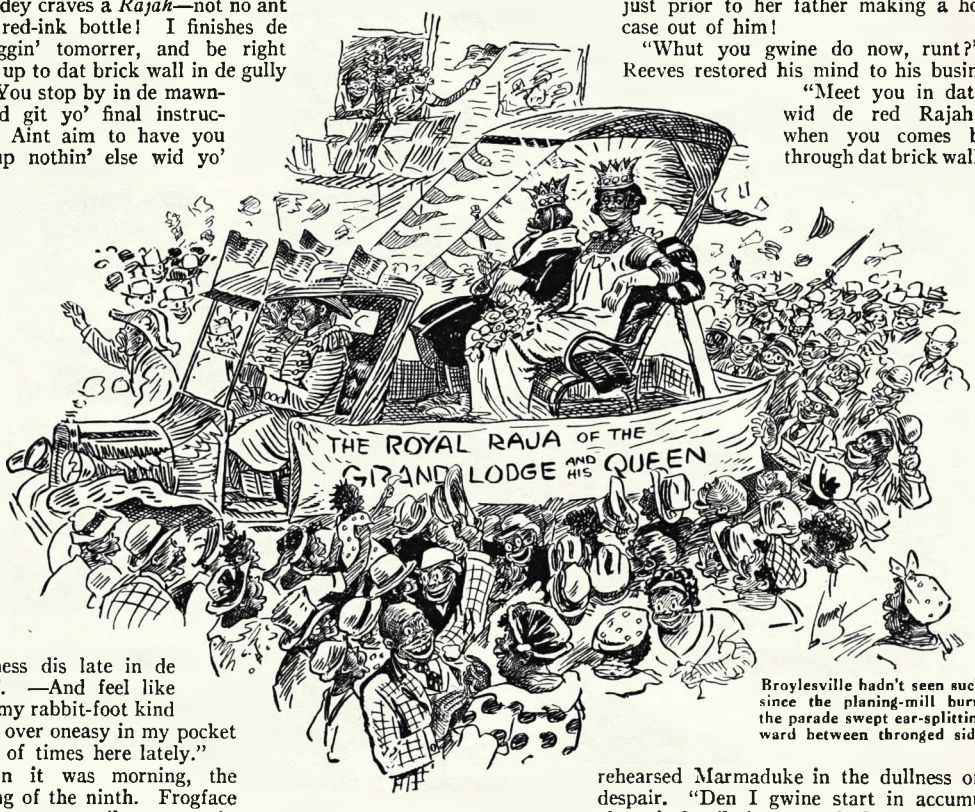
Mr. Brown's heart joined his feet in sinking protest as he went on his errand. If Frogface had tunneled so far that he needed a yardstick to measure his distance by, there was something more than wind in his tunnel—and he had gone too far for Marmaduke to dream further of leading any Grand Lodge parades with Caroline. In which case—

Nausea, numbness, and falling of the arches swept over Mr. Brown's body as visions of Caroline and her oversized parent swept over his mind. What a little bitters and loose language could do to a boy was staggering in prospect!

SNATCHING the yardstick, when it was finally, reluctantly brought, Mr. Reeves squeezed himself back into his hard-dug burrow, to emerge again at length with the look of triumph on his face that, Mr. Brown recalled bitterly, had always heretofore preceded the backfiring of one of his grandiose schemes in an associate's face.

"Aint did so much work in a year, but I aint mind workin' when I gits de results!" Mr. Reeves prefaced Mr.

Brown's bad news. "'Sociate wid me long enough, Ma'maduck, and maybe you gits bright in de brains, too. Yardstick say I's jest three feets from freedom now! And leadin' de pee-rade. Like I been aimin' to do ever since I turns my brains loose on de job. I aint no man to disap'int de women; when dey craves a Rajah dey craves a *Rajah*—not no ant in de red-ink bottle! I finishes de dirt-diggin' tomorrer, and be right smack up to dat brick wall in de gully den. You stop by in de mawnin' and git yo' final instructions. Aint aim to have you gum up nothin' else wid yo' dumbness dis late in de diggin'. —And feel like to me my rabbit-foot kind of flop over oneasy in my pocket couple of times here lately."



Broylesville hadn't seen such a day since the planing-mill burned—as the parade swept ear-splittingly onward between thronged sidewalks.

Again it was morning, the morning of the ninth. Frogface Reeves arose wearily to greet it. Every fat and flabby muscle protested, but success was in sight. Besides, he had to greet and instruct his serf, Marmaduke—a serf so bowed with thoughts of an embittered past and a gloom-filled future, as to display all the dash and animation of a sick oyster with sprained ankles.

"Meet me wid de Royal Rajah's red robe at de bottom de gully about daylight in de mawnin'," directed Frogface. "Right at de place whar I gwine bust through de brick wall into de ravine and freedom. Beca'ze last night I come right up to de wall!"

Mr. Brown closed his eyes in anguish—and saw that wall. In his ears seemingly rang the derisive laughter of the populace; on his neck burned the hot breath of Caroline's disappointed and pursuing parent.

"Sho is pull me down," quarreled Mr. Reeves at sight of Marmaduke's lethargy, "havin' to have all de brains in de lodge, and den do all de diggin' too! You aint double-cross me, tippin' nobody off, is you?"

"Aint double-cross nobody," moaned Mr. Brown, "cep'n my ownse'f."

"Lives longer dat way!" observed Mr. Reeves significantly. "Trouble wid you, you swallers a whole mess of big notions 'long wid dem bitters, and gits to braggin' around too free amongst de women. Dat's whut'll come out on you tomorrer when I's leadin' de pee-rade and you's leadin' de big laugh on yo'se'f. Y'ought to use yo' head, like me, to git yo'se'f out yo' jam."

Marmaduke's sufferings only grew the more visible. The morrow would reveal that love and liquor had made a liar out of him; but all that Caroline was going to recall was that lying had made a monkey out of him—just prior to her father making a hospital case out of him!

"Whut you gwine do now, runt?" Mr. Reeves restored his mind to his business.

"Meet you in dat gully wid de red Rajah robe when you comes bustin' through dat brick wall dar," rehearsed Marmaduke in the dullness of final despair. "Den I gwine start in accumulatin' about foah miles' start on de Queen's papa, dat's whut. And I hopes de jail-house gent'man cotch you, or you choke yo'se'f to death on a rock yit!"

"Let nothin' happen to *me* whut I can track back to *you*," rumbled Mr. Reeves, "and you gwine wind up *under* a rock—wid yo' name and couple of dates carved on it!"

DOWNTOWN that evening, Broylesville streets were filling; but Marmaduke was using alleys. By bus, train, and truck excited Grand Lodge delegates were pouring into the town. Formal proceedings began the following morning with the big, long-looked-forward-to parade.

But meantime, all was uproar and curiosity at the unheard-of absence from view of the Royal Rajah. Usually, on such occasions, Frogface Reeves could be heard for two miles and seen for one. This time, it was noted, even his satellite Marmaduke was missing. Speculation buzzed, and a darkened jail-house issued no intimations, save the sound of muffled digging; steel striking on brick, the muffled breathing of a fat man at hard subterranean labor.

And, above it all, the public knowledge that—come what might—Royal Rajah Reeves would be there when the hour struck! No obstacle had ever yet held him back when opportunity to ride in robes of red even half-presented itself; a comely Queen beside him, and upon him the eyes of every colored woman able to walk. It was a

knowledge all too bitterly shared by Marmaduke Brown, betrayed by bitters, torn asunder by a tunnel, facing a Queen's father—his new beloved's father—if he failed her; the wrath of Frogface, if he didn't.

Sounds that might be ascribed to some tortured tomcat issued between the tonsils of the wracked Marmaduke. Double-crossing Frogface—come what might—was the only alternative. A tip-off to the jail-gentleman, in the early morning with all its terrors and consequences, his only hope! Dark deed in the darkness—

Morning, at last—morning of the tenth! Loud and long blared Latham Hooper's second-hand calliope beneath a smiling sky. Banners waved. Expectant and ecstatic, the populace lined the curbs.

Nearer came the band-strewn procession, the great parade that was to open the Grand Lodge convocation. Higher and higher above the *pop-pop-popping* of a coal-colored grand marshal, leading the way officially on a motorcycle in the uniform of a color-blind Swiss admiral borrowed from a movie doorman, roared the cheering of the crowds. Broylesville hadn't seen such a day since the planing-mill burned!

A visiting band threw itself into redoubled efforts to drown the cheering. The calliope blew a cylinder-head in valiant effort to outdo the band. Headed by the now half-hysterical motorcycle admiral, the parade swept ear-splittingly onward between the thronged sidewalks.

Then the Royal Rajah! Dazed, dizzied, swollen, blinking beside his Queen, on a grocery-truck. At which ennobling sight, crippled calliope, mules, mongrels, and spectators outdid themselves in welcoming uproar—forming a vast background of sound against which the royal couple could converse at the top of their voices without danger of being overheard.

"Whut all dat squallin' I hears down round de jail-house, along 'bout daylight dis mawnin'?" the resplendent Caroline was making royal small-talk between bows to the populace, airy wavings of her hand toward a mountain of a man who strode watchfully, grimly in the gutter opposite her truck.

"*Dat?*" A Rajah was regal in his robes of red, regal in his disdain. "Why, dat wa'n't nothin'. Jest a big-mouthed boy in dar, name' Frawgface—"

"But whut he squallin' *about*, Mammaduck? Sound like he wuz sick enough to die—"

"He wuz!"

"Somebody done double-cross him?"

A royal grin overspread the once-mournful face of Marmaduke Brown. Airily, audaciously even, he waved to the big darky striding grimly, watchfully alongside in the gutter. Proudly he looked at his love, Caroline the Queen, beside him; at the cheering populace; and beneath the royal robe a vest-button popped under sudden surge and strain.

"Aint double-cross nobody—aint have to!" Thus the virtuous Marmaduke. "It's jest brains whut done it."

"*Brains?*"

"Frawgface's brains, whut he all time braggin' about. Sets to diggin' hisself out de jail-house. Digs 'bout a week, but when he comes to de brick wall he been aimin' for, to bust through it into de gully—"

A Rajah paused, rocking with uproarious recollections.

"You means he cain't git through?"

"Yeah, he git through it—he git out of de jail-house all right, but dem brains he brags about got him mixed up, diggin' around de big rock. So, when he busts through dat gully wall, it *aint* de gully wall—it's de jail-house wall! De squallin' start when old Frawgface find he'd done *rounded dat rock too fur*—and dug hisse'f right on back into jail again!"

REAL

In this department five of your fellow readers tell of the most exciting episodes of their lives. (For details of our prize offer, see page 1). First an army aviator tells of the disastrous day when a hurricane struck a Texas flying-field

Pilot's Hazard

By **Frank Morgan Mercer**

MY closest shave in a personal meeting with the watchful gentleman wielding the scythe was while I was a member of the U. S. Flying Cadet Corps at Brooks Field in the September class of '25. Never will I forget November 10th of that year. Nor am I the only one. I certainly came closer to changing a pair of earthly wings for a pair of heavenly ones—or a pitchfork—than at any time before or since.

In those ancient flying days of six years ago the Jenny still held sway as the training ship at Brooks, and the P. T. 1 and the T. P. 1 had not yet been adopted as the official training ships. Six cadets were customarily assigned to an instructor for the six months' primary course.

The usual procedure was for each instructor to fly an individual student under dual control for ten hours, thirty minutes a hop, always in the mornings. Except in rare cases the student must solo in ten hours. The afternoons were given over to the intricacies of ground-school and technical instruction. If the budding birdman failed to show any great aptitude in either ground-school or flying, he was weeded out swiftly in those first hectic weeks.

I drew Lieutenant Dick Harmer, one of the best pilots in the service, and as fine an instructor as ever socked a student, frozen on the stick, with a Pyrex.

On the ninth day of November Lieutenant Harmer, through some accidental delay, was unable to take his class in the morning, but left a notation on the bulletin board to report that afternoon at one o'clock. Those of us left, three out of the original half-dozen, reported at that time, all on solo.

Our regular solo ship, 219, had been used in the morning by another officer for his men.

After our solo periods the three of us walked back, a little late, to "Kay-det" quarters. As I entered the old rambling building, goggles in hand, Bill Rand, a particular chum of mine, rose from his cot, and gazed at me.

"That you, boy?" he queried wonderingly.

"In the flesh," I admitted. "What's so marvelous about that?" I suspected him of leading up to some wise-crack.

Then a dozen of the outfit, seeing me, rushed over, crowded about me, and pushed and prodded me.

EXPERIENCES

"Can't be true! Gosh, he looks all right! Some mistake—aw, you can't kill an expert barracks flyer! Just as beautiful as ever, he is, he is! Look at those eyes, those mouth, them teeth!"

"Lay off, fellows," I pleaded. "Enough's enough. What the devil are you birds up to?"

With great solemnity Bill produced a newspaper and held it out, front page toward me.

My eyes caught and held on a large, commanding caption in arresting headlines:

CADET CRASHES INTO WINDMILL NEAR BROOKS FIELD

Early this morning Flying Cadet Morgan Mercer, flying solo, crashed his ship into a windmill near Brooks Field, sustaining two broken ribs and losing a number of front teeth.

Mercer had witnessed a crack-up in which Cadet E. D. Rollins had nosed over in a dead-stick landing, and while circling the wreck, he failed to notice the windmill in the path of flight. His ship struck the upper part of the obstruction and was completely demolished.

Rollins was unhurt.

I gazed about the group astoundedly. I caught myself in the act of feeling to see if my teeth were still there.

What the deuce did it mean? As a party of the first part, if I *had* cracked-up, I was certainly entitled to a complete account of how it happened! And I got it.

Our usual solo ship, 219, had been used by another instructor for his charges that morning. Last of the soloing cadets was Rollins, not officially listed, and piloting the ship on my solo time.

When news of the crack-up came in, the sergeant in charge of line-flying glanced down his list and saw that Cadet Mercer must have that ship in the air—or did have it; so when a reporter from the San Antonio paper called up, he obligingly furnished my name.

And it was a press association dispatch!

I had to hurry and send a telegram to my father and mother, that I still retained my teeth and fatal beauty.

THE tenth of November, 1925.

A clear, oppressive, cloudless Texas morning. Fifty ships on the line warming up. Gas-trucks servicing, grease-monkeys and cadets twisting props, officers talking to students, inspecting ships. Color—life.

I sat in the cockpit of my ship, listed as the first solo man in my unit for the day. On the second ship to my left I glimpsed the ominous glare of a fellow-student, Cadet Smith, as he climbed into the pit. (He and I had been caught fighting the night before).

I revved up the 180 Hisso, which was turning over sweetly. A wave to the mechanic, and he pulled the chocks. I taxied slowly out; one by one planes were taking off, some with instructors, some solo.

As I gave her the gun, I saw Smith's ship already fifty feet up, a little to the right and climbing swiftly. Holding the Jenny close to the ground for two hundred yards, I finally pulled her into a chandelle, trusting to luck that no eagle-eyed instructor noticed the maneuver, and leveled off at the top with ailerons and tail surfaces vibrating.

I pulled her up to a thousand feet. The cloudless sky seemed to have become murky and strangely overcast in an unbelievably short time. Not a breath of air seemed to move, save that created by the ship.

Idly I noticed about two hundred yards away and slightly higher, the number of Smith's plane.

As I began my first wing-over at twelve hundred feet, a "twister" struck—without warning—and with terrific intensity!

There were fifty-four ships in the air that morning at Brooks Field, mostly students on solo.

That gale struck with ninety-mile-an-hour force. In split seconds I saw Smith's ship go hurtling down through the writhing air-currents and crack-up far below in a terrific sliding smash! I even saw a dim figure come out of the twisted mass and stagger away.

Then the full blast of the hurricane struck me.

Like the playful hand of a destructive giant, the irresistible force flung the ship first up, then down. No power of wide-open motor or man's control could guide that ship in the swirling, Titanic maelstrom of nature's making! Quicker than thought, the plane spun with devastating motion, down, down, down.

I tried to kick the stick sidewise so it wouldn't get me in the tummy. No use. Instinctively I threw back my goggles and put my other hand down to my safety-belt.

With a blast of unleashed fury the mighty hurricane tossed the ship over on its back, and in the same split-second we struck—upside down!

My goggles were torn away by invisible hands. The ship seemed to disintegrate about me. A sharp, searing pain came into my side, across my face. Darkness blotted out the hurricane and ship and pain—a merciful darkness.

That's all. Save that seventeen other ships went down that day that couldn't "ride her out." And the old Dark Angel stuck around my hospital cot two weeks before he regretfully departed. My front teeth are not my own, and three ribs will never be the same again.

Flyer's luck? Maybe. I only know it's quite a thrill to meet Old Man Death riding on a hurricane, and have him try to push you into China, upside down!

Alaska Pearls

A rumor of wealth from fresh-water pearls in Alaska led this adventurous couple to an all too exciting expedition.

By

Frederick W. Cobb

WE were prospecting in Alaska, as we had been for seven years. But that summer it was not gold we were after. It was pearls, lustrous pearls, pink, white, or black.

That such gems were to be found in Alaska had not been known to us until an old Russian woman told of having had half a teacupful at one time. She had taken them from mussels which the Indians brought her from various lakes. But she had no idea of their value, and let her children play marbles with them.

Some years afterward, when she was living four hundred miles away from those lakes, she found out that she had allowed a small fortune to slip through her fingers. A fur-buyer, stopping on business, happened to notice a gleaming black pellet among the buttons she was pouring from a bag. It was about the size of a blueberry. He offered her five hundred dollars for it, and she quickly accepted. She felt greatly injured when she learned a year later that he had sold her pretty marble for five thousand dollars.

We believed she was telling the truth, and her story was backed up by her husband, who was in charge of a post for a trading-company. We knew that those lakes were still there and we determined to explore them.

My partner was my wife. She was strong, fond of outdoor life, a good shot, and a good hand in a boat.

Our field of operations was the great flat country of the lower Innoko river, where there are hundreds of lakes, large or small. Our means of travel was a thirty-three-foot poling boat, narrow, double-ended, and easily sent along by two pairs of oars. Our outfit included a twelve-by-fourteen tent with five-foot-high walls, a supply of food for four months, and an extensive outing equipment.

Behind our big boat we towed a small skiff which was light enough for us to boost up the high river-bank and drag over the grass to any lake we wanted to prospect. And, of course, we had oyster rakes to dredge the mussels from their muddy beds, for fresh-water mussels do not cling to rocks as do their salt-water ancestors.

Before we left the native village of Holikachaket at the mouth of the Innoko the white trader there warned us to keep an eye on the Deminti bunch of Indians. This tribe included several young men who did whatever the old man ordered. Though they trapped few skins and cut no steamboat wood, it was significant that they were always well supplied with money. Also, in the summer they seldom bought food. Where did they get flour, sugar, tea, milk? And here lay the threat to us, our friend thought. For in recent summers a number of men had left the Iditarod gold diggings with considerable sums of money and provisions in their rowboats, and had never been seen again. On the snakelike windings of the Iditarod, which enters the Innoko near the Deminti village, it was easy for killers to lie in the dry grass on a knoll near the edge of the water and ambush their victims. Approaching boatmen could be seen at a distance, for the flats were low and without trees. There would be only two or three rifle-shots. The unsuspecting miners would have no chance to put up a fight. The ooze of some gully would make safe graves, and the boat could be burned.

In my Alaska experience I had come in contact with many Indians, and I thought I understood them pretty well. Neither my wife nor I was worried.

Still, I reflected, a rifle makes one man about as good as another—and even very much better—in a surprise attack. And the more I thought of the risk to which I was exposing my wife, the more I became convinced that I ought to throw some kind of scare into them before we moved about much in their neighborhood.

By easy stages we worked our way up the sluggish Innoko—a beautiful stretch of blue water, about a third of a mile wide, with willow-fringed banks, and never far from spruce- and birch-covered hills on one side or the other. In that silence, seldom broken save by cries of birds or rustling wind among green leaves, it seemed impossible that we were in any danger.

After going about fifty miles we saw white tents ahead, eight or ten of them. We had no doubt it was the Deminti summer encampment. According to Indian custom, they had moved out of their musty winter cabins and dropped downriver a couple of miles, where they could catch plenty of fish to dry for themselves and their dogs.

As we drew closer we could see children running about. Two women crouched close to the water's-edge and we supposed they were cleaning fish. A group of adults appeared to be observing us. A dog got our wind and began to

howl. At once the whole band of dogs, about thirty, set up a *ki-yi-ing*, and strained at their chains.

We had already decided to camp near by and look them over. So we chose a site about three hundred yards below the village, on a high bank among cottonwoods. At the end of an hour our roomy canvas home was established.

MY wife was building a fire and I was chopping wood when two canoes full of fish came slipping along noiselessly close to shore. The young Indians came upstream; they must have been lifting their traps in the mouth of some slough when we passed, but had concealed themselves as completely as a duck hiding in marsh grass. As they paddled past our camp they merely glanced at us —their eager eyes were taking stock of our supplies.

Soon my wife had a pudding steaming. I was only running errands to the boat, so we had leisure to observe the activities of the natives, and took turns using our binoculars, which brought the village close. The two youths did not bother to lift the baskets of fish from their canoes. This they left to the women. A pack of children and a woman launched a heavy skiff amidst laughter and shrill cries, and paddled with half a dozen others across the river to gather driftwood. A woman set out in a canoe to help them. A baby cried, and a girl ran into a tent to attend to it. Then a man slid his canoe into the water and paddled down our way.

He came ashore in front of our camp. He did not smile nor speak, though he landed only thirty feet from where we stood on top of the bank. Neither did we. While climbing the slope he was so busy looking at our boatload that he fell flat. But his serious aspect did not change.

Only after reaching the top did he recognize our presence by saying gruffly, "Hallo, there!"

I responded stiffly, and we awaited his next move.

"Plenty grub!" he remarked, more to himself than to us. He had seen eggs, potatoes, oranges, apples, dates, and two slices of ham on our table. With open curiosity he gazed at the high roof of our tent, at the washstand my wife had rigged, and at our backed camp-stools. Brazenly he surveyed my wife from head to foot. My lean hundred and eighty pounds he passed up with a contemptuous glance. We merely watched him.

He was short, broad and bow-legged. His flat face was set in stern lines, but his eyes were shifty. He moved alertly and undoubtedly had great physical strength. In the sheath, fastened to his belt, was a bone-handled dirk. The blade was very thick and I surmised that he had fashioned it from a big file.

With no regard at all for our presence, he walked into the tent. I was close behind him. After a look around he asked almost exultantly: "Huh? Got no gun? Where's rifle? Shotgun?"

We did have a few guns. Within reach of my hand under a newspaper was my .45 pistol. Our .405 rifle and our shotgun were under a fold of the bed canvas. Outside, leaning against a tree was my wife's .22 rifle—that is, it had been there, but soon I noticed that she was holding it ready for use.

However, I did not bother to show him our arsenal. I was enraged by the evident purpose of his visit. He might as well have told us that he had come to see if we would be easy to kill! I advanced and crowded him out.

He sensed my belligerency and tried childishly to explain his interest in our firearms by asking, "No ketchum ducks, you? Mebbe goose?"

"You poor slob!" I sneered. "I get my game by putting salt on their tails. That's the big white-man medicine." I waved my hands as if scattering salt, and my gesture happened to be in the direction of his village.

Just then we heard a scream. It was a woman's voice and told of danger. Deminti leaped for his canoe and zigzagged furiously for home. All the dogs jumped about. Men's voices shouted commands. The wood-getters piled into their skiff and paddled and screeched.

My wife was the first to make out the cause of the excitement: It was a tent on fire. We could see hurrying figures bringing water. Others were kneeling as if to reach under the tent walls to rescue whatever they could.

I thought it a good time to visit the village and see what the other men were like. As for the fire, I supposed it had started from one of the smudges they kept smoking to drive away mosquitoes. So I picked my way leisurely among the willows along the river-bank.

As I approached I could see Deminti talking excitedly to a group. I guessed by the faces turned my way that they were discussing me. But when I got as far as the first tent, the members of the group had scattered in various directions.

"Wakoh!" I saluted, in my best Eskimo accent. The two squatting women I saluted did not lift their heads. I observed, however, that they reached out arms to draw their youngsters close, as if to protect them.

I went on to the partly burned tent. Half-grown children ran from my presence. On all sides I was greeted only with scowls. A young man ignored me by pretending to chop wood. The other men were now out of sight.

Suddenly I understood their hostility and fear, and I chuckled. When I reached home I told my wife that they believed I had burned their tent by magic.

That I had guessed correctly was proved within an hour by the arrival of a lad bringing a large white-fish. He said his father sent it. We accepted it as a peace-offering, and gave the boy an orange for himself and a package of dates to divide among the other children.

Not long after the lad arrived home, old Deminti himself came to call. But he had changed greatly since his first visit. Now he exuded cordiality. Smiles wrinkled his hard face. And he paid attention to nothing but me.

"Strong medicine, you!" he exclaimed admiringly, as he pointed a finger at my breast. Then, grinning ingratiatingly, he asked, "How?"

I supposed he wanted to know how I made my medicine. Naturally I could not tell him, so I shook my head and tried to act the part of a possessor of a great secret. He grimaced some more and gave us to understand by gestures, smirks and a few words that he was our everlasting friend. This suited us better than bullets, and we sent him home with half a dozen highly prized hot red onions in his pockets.

WE stayed in that neighborhood a month. Almost every day they brought us a fish. They seemed ready to do anything for us. When we told them we wanted the entrance to a big lake cleared to let our boats through, they worked like beavers to lift their woven-willow fish fences. We were three days at the far end of that isolated lake. We visited many other places that appeared ideal for a massacre. But not once did a native come near without first announcing his presence by a shout.

The following winter, just as a blizzard was breaking, a young Holikachaket Indian sought refuge in our cabin out in the hills. We sheltered and fed him for two days.

In the intimacy of our small quarters he talked of things not often entrusted to white ears. He told us that all the old-fashioned Indians were afraid of my "medicine." It was a good thing, he said, that Deminti found out how strong it was, or we would not be alive now.

Then, though professing to be quite above superstition himself, he asked me how I had set that tent on fire!

A Man Hunt

By

A. E. Sterling

An officer of the New York State Police plays hide and seek with a murderer, corners him—and deals with a pitchfork.

AT the time this episode occurred I was stationed with a trooper named Collins, at the little town of Boston, some thirty miles out of Buffalo, doing outpost duty in the New York State Troopers. We were living at the inn, and on the evening I have in mind I sat in the tiny lobby and absently regarded a description of a wanted man that had come in that day. The man's name was Sam Latona; he was an Italian who was sought by the Buffalo police for the shooting of his wife a few days previously. The bulletin warned all troopers to be on the lookout for this dangerous criminal.

As I sat there, I was startled by an exclamation from a woman who sat in another of the lobby chairs. She was reading an article in the Buffalo paper, and suddenly she pointed to a photograph which accompanied it.

"Why, I believe I saw this man today!" she exclaimed involuntarily.

I rose and bent over the paper. To my surprise the photo was identical with the one on the poster which I held in my hand. Instantly I was all interest. "Tell me about it," I suggested.

"This man," the woman began, "appeared at my mother's house this morning and asked for something to eat. His appearance was vicious; he somehow looked like a man who is being hunted. I became frightened, and slammed the door. He then went away."

"Did you see which way he came from, or which way he went when he left?" I asked. But there she could not help me; for, womanlike, she had immediately pulled down the window-shades, she said.

I went to bed in a thoughtful frame of mind. I told myself that probably there was nothing in it, that the woman had simply imagined that her visitor resembled the wanted man. Still, the notice from Headquarters had stated that the Buffalo police had combed the Italian section of the city without success, and were convinced that Latona had made his escape from the city. Before I went to sleep I had arrived upon a plan, and consequently set my alarm clock for three o'clock in the morning.

Promptly at three I awakened and jumping out of bed, hurriedly dressed. I knew that my partner Collins would object violently to being hauled forth from his warm bed on what he would consider a wild-goose chase. Accordingly, I decided to use a little strategy. I rushed over to his bed and shook him roughly. As he opened sleepy eyes, I shouted: "Hurry up, get dressed! Some one here in town has been shot; we've got to go right out!"

That brought him out in a hurry, and while he was hustling into his uniform I went down and began to saddle our horses. I was acquainted with the bad condition of the country roads, and was convinced we could make better time with the horses than with a car.

By the time Collins got downstairs I had the horses saddled and ready. He stared at them in surprise.

"Why the horses?" he inquired. "Can't we walk—right here in town?"

"It's pretty muddy," I soothed him; "no use for us to get all plastered!"

Not until we were outside the village did I break the news to Collins as to the real nature of our errand. He was disgusted, and I blush to recall some of the things he said about my mental equipment. But after a time he calmed down, and we steadily plodded on through the seemingly unlimited gumbo mud. Our mounts sank nearly to their knees in the viscous stuff, and a steady, cold drizzle appeared to make the patrol even less comfortable.

As the first farms appeared, we began to reënact Paul Revere's ride. At each place we would ride into the yard, always to be greeted by a snarling rush of dogs. To avoid being bitten we remained in the saddles and rode directly to the back door. In response to repeated knocks tousled heads would finally appear from second-story windows—never at the door. The muzzles of double-barreled shotguns preceded some of the heads.

After the farmer had quieted the clamor of the dogs, I would shout up at him: "Have you seen any strangers around lately? Do you know of anyone who has just hired a new man?"

In every case after repeated "*heys?*" the reply would be no. The head would disappear, with a parting black look at us, and we'd ride on.

We progressed several miles in this fashion, and stopped at probably eight or ten farmhouses. I was getting discouraged, and my partner was more than discouraged. Finally I said: "We'll stop at just one more place, and if that turns out to be a blank, we'll go back."

At the next farm I repeated my questions. The awakened farmer replied in the negative to my queries, and I picked up the reins to depart. Suddenly he called:

"Hey, wait a minute! Seems I do recall, now that I

think, that George Tech went by from the factory this mornin' with a stranger ridin' on the wagon beside him."

"All right," I said eagerly. "Now how do we get to George Tech's place?"

The farmer began a jumbled series of verbal right and left turns. I hastily dug a pencil and scrap of paper from my pocket, and held the paper on the saddle pommel. Each time my informer made a right turn I would move the pencil to the right—or a left turn, to the left. In this way I succeeded in making a rough map which we later consulted by the light of matches as we rode.

BY the time we rode into the yard presumably belonging to George Tech, dawn was coming over the hills. A dense fog had rolled down into the valley, promising that full visibility would be late in arriving that morning.

A man responded to our knocks and admitted that he was George Tech.

"Have you a new hired man?" I asked him.

"Sure," he replied, "just hired him yesterday mornin'. Why?"

"I'd like to see him," I said. "Where is he?"

"Why, he's out in the barn, doin' chores. I'll go get him!"

"You'll do nothing of the sort," said I. "This man may be wanted for murder!"

I'll never forget the ludicrous haste with which the man bolted into the house. You couldn't have dragged him into the barn, then! He proceeded to bolt the door and draw the window-shades.

A problem now confronted us. We could tie the horses and both enter the barn; but if there was any shooting they would be sure to break their reins and bolt, leaving us stranded miles in the country. On the other hand, if one of us stayed to hold the reins, the horses might rear but would not break loose; horses are always greatly comforted in time of panic by the presence of a man they know. As I was the senior trooper, and nominally in charge of the patrol, I felt that it devolved on me to go into the barn.

"If you hear any shooting," I told Collins, "you can probably tell who is firing by the sound of the explosions—if this fellow is Latona, he isn't apt to be carrying a gun as big as a .45. If he breaks away and makes for the woods behind the barn, bring the horses and follow him. I'll catch my horse and join you."

The next moment I was on my cautious way to the big barn. As I reached the door, I unsnapped my heavy pistol from the lanyard, and slipped it into my sheepskin coat pocket. Then I edged through the door.

My heart was beating like a trip-hammer as I flattened myself against the wall and peered down the dim interior of the barn. It was a large building. Against the two walls were long rows of stanchions, in which were cows placidly eating hay. Between the two rows of cattle was a concrete alleyway about ten feet wide.

At the farther end of the building I could make out the indistinct figure of a man, busily engaged in wheeling fertilizer to the rear door. At that distance I could not be sure that he was the man I wanted, and I decided to take no chances.

Set at intervals along the alleyway were huge wooden posts, about eighteen inches thick, which supported the roof. I knew that I must avoid being seen by the cows as well as by the fugitive, for cows have a way, when startled by a stranger, of heaving prodigious snorts, and trampling noisily about. Accordingly, I began to steal cautiously down the length of the barn, trying to keep behind the posts and dodging ahead to the next one when my quarry had his back turned. Everything went fine until I noticed one old spotted cow who had an eye on me, and was regarding me suspiciously.

"Don't sell me out, old girl!" I prayed fervently. The cow seemed to decide to give me the benefit of the doubt, for beyond a little nervous snuffing she remained quiet.

I finally reached a spot from which I could make out the man's features quite distinctly. But what really decided me that this was Sam Latona was the way in which he was working—he showed himself to be inexperienced at work of that kind by waiting each time until he had loaded his wheelbarrow before turning it toward the door. A genuine farmhand would have known enough to turn his wheelbarrow around before loading it.

I decided my best chance lay in getting close enough to Latona to be able to reach him. If he should take alarm while I was still some distance away, he could duck in between the cows, and I would be unable to see him. From his cover he would have a fine shot at me, while I would be helpless. I hoped in this way to avoid any shooting, as I certainly did not want to kill any valuable stock, to say nothing of a care for my own skin.

I approached within ten feet of Latona; then, as I had passed the last post, I stepped boldly out and cat-footed up on him on tiptoe. Only about four feet of space separated us, when I saw him suddenly peer back as he bent over to lift a forkful of fertilizer. His burning eyes glared into mine through the space between his arm and body. The next instant he had whirled with catlike rapidity, and was presenting the sharp tines of his pitchfork at my stomach, not twelve inches away.

My stomach seemed to shrink to the size of a nickel as I gazed into the glaring eyes of the murderer. I dared not make a move of any kind, for I was sure he would thrust, and at that distance he could hardly miss.

I looked down at his hands; the knuckles stood out, a dead white—proving the strength of the grip he had on the fork. Luckily I had my hand in the side pocket of my sheepskin coat, wherein reposed my heavy pistol. I knew that even if I succeeded in shooting, I could hardly hope to down Latona before he had spitted me on that deadly fork.

Then, without knowing just why I did it,—for my gun was a double-action weapon, which cocked and fired merely by a pressure on the trigger,—I pulled back the hammer with my thumb. The action made two ominous clicks. The tiny sounds were distinctly audible in the dark silence, and they proved just what was needed to break the man's nerve. I saw his eyes flicker to my pocket, back to my face, then return fascinated to the pocket again. Not a word had been spoken. Suddenly Latona dropped the fork to the floor.

"Alla right!" he said shakily. "You gotta me!"

WIPING the perspiration from my face, I frisked him and started for the door. As I emerged into the growing daylight,—and it looked mighty good to me, I can say!—I met Collins. I had been gone so long, and there had been such utter silence, that he had come to the conclusion Latona had waylaid me and knocked me unconscious. He had persuaded the farmer to come out and hold the reins, and had come to my rescue.

We held the prisoner at the farmhouse and telephoned the Buffalo police department, whence two detectives were at once dispatched in a fast police-car—and in an hour's time we were rid of our prisoner. At this writing Sam Latona is serving a sentence of twenty years to life in Dannemora prison.

Though I was commended by my superior officers for the job, to this day my stomach contracts at the sight of a pitchfork!

The Pointing Bone

Prospecting for opals in the Australian desert this reader and his chum barely escaped with their lives from the blacks.

By

Howell Evans

IF, when one is discussing the price of opal with a jeweler in Adelaide, South Australia, the aborigines happen to be mentioned, the jeweler will probably dismiss the dusky denizens of the interior with a shrug of contempt. Never having been farther north than a pleasant Sunday afternoon auto-ride, he is guided by popular opinion—that the black is a cowardly, harmless, animal-like creature, whom no white man need worry about. But—

Three years ago, my "cobber" Bill Dixon and I were "finding" opal in the Everard Range. We were camped at the spring that started the Alberga River, that brackish creek which wends an uninteresting course eastward to the Eyre Lakes. Although dry for years at a time, water could be obtained in the holes in the river-bed by digging a few inches. We had followed the river out from Oodnadatta, depending on this supply. Agreeably surprised to find the spring and quite a length of creek before the water disappeared into the loose sand, we made our permanent camp just above it.

We usually put in the time between shearing-seasons at the opal fields in the Stuart Range. But the previous year we had heard about the rich but scattered and almost unknown fields in the Everard. The water just below us was the drinking-place for all the animals, and birds for miles around. We were lucky in this respect, because when it is 120 degrees in the shade—and there is very little shade in those parts—meat does not keep fresh for long.

Before the blacks came to camp about two hundred yards below us, we were feeling pleased with ourselves, and at peace with the world in general; the opal we had to share would fetch about eight hundred pounds.

They were the usual type of blacks—naked, of filthy habits, and smelling to high heaven.

They did not pay much attention to us while we had our evening meal, and inspected the hobbles on our "neddies"—we had two saddle-hacks, and a pack-horse grazing in the surrounding scrub. But when we had our pipes going, a half-caste boy came over to our fire, and asked for some tobacco. We told the boy that he should be in a mission.

"Yeh," the boy agreed. "Mission good-oh. But Old Man fetch um away, make um help hunt."

"Why Old Man fetch you away?" I inquired.

"His 'Gin' my mother," was the simple reply.

Bill gave the youngster about half a plug of tobacco, but he seemed to be in no hurry to return to the tribe.

In the firelight I could see that his back was covered with old welts and scars. Probably his life was no bed of roses amongst the full-blooded blacks.

A figure suddenly appeared behind him. The natives move like that—noiselessly they seem to come and go, as though they are a part of the scenery. Without uttering a word, the newcomer, a short heavy native, grabbed at the tobacco. He was the boy's Old Man, the one who had sent him for it in the first place. He was evidently irate at having to wait for the tobacco, and proceeded to give the boy a dressing-down. The youngster, however, put up a good defense, and at first we enjoyed the catch-as-catch-can exhibition. But when the native put his foot into the edge of the fire, he gave the boy a thump in the ribs that put him out for the count. To our horror, the man grasped one of the boy's hands, and tried to thrust it into the fire—to balance his own burn, I suppose.

This was against all the principles that either Bill or I ever had, and Bill got in a very neat uppercut which toppled the black over as cold as mutton. The remainder of the tribe had collected, and formed a circle round the edge of the firelight; so to be on the safe side, I dived into our "humpy" and got the shotgun.

The boy was the first to regain his feet, and catching Bill's hand he incoherently jabbered his thanks.

At the same time he warned us: "Him make it magic. Him witch doctor. You watch out!" Then he dived through the ring of blacks, before the older man had scrambled up to stand—swaying dizzily, and with his clenched fist held above his head—calling on his gods for revenge. Finally he strode off to his own camp, followed by his tribe, whose looks in our direction were the reverse of friendly.

Next morning, Bill discovered that our water-bag had

been poisoned. He took a swig as soon as he threw the blankets off, and was stricken with violent pains in the stomach. I gave him some water fresh from the spring; this made him vomit, and thus get rid of the poison. After two or three doses, with plenty of mustard added, he washed his insides clean, and the pain diminished. But it was a close call. If he had had his breakfast first, so that the poison had something to work on, he would have had no chance.

We did not go out for opal that day, and the camp was left unguarded for only about five minutes all day—that was when Bill went for water while I was away after the horses. Yet somehow two adders were put into our blankets. Luckily we both had the bushman's habit of opening our beds right over before getting into them. The adder is one of Australia's deadliest snakes, and their discovery made us think seriously of our position.

THAT night we took turns in keeping watch. But nothing happened. In the morning we held a council, and decided it was time for us to move. But Bill wanted to try out a spur of the ranges that promised a good return, and thought he would put in the day there while I packed up ready to return to civilization. When he returned in the late afternoon, he had a fair showing of opal, and reported that although he had not seen any blacks, rocks had come rolling down from the higher slopes on three separate occasions. Luckily they had made enough noise to warn him in ample time.

After an uneventful night, we saddled the two hacks, packed the third horse, and started off at sun-up. The whole tribe watched us go and gave vent to their feelings with derisive, insulting shouts. We had covered about ten miles when we heard a disturbance behind us. The whole tribe was overtaking us, and at first we thought that they intended a frontal attack. But after a few minutes we could see that they were pursuing the half-caste boy, who had got a lead of about half a mile. He got to us only one jump ahead of their boomerangs.

When he had recovered his breath sufficiently to speak, he implored us to take him with us to Oodnadatta. Showing us the fresh welts across his back as his reason for leaving the tribe, he said that he wanted to get into some mission, "where Old Man him no come."

In view of the threatening attitude of the tribe, which stood in a bunch well out of range, we could not leave him to their mercy. In any case he would have probably stayed in our company, even if we didn't want him. We did not doubt our ability to protect him from all the blacks in Australia, and he clinched the matter when he told us that as he knew all the native water-holes, he could take us direct to our destination, saving a week's march.

We called it a bargain, and the boy took the lead in an easterly direction. The blacks moved on a parallel line, and easily kept pace. He took us to a good "soak" for the first night's camp, and we let the horses graze until the sun went down, but tethered them for the night.

After darkness had set in the natives held a "corroboree." The weird sounds sent involuntary shivers through us as we sat by our fire, gazing into the surrounding shadows. One long *"coo-ee"* echoed over the sandy plain, and then came a long harangue in a singsong tone. It had a disastrous effect on our guide. His eyes rolled, his jaw hung slack, and he started rocking himself on his heels as though in agony.

"What's stung you?" Bill wanted to know.

"Point um bone—point um bone!" was all the boy could gasp. The white half of his make-up had disappeared under the flood of superstition—he was all native now. Both of us had heard of the bone-pointing ceremony before, but no white man has actually seen it done. Apparently the witch doctor juggles a handful of bones, among them one from a human being. With appropriate incantation he casts down before him the loose bones, and if the human bone points toward any particular enemy, that man dies in a few days.

Being white, we would not allow black magic to worry us, and after a lot of fervent swearing, and appeals to his white half, we managed after a while to cheer the boy up somewhat. But he remained very subdued.

The next morning we got away early. The boy ate very little breakfast, and we noticed that all the spring had gone out of his stride. During the morning the tribe kept at a distance, as they had the preceding day. But after the midday rest, we put the boy up onto the pack-horse, and made better time. We saw with no little satisfaction that we were leaving the blacks behind, and hoped that they would give us a rest. But not long after dark we saw their fires spring up about a mile away. Although we would have liked to shoot the whole tribe, we knew we had no chance of that—they would be scattered into the scrub long before we could get near their fire.

We stood guard by turns again, but in spite of our precautions, some of them crept amongst the horses. Bill, who was sentry at the time, saw nothing suspicious until the two hacks fell down, kicking and making a ghastly whistling noise. The blacks had cut the jugular veins of both! Bill's shots after the shadowy figures woke me up with a jerk. We tried to fetch a couple of them down, but the noise of their passage through the scrub soon ceased, and after that we had nothing to guide us, while the blacks were at home in the dark clumps of mulga.

Friday morning we started off on foot. Unaccustomed to foot-slogging, both Bill and myself, were in poor shape by midday. The loose sand working into our boots soon had blisters throbbing, and when we took our boots off, the heat of the sand seemed to burn the tender skin. The tribe could easily keep pace with us now; in fact, some of them must have gone on ahead, because when we got to the water-hole where the boy had intended to camp that night, it was poisoned. The water had the bluish tint of the fish poison that the blacks use, and it was death to drink it.

OUR position was critical. Luckily we had not taken much from the water-bag during the day, so we could have a fairly satisfying drink. But we had none for the horse. We did let him wash his mouth out, but took care not to let him swallow too much.

We decided to go on to the next "soak" that the boy knew of, which he said was only a few hours' trek farther on. So after resting a short while, we set off through the night, taking precautions against a possible ambush by the blacks. We hoped that they would not expect us to go right on, knowing as they did that we were not used to walking.

But they beat us to it. The second "soak" was reached about ten o'clock Saturday morning. Like the one we had left, it had the same blue look about it. To make matters worse, the half-caste boy, who was the cause of our troubles, was getting weaker. He was actually dying by degrees before our eyes, and we could not cure him in any way.

Naturally the blacks moved faster than we could now, and knowing which hole we must make for next, could get on ahead, take enough for their own needs, and poison the remainder. They could keep on doing this indefinitely. Clumps of mulga and smoke-bush, covering the surrounding country, gave the natives plenty of cover, so that we were in desperate straits. *(Please turn to page 1)*

The Charivari

Wherein a lady new-arrived from Russia misunderstands a jovial Western custom and cuts loose with an accurate little pistol.

By

Paul Bailey

THIS incident happened in a little town in southern Idaho, when I was about eighteen. The principal characters live there yet so I am changing details slightly, but anyone from there will recognize them—and the occasion.

When Deep Creek was only a scattered collection of saloons, general merchandise stores, and tent-shacks, Mike Volke came over from Russia and put up a ramshackle frame building which became known from Snake River to the Nevada line as the Ranch House. Mike served good meals and treated everybody square. As a result he prospered, and made many friends among the cattle and sheep men in that part of the country.

One fall, after about five years of business, Mike turned the whole shebang over to his clerk, a kid named Wilson, and left for Russia, to marry the sweetheart waiting there for him.

The next May, Wilson got a letter from Mike saying that he was bringing his bride to Deep Creek, and to be ready for them the following Saturday.

The clerk got ready all right! He spread the news far and wide. For days every rider who left town carried the news to the outlying camps and ranches with a request to come in and meet the newly-weds.

Early Saturday morning the crowd began drifting in. Riders came from as far south as Three Springs, to join the milling throng. The saloons did a big business.

At four o'clock when the local was due in from Minedoka there must have been close to three hundred men packed around the old box-car that did duty as a station. When the train came in sight, there was an occasional popping of six-shooters, but most of the crowd saved their ammunition for the appearance of the bride and groom.

When the train stopped and they climbed off, the crowd let go a salvo of six-shooters and shotguns that would darn' near jar your teeth out! I guess the shooting and the cowboy yells sounded pretty bad to a lady straight from Russia, for she did an about-face and started to climb back on the train. Mike, however, knew what it was all about; he grabbed her and tried to reassure her, but before he got very far with it we rushed them and parted them as is our Western custom in charivaris.

We lead them around to the head of the one street, and mounted them on a couple of burros that an old prospector had in town, and to the accompaniment of much gunfire and yelling escorted them down to the hotel.

When we got to the hotel some of the men put the lady inside, it being the intention of the entire male population to accompany Mike over to the Astor House Bar and drink his health—at Mike's expense, of course.

Just for fun Mike began objecting to buying the drinks. He offered to buy beer, but unanimously the crowd demanded whisky and lots of it. Mike demurred, and somebody flipped a rope over his shoulders. Willing hands slid it up under his arms and threw the end of it over the out-thrust arm that supported the hotel sign, and in a moment Mike was swinging several feet off the ground!

The second story of the hotel was set back a little, making an upstairs porch or balcony along the front of the building. All of us were busy watching and shouting at Mike, when some one yelled: "For God's sake, look out!"

I looked up, and there on the balcony above us stood the new Mrs. Mike. Her face was as white as a sheet, her black eyes were spitting fire, and her black hair had tumbled down around her shoulders in a filmy cloud. She was beautiful—but I could hardly be expected to notice that, for in her hand, pointed down at that close-packed throng, she held a neat little lady-sized revolver!

She did not know what it was all about—she saw only a horde of wide-hatted hoodlums hanging her man—and she was going to save him or die in the attempt.

From Mike's position, he could not look up to see her. The rest of us began to yell at her not to shoot, that we were only having a little fun. But the English language was just so much noise to her. She let out a screech and cut loose with that little nickel-plated smoke-wagon.

The first shot hit Jimmy Donovan—our City Marshal, by the way—square in the stomach. Jimmy took a forty-six-inch belt, and the little bullet burrowed through five or six inches of fat but finally gave up and came to rest without doing any serious damage.

The next shot hit me on top of the head and plowed a three-inch furrow. From the width of it, I think the bullet was traveling sideways when it hit me. At all events I lost interest from then on.

That little gun held five shots, and each bullet hit somebody some place. After the first couple of shots all she could see was the rear ends of cow-punchers going in various directions—which was partly the reason why nobody was killed.

Mike was heartbroken over the whole affair. He called the doctor and had everybody patched up, and then set a barrel of whisky on the hotel porch. The bunch decided that the joke was on them and everybody was happy.

Deep Creek grew up and became respectable. Mrs. Volke is president of the Woman's Club there now—but a few of the old-timers remember when she plugged the Marshal and shot up the town!

Extraordinary Lives

NO man's life is ordinary to himself. And probably, if we knew all the facts about it, no man's life would seem commonplace to us his fellows. It is upon this belief that our Real Experience department is based; and it is for this reason that we have from time to time published adventurous autobiographies like Captain Dixon's "A Million Miles in Sail" and Charles Brower's "My Arctic Outpost."

There are certain men, however, who have led conspicuously interesting or exciting lives, who are unable through lack of opportunity, or unwilling through excess of modesty, to tell us about them. Yet often special traits of character, or unusual combinations of circumstance, have made these lives of consummate interest; and we therefore plan to publish, now and then, brief and vivid biographies of such men under this title "Extraordinary Lives." The first of these, the story of "the Mister"—a typical old-time Westerner who for years, with the help of God and his six-gun, has ruled a principality of his own in a remote Brazilian province—will be told by David Newell in our next issue.

Our main reliance, however, in our earnest endeavor to make this the most interesting of all magazines, must necessarily be upon stories which are fiction in form, though based firmly on the facts of life. (Tarzan? Surely his story too is based firmly on the facts of man's imagination, his lively racial memory of prehistoric days when we too roamed a primeval jungle.)

For the real writer's gift of insight enables him to see beneath the surface of things into moods and motives; his endowment of imagination allows him to create novel and dramatic situations; and the magic of his art gives him the power to make these alive and actual to you his reader.

Notable among the fiction of our next issue will be that extraordinary novel which we have tentatively entitled "These Shall Not Die," by Edwin Balmer and Philip Wylie, which is described more fully on the inside front cover of this issue; and a novelette "The Damned Thing," by Seven Anderton, who gave us "Phantom Foemen," "Murder, Inc." and many other good ones. Again in this stirring story of an apparent *Frankenstein* in battle with a city's criminals, he displays those fine qualities of ingenuity and daring which have made his other stories so popular.

Tarzan will of course also be very much present. So too will the Free Lances in Diplomacy and other familiar characters. But there will be a wealth of novelty also in short stories by the ablest writers, new and old.

—The Editor.

NEVER PARCHED OR TOASTED

Switch to Camels

then leave them—if you can

IF YOU want to know the difference between a truly fresh cigarette and one that is parched or toasted, light a Camel.

As you draw in that cool, fragrant smoke notice how smooth and friendly it is to your throat. Not a hint of sting or bite. Not a trace of burn.

That is because Camels are blended from choice Turkish and mild, sun-ripened Domestic tobaccos, and are made with just the right amount of natural moisture and kept that way until delivered to the smoker by the Camel Humidor Pack.

Camels are never parched or toasted.

That's why Camels bring you so much unalloyed enjoyment. That's why they are so much milder; why they leave no cigaretty after-taste.

If you haven't tried Camels lately, get a package today and see for yourself what you are missing.

Switch over to Camels. Then leave them —if you can.

R. J. REYNOLDS TOBACCO COMPANY, *Winston-Salem, N. C.*

CAMELS

***Made* FRESH—*Kept* FRESH**

● *Don't remove the Camel Humidor Pack—it is protection against perfume and powder odors, dust and germs. Buy Camels by the carton for home or office. The Humidor Pack keeps Camels fresh*