August

# BLUE BOOK

NRA CODE

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## *The* Man *who* Bombed *the* World

*by* S. Andrew Wood....William Makin

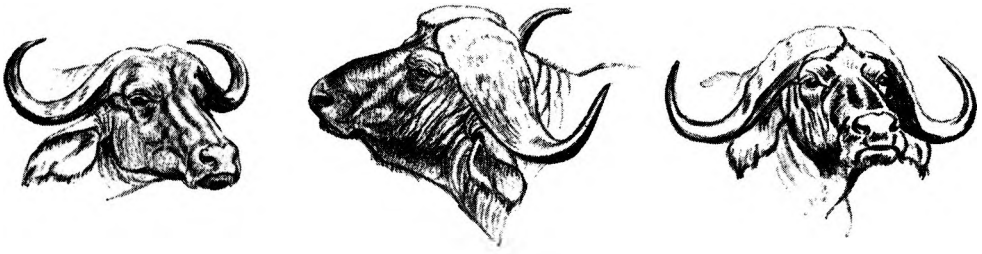
Horatio Winslow, Beatrice Grimshaw

AUGUST 1934

THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

NRA CODE

VOL. 59 No. 4



# *From a Naturalist's*

*By* WALTER J. WILWERDING

STATISTICIANS report that the African Cape buffalo has more notches on its horns, for killed and wounded hunters and natives, than any other African big game animal.

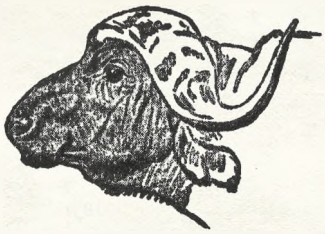
As I heard stories of its truculence wherever I went in Africa, and because both my guide and gunbearer were exceedingly nervous when on the spoor of this beast, it was only natural that I too became infected with nervousness. So it happened, when I at last saw the great herd of black beasts spread before me, I had an attack of some malady that made my hands shake. It took much will-power to still those nerves, while I held the bead steady on a huge black bull; but fortunately the shot went true, and my first buffalo lay in his last sleep in the warm glow of the African sunrise.

I am seldom elated when I bring down game, for animals look so much more beautiful and majestic when alive, posing unconsciously in the most dramatic attitudes; and it is not pleasant to think that the vultures will soon be cleaning the bones of one who was so vitally present but a few moments ago. Yet I needed this specimen for my work, and was glad to have him close where I could make sketches and studies without the danger of losing my life in the process.

He was black, rounded of body and heavy, with very thick bosses on his horns, for this buffalo has a heavy armor of horn on the top of his head, instead of having a little curved horn sticking out at each side, as with our bison—which is not a true buffalo, though it also belongs to the wild cattle tribe. Old African buffaloes look much like cattle in the shape of body and head; the horns alone being an exception. They never have woolly coats like our bison; and the hair is rather thin, especially on old bulls. The young look like domestic calves, brown in color.

An old bull that has been scratched several times by bullets is a dangerous antagonist for the next man who comes a-hunting. I was once hunting with a man who wounded a bull, and we had a heart-breaking stalk after the beast, for it is the law with sportsmen that when a beast is wounded it must be followed and finished. This one waited for us in one of these dense thorn-bush tangles, characteristic of buffalo country, and charged us in the most unexpected manner when we were exhausted from many miles of following the spoor through bad country. We downed him before he could do any damage, but it took a lot of lead and quick shooting.

There was, and still is, a big bull, in a certain forest of Tanganyika, with horns



# Sketchbook

## IV—African Buffalo

that are reputed to be records; and I was anxious to add him to my bag, but he was far too wary and wise to allow us to get within sight. This bull has the habit of bellowing loudly when he gets your wind, and as other buffalo bulls in this section remain silent when disturbed, one can readily tell when he is about. I once had a rather startling experience with him.

I was seated by a fire at night talking to a companion, when suddenly we heard a crashing and snapping of branches all about us. We ran for our rifles and stood side by side by the fire to do the best we could if the herd charged. They turned when only about ten yards away, no doubt scared by the fire, and made off to the accompaniment of the old bull's bellowing. It was a relief to hear the sound of their retreat in the distance.

# BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

AUGUST, 1934 VOL. 59, NO. 4

## *Two Fascinating Novels*



## *Memorable Short Stories*



## *A Fine Detective Novelette*



## *Prize Stories of Real Experience*



*Except for stories of Real Experience, all stories and novels printed herein are fiction and are intended as such. They do not refer to real characters or to actual events.*

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William B. Warner, *President and Treasurer*
John C. Sterling, *Vice-President*
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Publisher, The Blue Book Magazine
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, 1934, Vol. LIX. No. 4.  Entered as second-class matter, November 12, 1930, at the Post Office at Dayton, Ohio, under the Act of March 3, 1879. Subscription Price, $1.50 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. Special Note: Each issue of The Blue Book Magazine is copyrighted. Any republication of the matter appearing in the magazine, either wholly or in part, is not permitted except by special authorization.
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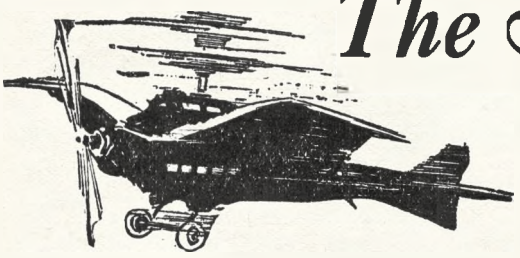
## A PRIZE OFFER

THE truth that is stranger than fiction; the hour so crowded with excitement that it shines bright before all others in memory—these are tremendously interesting to everyone. For this reason The Blue Book Magazine prints each month in our Real Experience Department (beginning on Page 130 of this issue) a group of true stories contributed by our readers. And for this department we are glad to receive true stories of real experience, told in about 2,000 words: and for each of the five best of these we will pay fifty dollars.

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 Man Who

Illustrated by R. F. James
Decorations by Grattan Condon

*By* S. ANDREW WOOD

SOMEWHERE within Anderthal's yacht a dynamo was humming sleepily. The tinkle of an ice-bucket came from where the servants cleared up the luxurious clutter of dinner that was left in the dining-saloon. On the blue of the lake there was still visible the white wake of the big motor-launch where it carried Anderthal's guests, the members of the Fifth Disarmament Commission, back to Geneva. The white-and-scarlet Swiss flag made a last blob of color against the purple shore.

Anderthal loosened the ash from his cigar and spoke in his thick, quizzical voice.

"Dined and wined! They are all charming men. It would be nice to give them a salute of twenty-one guns—all loaded with shell. It would save time and money. There speaks the savage, eh? The Neanderthal. Good!"

A laugh of amusement left the red-haired woman who sat swinging a tiny scarlet-shod foot in one of the chromium deck-chairs. She grimaced across at Jacob Anderthal, but it was to the little beak-nosed man whose shirt-front gleamed in the dusk by her side that Anna Landeck spoke.

"Your pet brute is always the same, Mr. Kingdom. Why don't you put him into a cage?"

"He's not dangerous; and you forget that I'm Anderthal's guest and not his keeper, at the moment," said John Kingdom. "This is his yacht, after all—though I agree the evening's too pleasant to have the Swiss navy chasing us all round the lake. And they would appoint another Disarmament Commission, anyway."

A flicker of chilly amusement was all the expression on his face. There was something almost ludicrous in the contrast between the two men who were perhaps the richest and certainly the most powerful men in Europe: modern Europe, where kings had lost their power, and secret men of no country ruled behind the curtain. John Kingdom was small and trim as a Japanese. He had never had his portrait taken. Anderthal, with his huge shoulders and round skull, was like some vivacious Jewish ape in evening clothes. He was the Overlord of Armaments of the imagination. The cartoonists of a dozen nations portrayed him as a Neanderthal man, with flattened skull and hairy arms; and he exulted in the picture and the inevitable nickname with an almost childish pleasure.

"Cynical!" chuckled Anderthal. "I am not the brute, Kingdom. It is you."

THERE was silence save for the plash of the dark cobalt water against the yacht's sides. Anderthal padded to the rail with his lips pouched about his cigar. In the shadows he seemed to take on an infinitely more formidable and animal-like shape, in spite of his good humor.

Yet it was John Kingdom, small and immobile, who dominated. He was the Man of Legend. No other living soul knew the extent of his interests. But one could guess. In a year Europe spent some hundred millions of pounds upon armaments to make itself safe from war; and there was not an armament firm in Europe, not a great finance corporation, which John Kingdom was not behind. He was the new angel of Armageddon, ready to fight with magnificent impartiality on every side, should Armageddon ever turn loose again. . . .

He turned to look at his companion—not the red-headed and alabaster-skinned Anna Landeck, Countess of Gerolstein,

# Bombed the World

*THE terrific story of God's Madman and the Princess of Armageddon—of a great munitions merchant who undertook to club Europe into disarmament, and of the men and women who rode with death in his service. . . . By the author of "Red Terror" and "The Frog of Moscow."*

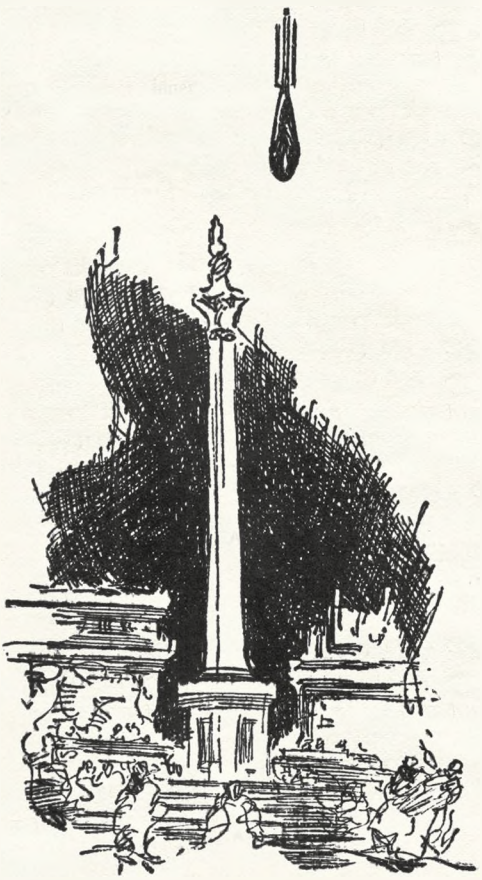
but a dark-haired girl who sat quietly beside him.

"You're not cold, Crystal?"

"Not at all. It's lovely and warm. This is August, you know."

"August the fourth," said John Kingdom, "and only two hours from midnight. Time for us to go."

The yacht swayed on the slight swell, and the wind brought a clean scent of gentians and mountain snow from the high peaks. A fleet of red lateen sails drifted shadowily past. In the lap of the mountains, far down the lake, Geneva began to glow in the sky. A single bright light glimmered among the dark vineyards of the shore. That was John Kingdom's villa. Within sight of the pleasant white city where statesmen gathered to abolish war, John Kingdom had one of his villas, and Jacob Anderthal sailed an opulent little yacht on the lake. It was one of the amusing paradoxes of the modern world.



"What a hurry!" Anderthal moved back into the light, and changed into a good-natured ape once more. "I have a new Maraschino liqueur which was too good for those solemn idiots who have just gone. It tastes like some rare women—so I am told, though I am only an ugly old bachelor. I keep it in a crystal cabinet. So you shall come with me to fetch it, Miss Templeton."

"No, she won't," said Kingdom, rising lightly. "Take the Countess Anna, instead. She's one of those rare women."

HE bowed carelessly, scarce troubling to veil the irony, or to look at the green eyes which burned back at him with sudden hatred behind their laughter. John Kingdom knew the history of the Countess of Gerolstein. It was not rumor, for Anderthal told it with the rumbling delight with which he boasted of all his possessions. She was, perhaps, eighteen, and had walked out on a husband she had finished with, into the gorilla-arms of Anderthal, with the greatest coolness. It gave John Kingdom a faint disgust, for he was a puritan.

His electric launch purred out of the velvet darkness to the landing-ladder at that moment. Crystal Templeton saw it with a feeling of relief that she could hardly explain, and sprang lightly down into the glowing cockpit.

"*Auf Wiedersehen,* you two—and keep good!" the young Countess' voice called. John Kingdom caught the note of mischief and faint deliberate vulgarity which so delighted Anderthal; and it made him flush in the darkness. He thought he heard Anderthal's malicious chuckle, and threw up his head dangerously, then smiled at himself.

Crystal drew the lacy Basque shawl about her shoulders. She was brown-haired, with a soft warm color and blue eyes under straight brows that looked out on the world—even the world of John Kingdom—tranquilly. Though she was young and healthy enough to enjoy the glitter and excitement he had brought her up in, Kingdom thought she was amused by it sometimes, and loved her for it. Usually there was a little imp of laughter dancing about her mouth. But it was puckered thoughtfully as the launch slid silently through the water.

"I'll offer as much as a franc for what you're thinking about," he said.

"Rather silly things. I was thinking how much those two people hated you. They do, you know."

"They'd like to see me dead, you mean?"

"I'm not sure about anything so drastic as that." Crystal threw him a startled look and tried to smile. "Possibly Anna would. She's primitive, I think. You're not nice to her. And Jacob Anderthal—"

"The Countess Anna knows what I would like to do to her: There's a whipping-post in the village near her husband's castle in the Tyrol, and that lovely back of hers would fit it nicely. As for Anderthal, my performing bear, I feed him well. Naturally, he hates me. He's jealous because I'm Kingdom, and he's only Anderthal. I might be assassinated by a pacifist in black gloves, or by the Countess Anna, hired by the Soviets, who don't need me because they make their own munitions; but Jacob would be somewhere behind it."

JOHN KINGDOM laughed in faint amusement; but his voice held a cold and impregnable arrogance. The suave statesmen of the Fifth Disarmament Commission had got on capitally with the bluff, cynical Anderthal. They could understand him. His mask was that of a dancing bear, even if the face behind was not. But John Kingdom repelled them like chilled steel. They felt that this man, with his devilish genius for power, and the strings of a hundred puppets in his fingers, hid a polite yawn. He seemed to be thinking, with an embarrassing sense of humor, of the furnaces and steel-works, the newspapers and laboratories he owned in each of their respective countries. They felt that this dapper little tyrant, who was almost unknown to the outside world, save as a legend, leaned back in his chair and silently laughed at them.

AS they left the motor-launch at the private landing of the Villa Marigolda, the house gleamed a misty lavender color above a steep garden-path that ran up from the lake. A faint wind fanned fragrance all about Crystal and John Kingdom as they climbed. A clock struck eleven with a silver chime. The door was opened by Chundra Dah, Kingdom's stout and silent Hindu servant. Beyond Crystal's maid, there were only two other servants there, and not a single secretary; for the Villa Marigolda was John Kingdom's retreat from the world. He had a restless vitality which sent him, sometimes to his big house in the heart of London, sometimes, with Chundra Dah, to an almost unapproachable little Grecian islet in the Ægean Sea which was owned by some vague, eccentric American named Van Horn. But the Villa Marigolda, perhaps because it was a little like Crystal in its sunny warmth, was his refuge.

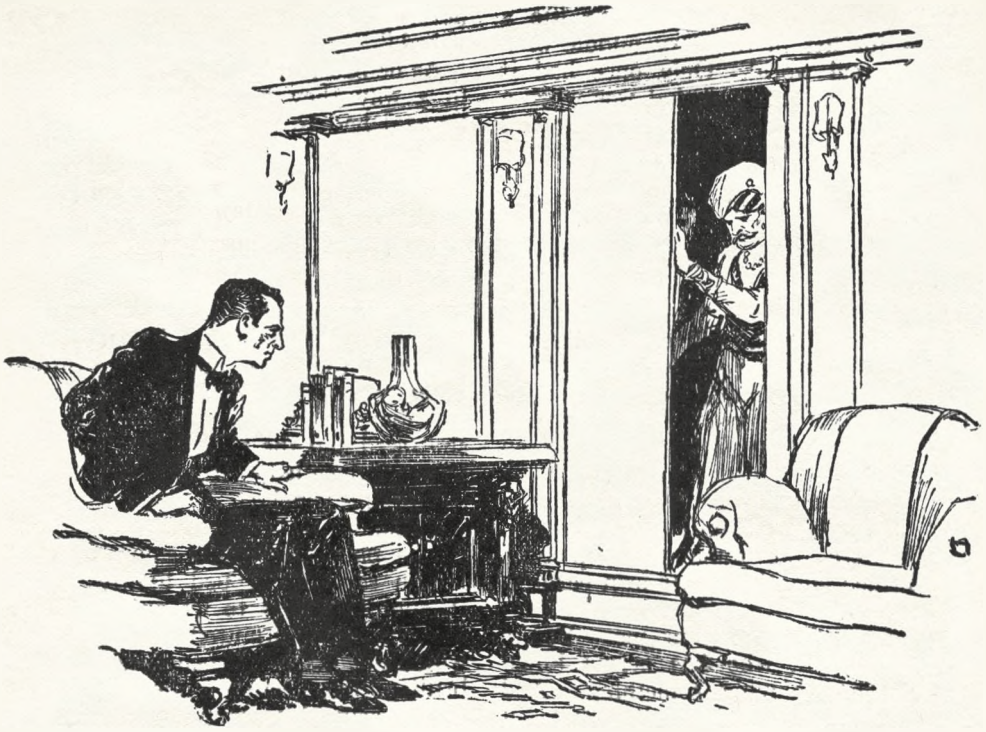
"Tired?"

He took the shawl from Crystal's shoulders, with a movement that was rather clumsy. Crystal smoothed her honey-brown hair and looked at him with candid affection.

"Not at all. But I think you must be. Your eyes are lined and burning more than usual, and you ought to go to bed. It must be pretty awful to be always John Kingdom. Even men like you have a breakdown, sometimes. I've often wished you could find another personality you could rest in. A kind of *Dr. Jekyll* to get away from *Mr. Hyde*, you know."

"I'll consider it. Perhaps I already have one—who knows? You've suspected Chundra and me of all sorts of mysteries on that poor little island-rock of Van Horn's." Kingdom's lean face lit up with the smile he always kept for her. "And thanks for insinuating that my normal self is that unpleasant scoundrel *Mr. Hyde,* Miss Templeton."

"You know what I mean," said Crystal gravely. She thrust him gently by



**The panel slid open smoothly. The Hindu servant stepped lightly through it, standing aside to let another person follow.**

the shoulders into a chair and lit his cigarette. The vibrant youth of her set him shaking inwardly as nothing else on earth could shake him, though it was the very last thing she guessed. He could see the tiny white mark at her temple, which her hair hid.

That had been caused by a fragment of bomb-shrapnel. From the same missile John Kingdom still carried a small piece of metal in his own head, which at times gave him fearful headaches, in spite of all the surgeons. Tonight he could think of it all over again: Sixteen years ago, and black wings over London, swooping through such moonlight as shone tonight over Geneva. He could see that house in Chelsea now, ablaze with the phosphorus bomb that had struck it, with Elizabeth lying among the flowers of the quiet garden, and the child bending over her, oblivious of all the other lurid horror about her. The second bomb had fallen in the street a hundred yards away, and the humming dust of the explosion flew about the child and him as he carried her away, making them both bleed. . . . Elizabeth was the woman he had loved, and the child her baby sister; and the rest of the family were already cremated in the blazing house. It was a trivial sort of holocaust when one thought of what the firm of Kingdom and Anderthal and its allied combines had made possible nowadays—John Kingdom and Jacob Anderthal, who had just taken wine with the Fifth Disarmament Commission. But he was glad he had adopted the child.

"HAPPY, Crystal?"

A quick and guilty color stirred in Crystal's face. She had been looking dreamily out of the window that opened on to the moon-misted garden and the lake below, where the lights of Jacob Anderthal's yacht had all gone out.

"Too happy to tell you how much. You never let me mention it, so I've almost forgotten how."

There was a glint of unexpected tears behind Crystal's smile. The wonder of it never left her. A fairy-tale princess was feeble by comparison; yet it was all real. Nowadays ordinary princesses were bundled unceremoniously out of their palaces by dictators and presidents, and kept hatshops in the Rue de la Paix, or sold flowers in Bond Street, if they were lucky. But John Kingdom's ward, as everything he touched turned to gold and power, grew to be a princess

out of nothing. He had made life a dream for her in the very middle of a harshly real world. Only once had it ever jarred on her, and that was when a famous ambassador had playfully called her Princess of Armageddon. She hated that.

"It hasn't spoiled you, Crystal!"—under his breath.

"No, but I'm sometimes a little bit frightened."

"Of what?"

"Of you. Of what will happen to you. Something's burning you up, and it's no use denying it. You've too much power. I'm afraid of some sort of—catastrophe."

"Brainstorm? A little private scrap of my own to liven the boredom?"

Crystal shook her dark head. To the man, her slender limbs and firm red mouth were like some pastel picture. She flushed slightly at her own earnestness.

"You mustn't laugh at me. You're like some man who has nearly killed himself in achieving something. And now it's finished, it's—well, ashes. I don't mean all this money and power, but something else—I don't know what."

"Go to bed, child!"

Kingdom came to his feet, small but clean-limbed, his leonine head thrown back in laughter, and pulled the girl lightly from her chair. But the fragrance that came from her, the clear soul that looked solicitously out of her eyes at him, was almost more than he could bear at that moment, man of indomitable will and patient plans that he was.

"Crystal!"

She turned quickly, and his hands fell to her shoulders. Crystal saw the strange glow about him that had made her uneasy more than once. Though she was the only human being he opened his soul to, he walked alone. Even to her, he was a mystery.

GENTLY he put aside the soft hair at her temple where the tiny white scar was. His own throbbed rather painfully at that moment.

"If anything should happen, you'll always think kindly of me?"

"What could happen?" she demanded breathlessly. "Do you mean Jacob Anderthal, or the Countess Anna—"

"Answer me!"

"I've always thought of you as the kindest and finest man who ever lived," Crystal said slowly, with some feeling that he hypnotized her, "and I should never change my opinion, whatever happened."

As he brushed her lips, his eyes flamed in a way they had never done before. Crystal had to struggle ever so slightly to free herself. She ran a little confusedly out of the room.

A GUST of wind rattled the windows of the Villa Marigolda; but otherwise the house above the Lake of Peace was sunk in deep quiet at that hour verging on midnight. John Kingdom looked at the clock, then passed into another room. It was a long oak-paneled chamber, in which the windows were shuttered and the blinds drawn. He sat down and called, with his glance upon one of the panels:

"Chundra Dah!"

The panel slid open smoothly. The Hindu servant stepped lightly through it, standing aside to let another person follow. He murmured "Pardon!" and wiped out his bland benevolence with a brilliant but fleeting smile as he gently thrust aside his companion. His slippered foot thumped the floor, and the panel closed. He moved to the table and began to pour out wine.

"Enter Harlequin, Johnny," said the newcomer, "in the approved manner of pantomime. I wonder you didn't provide a trapdoor instead."

John Kingdom looked up—a long, frigid, critical look.

"Very satisfactory, Brian. I congratulate you. There's a mirror here. Shall we compare the effect of Chundra's grooming?"

The long mirror framed them both against the dark, softly lighted background of the room. There was a touch of bravado about the poise of one of them, and something faintly blurred about his face that was not in John Kingdom's. But they were startlingly alike, from pointed evening shoes to gray-tinged hair; and only Crystal Tempeton, and Chundra Dah, perhaps, in all the world, would have been able to distinguish them.

Brian Kingdom turned away with a husky sound of mirth and flung himself into a chair. He threw his head round to speak in a taut voice.

"That darky of yours is a genius for little finishing touches, I agree, Johnny. I've been so much meat to him since he brought me here. Brandy, Chundra."

"Wine for him, Chundra Dah. The Lafitte. I beg to remind you that you

are now John Kingdom, Brian. I never drink brandy."

The two men looked across at each other. Even in their attitudes there was a similarity, and they were like men seen in twin stereoscope photographs, save that a bead or two of fine sweat glistened on the forehead of one, and the other was as cool as granite, and nearly as inhuman.

"Damn you then, Johnny," said Brian Kingdom lightly, "or should I call you Brian, since we're going to exchange—"

"Exchange?" repeated John Kingdom, icily blank.

"Sorry. My joke. I'm in the dark, though I've some nasty suspicions."

BRIAN drank with an audible gulp. He still kept the debonair amusement, which had been fixed on his features like a mask as he stepped into the room behind the Hindu. One guessed that, most of his life, he had kept laughing and reckless enough, finding that the devil could usually be cheated at the last moment that way as well as any other. Even now, when something seemed to pinion him invisibly to the chair where he sat, Brian Kingdom radiated a careless vitality. Unless, indeed, it was all part of the mask.

"The hour approacheth. Do you deliver me over to the police, Johnny, or am I to be used for experiments with one of Kingdom and Anderthal's new poison gases? Your own blood cousin, by gad!"

"I kept my bargain, and you've kept yours. You asked for another year of that life you were leading. I gave it to you, and you came here. At least, Chundra fetched you. It's unimportant."

Sane and cold, Kingdom looked and felt. The eagerness was growing upon him in this last few minutes at the end of long planning. He went over it all, while Brian sat with his fingers, those short, sensitive fingers that he himself possessed, gripping the arm of his chair tighter and tighter, and Chundra Dah stood, brown-skinned, mild and protuberant, behind the chair. He had given Brian everything since that night he had come to him with the police at his very heels, after killing the girl in the frowsy Montmartre bedroom. A new name (though that was not important, for long ago the man's real name was sunk and left behind), a new life, money to burn instead of the guillotine which would otherwise have certainly claimed him. Even his crime had been pigeonholed from the *dossiers* of the Sûreté by means which only John Kingdom could have influenced. And the underworld of Paris had held him very cozily in cold storage, till Chundra Dah fetched him. It was a bargain such as no other man could have driven with that doomed and hunted rat Brian Kingdom. But Brian had accepted eagerly, born gambler that he was.

"Listen," said John Kingdom patiently. "I'm going to credit you with still being the devil-may-care you always were. You were never a coward. Still, you were never dependable. I want to say that there's not one iota of a chance of—well, shall we call it escape? You know how clever Chundra Dah is? During the last month you have spent as my guest he has made you what you are now. You were becoming a wreck in Paris yonder. You nearly slipped out of the bargain that way, Brian. I took that risk,"—Kingdom paused,—"but Chundra—"

"—fattened me up," finished Brian, flashing his white teeth in a noiseless laugh. "Turned me from a dissipated dog of the gutter where you gave me such a good time, to the cousin who is so damnably like you. Damnably for you, of course, Johnny. It's an honor for me. Chundra has been rather hell. But go on."

He gulped his wine again. In spite of his bravado, his hand shook perceptibly. Kingdom said:

"Chundra could do anything."

"In the killing line? I'll say he could. And there's the police, and the guillotine. I'm a done man. You bought me for a mess of pottage. I promised to deliver myself into your hands and let you do what you wished with me," said Brian Kingdom, his eyes starting a little as though the mask broke. "Mention those

too, my dear cousin, and complete the catalogue. And in God's name give me my instructions."

"Presently. I haven't finished," said John Kingdom in a level voice. "I tell you I could leave nothing to chance. This thing is greater than either you or me. It happens that I haven't been sleeping well of late. My doctor gave me a narcotic. There's a prick or two of a hypodermic syringe on my left forearm. Look at your own."

There was a moment's silence. Brian Kingdom's underlip drew back tightly on his teeth like that of a cornered dog. He did not roll up his sleeve, but sat staring at his cousin.

"Tell him, Chundra."

The Hindu still stood behind the low back of the chair. Chundra Dah was real *Babu-ji,* and an educated Indian gentleman, though he had become a bodyservant. He said in a soft voice:

"Aconitine. Specially imported from Nepal, where it is called 'Old Man's Poison.' But it is good for the young too. I injected it early this morning when you slept, Mr. Brian. The expert can time the toxic effect with the accuracy of an alarm clock. I am expert—please excuse swank. The time would be twelve forty-five, roughly speaking, if you survived present suicide episode. It is, I am afraid, rather painful, when once it begins."

THE two sat almost motionless: the castaway and the man of legend. Brian Kingdom's cheeks were sucked in, his eyes downcast. He laughed huskily, then threw up his head like one who fought to keep his nerve out of some tattered sort of pride.

"You cunning old devil, Johnny! I guessed it was something like this. I watched Chundra, but I couldn't watch him all the time, could I? I'm not sorry. That life in Paris was pretty horrible at times. I always had nightmares about the police. I never trusted them, though you held them back very well—" He broke off, and thrust the wet hair back from his forehead with a gesture that had a touch of the theatrical. "What now, Johnny? I'm at your service. Never too late to be a gentleman, eh? You're mad. But a big madman."

"Possibly. It's immaterial."

John Kingdom was watching the other closely. But he drew a deep breath and leaned over. His eyes had been fatigued, as though even his tempered metal felt the strain, but now there was a fleck of flame within the gray pupils. It mingled with a fierce but boyish eagerness. There was something relentless yet full of dreams in it; and if it was madness, as the sagging man in the chair said, it was at least a great and steady madness.

"I do you a big honor, Brian. This is a great moment in your life, and the greatest in mine, so far. The question of insanity can be left out. Sanity is a relative thing, after all. I call a world insane that piles up death-weapons and shivers to think of the day when it will use them. I call the nations mad when they surround peace with the same humbug and rascality they used to surround war with. It's a grisly joke. But nothing, compared with mine."

"WHAT'S that?" Brian Kingdom's question was almost a whisper as he stared fascinatedly. But a forced grin of admiration was on his sweating face. It was plain to be seen he meant treachery, that he humored an unhinged man.

"My suicide," said John Kingdom, almost gently. "After years of swindling and jugglery! The self-destruction of John Kingdom, and a crash that will beat that of any previous defaulter hollow. After that, perhaps—the deluge! Who knows what jokes the ghost of a departed armament-king may play?"

"You *do* honor me, Johnny." Brian raised eyes that were at once bloodshot and dancing, gibing and serious. "But you move me to argument. Why this tremendous change of heart? Why this sudden change from Kingdom and Anderthal to a good little Tubal Cain? You know, 'Not alone for the blade was the good steel made, so he fashioned the first plowshare'—excuse poetry, as Chundra might say. Why this great conversion from armament-shares to plowshares, if that's the program?"

Kingdom looked at his cousin. Ever so faintly, he smiled.

"You're trying to gain time, Brian. You're not really interested. Take it that it is my incurable thirst for power. Could there be a greater exercise of power for any human being than to create Kingdom and Anderthal, and then command it to change itself into plowshares? Or take it that I have the larger vision, and I mean to blackmail the world into sharing it with me. But we waste time."

"It's megalomania, Johnny." Brian's voice was solicitous. "That shrapnel—"

"Thanks, Johnny!" croaked Brian. "And here's for you! Roland for an Oliver!" He snatched up the pistol, took aim and pulled the trigger.

The small, trim figure moved to a bureau that stood in a corner of the room. He turned for a moment to look at his cousin. It had always seemed to John Kingdom, as it seems to most great men, that the world had been fashioned and shaped for him; and Brian was only a part of it which he had seized, as he had seized a thousand other opportunities. He could picture that worthless shell, more useful in death than it had ever been in life, without any flinching.

There was a portrait of Crystal Templeton on the bureau. Kingdom took it up, looked at it, then set it down again with the tranquil face turned away from the room. He opened a drawer and brought out a slender-barreled automatic pistol, broke it, and glanced first at the grinning man who humored a lunatic, then into the magazine. He made sure that the first cartridge had been fired, though he need not have troubled. Chundra never failed.

John Kingdom walked across to the man in the chair and laid the weapon upon the leather arm.

"Thanks, Johnny!" croaked Brian. "And here's for you! Roland for an Oliver!"

He snatched up the pistol with a shrill laugh, took aim and pulled the trigger. There was the snap of an empty cartridge; and a second pistol sprang into Chundra's brown hand where he stood behind the chair. The explosion of it at Brian's temple sounded like the crack of doom which began in the quiet room and sent its reverberations through the Villa Marigolda.

CRYSTAL, though she had gone to her room, did not go to bed immediately. On the contrary, after climbing into a suit of pajamas, she lit a cigarette and sat very wakefully for a quarter of an hour at the balcony. And now she stood leaning over with her hands on the stone edge, to speak to a person below.

"The moon must have struck you, Larry—hard," she said in shocked tones. "Do you know it's nearly midnight?"

"I like midnight," said the person below, "nearly as much as I like you, lady. Come down, Crystal."

"The idea!" murmured Crystal, putting a blue pajama leg and a slippered foot over the balcony, and slithering down.

Larry Raeburn caught her and held her for a moment. Her arms slipped round the neck of the young man. There was only a flitting bat or two to see how she raised her lips, and how he responded.

"This must cease," said Crystal demurely. "I hate soppy things like bal-

conies, except when it's midnight and you and me."

"I'm going to ask him for your hand tonight. But I wanted to hold it a bit first."

"I expect he'll give it to you, Larry. He gives us most things we want, doesn't he?"

The young man nodded. He glanced at the flushed cheek by his side with a quick breath of unbelief in his own good fortune, though Larry Raeburn of the Diplomatic Corps, attached at present to the British Secret Service, had a sufficient opinion of himself. He was a bronzed and personable young man.

"He's given me a lot." Raeburn was grave for an instant. The tones of both of them softened as they spoke of John Kingdom. "Everything! I told you about my old man. Kingdom saved his affairs from a fearful smash years ago. And afterward he took me up. And so behold Larry Raeburn, Esquire, a moneyed bloke who helps to keep the world at peace by smelling out what hokum Tweedledee is pulling for Tweedledum." He grinned. "Bless the S. S., though it's slow enough down in Geneva at the moment. But it led me to you, Princess."

Crystal frowned slightly.

"Princess of Armageddon. Some old idiot called me that, and thought it flattery. Please make me plain Mrs. Raeburn soon, Larry. . . . Larry, do you realize that we've kept it very secret from him? I don't believe he even suspects. Why did we?"

"I won't make you *plain* Mrs. Raeburn. That's impossible. And we kept it pretty secret from each other until a day or two ago, Miss Templeton."

But they were both rather uneasily silent. Among the cypresses the moon threw quaint and grotesque shadows about them, leaving the villa like a quiet, pale ghost, and the lake glimmered emptily below. They were very much in love, and still jealous of their secret. Crystal felt very happy, but the quiet air of the garden gave her a premonition of something disturbing. . . . It would not be shaken off.

LARRY was speaking again of John Kingdom.

"They're all frightened of him. I think we're the only two people who love him. We and that queer old fat Chundra Dah. He's an enigma. I've got a theory that he's no armament-bug at all, but a—well, an icy pacifist at heart. More merciless and cunning, if you like, than flea-bitten old brutes like Anderthal. Sounds strange. But I've thought at times that something touched him long ago, and he's got a plan that will stagger everybody. You know he's a trifle mad, Crystal?"

"Mad?" Crystal was startled; then, involuntarily: "Yes, he might be. But if he is, it's in a tremendous, noble way."

Larry Raeburn's arm tightened about her as they sat on the bench among the cypresses. The young man was vaguely aware that he hung back from telling John Kingdom of his and Crystal's secret. What if John Kingdom would not let her marry him? Kicked him out? He was a pauper, compared to Crystal, who would be a millionairess some day. Any day, perhaps, for John Kingdom's life was not safe. Larry Raeburn, of the British Secret Service, knew that well enough. . . .

A clock within the villa chimed twelve.

"You're too late for tonight. He keeps early hours at the Villa Marigolda, and he was tired," breathed Crystal, with a low laugh that sounded relieved; for she too shrank unaccountably from telling John Kingdom. "I believe it was only me and the balcony you came for."

"I believe it was," Raeburn grinned, half-ashamedly. "This is dramatic. . . . Midnight on the Fourth of August, Crystal. The world started a fire for a few years on that date, you remember—or I expect you don't, any more than I do, being but children. Not much of one, compared with the next, I guess. Jolly kind of nightmare, it'll be. We're all going to stop it by making it so horrible that nobody will dare begin—the

way they stopped the last one! Ask Kingdom—"

There came the sharp explosive noise of a pistol-shot from the quiet house, as sharp and unmuffled as though it were in the open air. An owl that had been hooting sleepily in one of the trees stopped on mid-note; the soft splash of the lake below rose suddenly clear and audible.

Crystal was on her feet, white and staring at the pale quiet house. Larry Raeburn, too, sprang from the seat. The throbbing quiet seemed to envelop both of them.

"Stay here. I'll go and see."

"I'm coming. It may be Jacob Anderthal, or that woman—"

Crystal was dimly aware of the folly of her suspicion as she moved quickly by Larry Raeburn's side; yet she could not crush it. They reached the terrace together. The big outer door with its hanging lamp was still open, the inner one unfastened, the hall empty, a hastily clad servant running down the stairs.

The door of John Kingdom's library was ajar, the room brightly lighted. Something held Raeburn rooted to the spot for an instant, and he kept Crystal back as she would have thrust herself past him. By one of the deep armchairs Chundra Dah, the Hindu, was kneeling, and he turned the whites of his eyes to look up, stricken with such dazed grief as Larry Raeburn had seldom seen. One single sob shook his heavy figure.

"Good God, Chundra!"

Chundra Dah put out a brown palm.

"Do not allow her to approach, I pray, Mr. Raeburn. Take her away, sir!"

He drew a silk handkerchief from his pocket, and with shaking hands spread it over the face, where it lay back, limply, but not without dignity. Then he rose to his feet and looked at Larry Raeburn.

"I came in quickly," said Chundra Dah brokenly, "but too late. *Ai*, but I never knew! Why did he do it?"

For a moment it looked as though Chundra might become an Oriental and beat his drumlike chest. Then with a deep sigh he turned impassive again. Mechanically Raeburn looked down at the crumpled figure. He had cool nerves, and had seen death before: nearly as dramatic as this. But a feeling of stupid unbelief came to him. The hand that had held the pistol hung down limply, a little trickle of blood that still moved, stained the white collar. Yet it seemed impossible that John Kingdom could destroy himself; he had seemed indestructible. . . . Chundra Dah's handkerchief did not entirely cover the face. What looked like a sardonic smile was stamped about the mobile mouth.

"I like midnight," said the person below, "nearly as much as I like you, lady. Come down, Crystal."

Larry Raeburn turned and caught Crystal, as she swayed against him.

THE first sensation of John Kingdom's suicide passed through the world like a lightning-shock. The second one was like the sickness and paralysis which follows.

It was Jacob Anderthal who first roared the news like the wounded bear he was. Within a week it was proved that the great John Kingdom was a colossal swindler, who had built upon the quicksands of forgery, fraud and deception. It was the greatest smash since the South Sea Bubble; for Kingdom, the master crook, the colossal confidence-man, had the money and trust of the chancelleries of Europe. He had used them like pawns on a chessboard against each other, and laughed as he forged their bonds and hoodwinked their bourses

and their statesmen. The shares of Kingdom and Anderthal and a dozen subsidiary companies, pitched headlong. The world knew now why John Kingdom had always kept his own counsel. He was Samson, and he had brought the temple down.

IN southeastern Europe where Kingdom's money—worthless bonds—had stirred the war-pot till it bubbled merrily, bankers and politicians looked at each other with sickly faces, and went home to commit suicide or quietly decamp. A little rebellion in the Carpathians, which had been meant to become a large war, fizzled out. A South American president, who had once entertained Kingdom, received a knife between his shoulder-blades. An exiled king went back to his game of cricket on an English village-green. Governments, large and small, who had taken huge holdings in Kingdom's enterprises, found themselves holding worthless scrip. The Fifth Disarmament Conference postponed its labors at Geneva. For the moment, in Europe, Mars was a sick god.

"A lunatic—a brilliant lunatic."

That was the laconic verdict in Room D3 of the British Secret Service. Shieling, the chief, watched Larry Raeburn curiously as he spoke it, sensing his loyalty to the man whose name was now so execrated. Shieling had a grouch against lunatics, because they sent Room D3 upon most of its false trails. In a lunatic world that ached for peace while it piled up arms, they were inevitable, though an infernal nuisance. Room D3 had bulky *dossiers* about death-rays and devices for exploding the atom, about magnetic circuits that would shrivel all steel within a thousand miles, and stratosphere planes capable of reaching Moscow in two hours—all from unhinged brains eager to keep the peace by the power of universal death. "And all more or less possible, too, within the next ten years, as we know," said Sir John Shieling with a grim smile. "That's the devil of it. Nobody was more aware of it than Kingdom. God knows what his purpose was, either in life or in death. No use pumping you, I know, Raeburn. You knew as little about him as anybody else, I guess. Anyhow, it's all over, bar the squealing. I should take a holiday, my boy. The business has shaken you."

A few minutes later Larry Raeburn emerged into Whitehall. He glanced at a newspaper-placard which said, simply, "KINGDOM—£200,000,000," and averted his eyes. The shouting newspapers tired and sickened him. John Kingdom lay buried in the quiet little churchyard at St. Sulpice, by the Lake of Geneva. Why the devil couldn't they leave him alone? Then he smiled grimly at himself. The nations, left indignantly holding the baby, and the shareholders in Kingdom's nearly bankrupt armament companies, were not likely to leave Kingdom's memory alone. For the hundredth time Raeburn wondered why the man had done it. For years John Kingdom must have worked to sap his own fortunes, with a genius that far outstripped the fortune-building of lesser men. It was an enigma.

He stepped into his long-nosed little sports-car that was parked in Scotland Yard. He felt that Shieling dismissed him as a wealthy amateur, a protégé of John Kingdom's. It made him tread savagely upon the throttle and roar recklessly along Piccadilly, but there his mood cleared. Crystal was in London. Till the thunderstorm about Kingdom had passed, she was living quietly in a Kensington hotel. . . . Princess of Armageddon! Raeburn winced involuntarily at the name, and the irony of it now. Yet he was almost glad to think that Crystal was poor, and he the richer of the two. . . .

"Larry!"

He took her in his arms gently, but on a thrill of passionate happiness. Crystal freed herself, flushing slightly.

"I've news. Take me out to dinner somewhere, and I'll tell you, Larry."

HER eyes shone, then were sedate again. As the little car drew smoothly into the gathering dusk of London, and began to thread across the firefly-like traffic of Hyde Park Corner, a little sigh came from her. Crystal loved London.

"I'd like to be poor here," she said. "I'd love to be a complete nobody."

"You are, begging your pardon, lady." Raeburn grinned and pressed her hand, and nearly added "Thank God!" though instead he finished: "Till you're Mrs. Larry Raeburn."

"I'm not," Crystal answered slowly. "The lawyers sent for me this afternoon. I'm still fairly rich and romantic. He settled a hundred thousand pounds on me, with the steam-yacht *Elvira*, and his villa on Martos, that Grecian island of his. He did it five years ago. Nobody can touch them. They're mine. He

"Good God, Chundra!" cried Larry. Chundra Dah put out a brown palm. "Do not allow her to approach, I pray, Mr. Raeburn. Take her away, sir! . . . . *Ai!* Why did he do it?"

made quite sure of that, the lawyers say. That's my news, Larry."

Larry Raeburn was conscious of a jar, and felt ashamed of himself because it was so like jealousy of a dead man whom he had loved. He tooled the little car into the purple lamplit haze that lay over Constitution Hill. It was a heavenly evening, with a sky that looked like the misty roof of a cathedral.

"We'll sell 'em—the yacht and the villa. I always wondered what he did when he played the hermit on that beastly little rock."

"It's not quite so simple as that, Larry dear. There's a condition attached. It's rather a strange one, but not monstrous. Only unexpected—as he was. I have to go with Chundra Dah and take up residence on Martos a fortnight after his death, for a period of two months. He makes Mr. Van Horn, that eccentric American friend of his who lives on Martos, my guardian for the period. I've had a letter from Mr. Van Horn, quite a charming one. I think he is nice and quite old. It wasn't only a condition, Larry," Crystal ended softly; "it was a request from John Kingdom. He wished it. I shall go, of course, though I haven't the slightest idea where Chundra is now. He'll come for me, I expect."

Though Crystal's lips were firm, her glance held perplexity. Both she and Raeburn were silent. In the soft London twilight, each seemed to feel John Kingdom like a presence. They glided in the smooth and luxurious traffic of the Mall toward the pale mass of the Admiralty Arch, through which Trafalgar Square was a cheerful pool of movement and light, where scarlet buses hummed, and the fire-signs flashed. A policeman held up traffic in the arch, and Raeburn rested thoughtfully on the wheel. No man had ever known John Kingdom and his hidden purposes. . . .

"Larry—you won't worry?"

"Not me. Because I shall come with you," said Raeburn. "What do we know about old Van Horn? There's something uncanny—" He broke off. "Gosh! It's funny to be here in the middle of London and feel that! But—don't *you?*"

"I do," said Crystal in a low voice.

The policeman lowered his white-gloved hand. As he did so, there was a sound which made Crystal Templeton flinch with a terror which was not of the present, but belonged to some incident in her childhood that was burned on her memory for the rest of her life. It began high up in the sky above the palpitating lights of Trafalgar Square, and came down—down—screaming sonorously above the busy hum—louder, louder—

There was a dull crash which sounded near to the base of the Nelson pillar. No

flame, and no smoke. Only a faint orange haze that fanned outward on every side and spread low among the traffic and over the stone pavements. It ran like a heavy ground-mist, rising shoulder-high. . . .

The squeal of brakes and a hoarse shouting; the jangle and crash of vehicles that ran together, followed by an odd silence in which was nothing but the throb of standing engines, and then people running, who choked and pitched forward into the drifting haze as they fled. Helplessly Larry saw the low yellow fog moving toward their car, saw the white-gloved policeman, with astonishment on his face, sag and crumple to the ground. And then, sweetish and stifling, it caught both Crystal and himself. Larry's consciousness, before he lost it, flamed up with extraordinary clearness. He had the razor-edged vision which comes just before an anesthetic acts. The pigeons were wheeling madly against the bright lamps, and it was exactly three minutes to eight by the illuminated dial of a huge clock which advertised somebody's tooth-paste.

It was eight o'clock when Larry sat up again, sick but clear-witted. Somewhere a man was laughing vehemently, and here and there people were retching in the faint, almost fragrant scent which still remained. A bus had run onto the pavement. It leaned drunkenly against the wall, still brightly lighted. The driver crawled out slowly. An automobile started a crazy hooting in the jammed traffic. Somebody screamed. Panic was stirring to life.

"Crystal, you're all right?"

"All right. Larry, we're both awake, aren't we?"

"We are now. But we weren't a moment ago." Larry's nerve was cool again. People were moving, shouting. Shouting and looking up into the night sky. *War!*

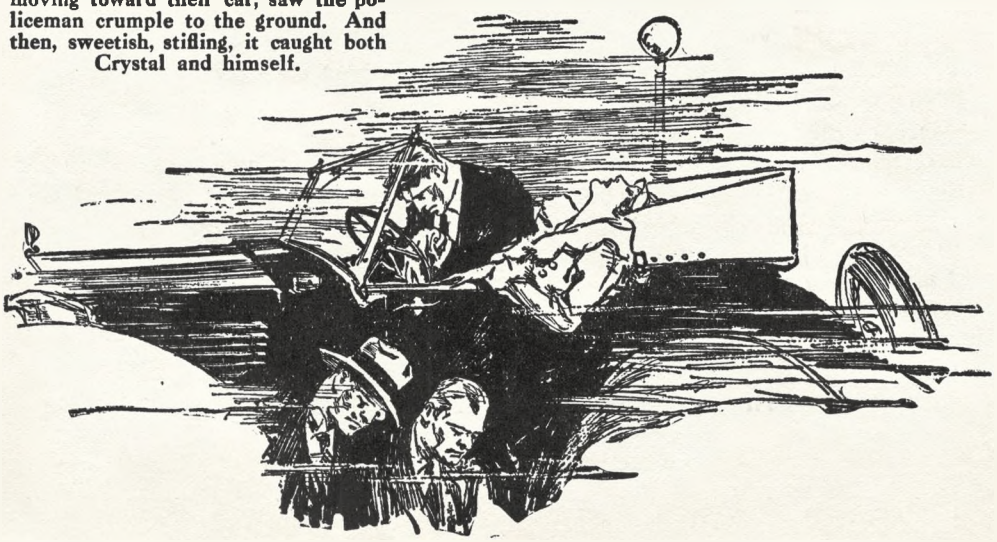
It went like a wave of fire, that whisper of fear which had hung in every corner of Europe for so long. But the scared pigeons were back in their nests again, high up on Nelson's cocked hat, and in his empty sleeve. The sky was perfectly empty. There was no sound of propeller or droning engine. Sprigg's Sparkling Ales still blazed their cheerful message to London.

"Nitrous oxide!" muttered Larry fascinatedly. "Just laughing-gas. Only one bomb, too, though it was *some* bomb! But where did it come from? And why?"

Crystal gripped his sleeve. In the back of her throat was still that dry, sweet taste, and her head ached slightly. That was all. But for the distant clatter of fire engines and ambulances, it would all have been a dream. Yet there were the fringes of horror about it, sitting in the car there among a surging crowd of people that still laughed with a touch of hysteria, that was still welded into one emotion of fright and bewilderment, still troubled with that undertone —*War!*

"It's no war," said Larry between his teeth. "It's some kind of a lunatic. Some idiot who didn't know what he was doing."

**Helplessly Larry saw the yellow fog moving toward their car, saw the policeman crumple to the ground. And then, sweetish, stifling, it caught both Crystal and himself.**



Conscious of a tiny jar within him, which for the world he could not have explained, he started the car and began to crawl slowly out of Trafalgar Square, where the first gas-bomb in the history of civilized cities had just been dropped.

SALLY ALLISON stepped from her taxicab outside the entrance of the Grand Criterion Hotel. A policeman standing at the curb smiled and opened the door for her. The taxicab driver grinned broadly and saluted. She called the policeman "Joe" and the taxi-driver "Dan," which seemed to please them. In age Sally Allison of the *Post-Mercury* was perhaps twenty-five. In adventure and experience, from Lucknow to Limehouse, there were few, even men, more hard-bitten. She was tall and angular, with fierce gray-green eyes and a matt-white skin which she neglected.

"The old edifice still stands, I see, Matt," she remarked to the immaculate hall porter. "That washes out Moscow. Rather a pity. I was served with some caviar the other night that called for a bomb or two." This last to the head-waiter, who as was usual when Sally Allison came on the scene, had come forward.

He took her into the Cavendish-Bentinck room, where a young man with curly black hair, offset by a rather rat-trap mouth, which in turn was negatived by a pair of innocent gray eyes, came to his feet at the table where he had been sitting. "You're late," said Dick Challis accusingly.

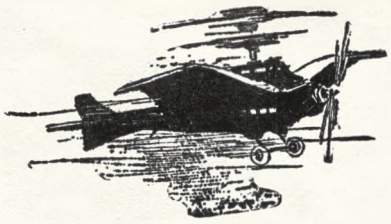
"Correct. I happen to be a newspaper-woman who works for her living, not a person who can turn into a lounge-lizard and say that it's for the sake of the dear old Secret Service. . . . All right, I'll be dumb. . . . No, I'll not sit down. Crystal Templeton and Larry Raeburn are behind the pillar yonder, if you look closely. We're going to join them. How do I look? You know I want to pinch Larry from Crystal."

Dick Challis winced visibly, and seeing it, Sally flushed and was silent. When they reached the other table, her nod of recognition to Larry was cursory. It was on Crystal that her look rested.

"I presume you were in it?"

"Yes. We were just on the edge of Trafalgar Square. But nothing much happened to us—I mean it was like some anesthetic. What is it, Sally?"

Dick Challis questioned, a little eagerly: "Not—war?"



At the word, Challis and Larry Raeburn looked across at each other. They were big friends, but Larry knew that Challis considered him a dilettante in Room D3, because he had money and had been a favorite of John Kingdom's. There was one crisp white curl in Challis' black hair, and that young rat-trap mouth had not grown on him out of nothing. A grim quality lay about all Dick Challis' adventures in connection with Room D3, though he seldom spoke of them. He was a fatalist. His traditions were all English, as they might have been German, Italian or French. Like millions of other young men in Europe, he believed that if Armageddon must come, come it must.

Sally drew a long breath on her cigarette, and answered:

"Not war, no. The news was coming over the tape machine as I left the office. They dropped a bomb on the Quai d'Orsay in Paris, one on a meeting that Hitler was addressing in Berlin—a monster meeting, it was, and I believe Adolf himself was laid out—and another one just by that palace where Mussolini lives in Rome. All at exactly four minutes to eight this evening. Just laughing-gas in every case, it seems to have been. Appropriate, in a way. There were a few casualties in Berlin. Some of the airmen who were cavorting above the demonstration came down flat. You can't fly an airplane when a sort of invisible dentist gets his invisible nose-bag on you."

Dick Challis said crisply, a little like an adjutant speaking: "Why the devil didn't one of them get the fellow?"

Sally laughed. "Dear old Dick! They didn't belong to a crack regiment, perhaps—I mean squadron. Anyway, there doesn't seem to have been the whisper of a propeller when everybody came round. And nothing to be seen. . . . A darn' good thing it wasn't real gas."

Crystal repressed an involuntary shudder. The Cavendish-Bentinck room of the Grand Criterion was filling, and there was a simmer of excitement over everybody. Only the suave service of the

Grand Criterion—which, even if it were war, would carry on silently until its destined bomb hit it—was the same as usual.

Crystal felt Sally Allison's hand touch hers comfortingly. In Geneva she had known and loved the outwardly hard-boiled newspaper-girl, and knew that Sally was thinking—as she was herself—of John Kingdom, and all he had been.

"Let's eat."

THE four dined almost in silence, but any middlingly acute observer could have seen that Dick Challis was in love with Sally Allison. Whom Sally was in love with, if she ever let that weak emotion enter her soul, Janus himself could not have told just then.

"I've thought of a line of poetry all at once," said Sally, addressing Larry, almost for the first time. "When is Larry going to marry? In other words, do we toast you tonight, Crystal dear? Before that mysterious bloke from the skies has a chance of putting nitrous-oxide into our wine?"

"It's postponed," said Larry with a laugh. "We're taking a trip to the Ægean first."

"Coo!" Sally's eyes rounded mischievously. "Not a trial marriage? Hello! You've spilt your wine, Crystal. I'll call Heinrich to mop it up. Oh, Lord, here he comes. Message for me, I guess. Wanted at the phone. All Lombard Street to an orange, I've to go to Rome or somewhere."

Crystal looked into her refilled glass with cheeks that felt rather hot when Sally had gone. She wondered why she had upset her wine purposely. So that Larry would not speak of their actual destination? Not that she didn't trust Sally. And why shouldn't he mention it?

Dick Challis sent her a curious glance, and then grinned at Larry.

"Nothing sacred to Sally," said Dick. "Looking in at headquarters tonight, Raeburn?"

Larry shook his head. "Not unless I'm sent for. I'm on leave at the moment. Who the devil can it be, Dick?"

Challis ran his hand through his black curls. He was watching the doorway for Sally.

"Ask me another. The world's full of lunatics. Good thing it happened all over the place; otherwise we'd all have been at each other's ears by now. I wouldn't mind. It's got to come—and the Kingdom business hasn't altered it one jot, if that was his game. *Nitchevo*, as the Russians still say, I believe. . . . Well, we've eaten and drunk, though we don't seem particularly merry. . . . Here she comes. With news, I think."

Sally sat down. There was a fleck of bright jade in her eyes, the only sign of her excitement.

"I'm going to Geneva. Special plane. The venerable peacemakers of the Seventh Danubian Conference are still at it. But they got a radio message about half-an-hour ago. It mushed out everything else for miles round Geneva. It just said: *'Get on with it—get on with it.'* Short and sweet like that, for nearly an hour. They put their tracker apparatus onto it."

"Well?" Dick Challis fired.

"It was tracked, okay," said Sally; then, after a pause: "They got it, sure. It just came from up overhead there—from the stratosphere. Six or seven miles up, where Piccard, the Swiss, and those Soviet balloon people who came such a cropper, went to spy out the land."

"And where no known airplane has ever been yet," ended Dick Challis gently, though his eyes were cold and eager. The whistle he gave was noiseless. "There'll be a conference down at Room D3 tonight. Good hunting, Larry. Even guys up in the stratosphere have to come to earth now and then. Pity you're out of it, old man."

Larry demanded, flinching: "Why am I out of it?"

"Kingdom," answered Challis dryly, and a little brutally without meaning it. "I'm not superstitious, but I'll bet his ghost is in this. Likewise, you're a mon-eyed bloke and engaged to marry this charming girl. I'm off. You may see me in Geneva, Sally."

"If I look at you," said Sally, viciously for some reason.

WHEN Jacob Anderthal was five years old, there was a pogrom in the Russian province where he lived. He and his father and mother ate turnips and filth in the fields, while their relatives were being crucified in the neighboring villages. Both his parents went without clothing to keep him warm. He was such an enormous, laughing little fellow, that they could not let him die. In the Ghetto of Kiev, ten years later, he walked away when the Cossacks were coming, because it was no use three of them perishing. He wandered Europe, growing bigger and hairier, and laughing

at the Gentiles to himself, even when he was starving. In 1914 he was making mess-tins at Stockholm, Sweden, and selling them to the German and Russian armies. Two years later, with the money he saved and his inborn financial genius, he provided big guns to both sides from a palatial office in Copenhagen. At the end of the war he could not write, for his fingers were too clumsy; his mentality was that of the Ghetto; but he was a millionaire. Two years after the war to end war, when munition-making was looking up again, he realized his dream and became partner with a man he hated and feared, equally—John Kingdom.

"Kingdom!" murmured Jacob Anderthal now.

The Countess Anna, at the white piano-keys under the jade lamp, let the last note drip from her fingers. She turned slim, magnolia-like shoulders, and let her small chin rest on one of them, to look across the room in the Villa Marigolda, John Kingdom's late villa, on Geneva. She asked indolently:

"Why do you let yourself be haunted by a dead man, Jacob?"

"Sometimes I dream," said Anderthal, in his sluggish playful voice, "of other things than you, little one. Less pleasant things. Of how Kingdom deceived me and cast me into poverty. And sometimes I think—no, he cannot be dead. Foolish!"

The Countess Anna ran across and knelt by his side. He was about as poverty-stricken as any other millionaire, even now, she knew. She pressed the bright sorrel of her head against the big mouth, then looked up.

"If he was alive, I should know. He couldn't live in a world in which was my hate of him. I meant to kill him some day in any case, as you know. Of course he's dead. I know it inside me. Why do we keep on staying here?"

"These women's intuitions! Of course Kingdom is dead. He shot himself, *hein?* And we stay here because, after the excitement, I want only my beloved for a little while."

"I adore you!" said Countess Anna.

Anna Neszl Landeck, Countess of Gerolstein, had been born in a castle in the Tyrol, years before. At the age of ten her mother had been kissed shyly by a blue-eyed peasant boy, on the slopes of the Glockner. A few hours later the peasant boy had been found hanged from a tree, and ten servants were flogged

**Anderthal began to creep on hands and knees. . . . Not for years had he fought or killed with his own hands.**

for negligence. Anna never knew those days, for the Empire cracked when she was two, leaving the Landecks with nothing but their aristocratic blood. In Vienna, after the war, the Countess Anna spat in the face of a Socialist burgomaster, according to her rights. Her two brothers were shot as they galloped triumphantly down the Ringstrasse with her, trailing the old Hapsburg standard behind them. In any case, they were starving. A year later Anna married a young count, who, though nearly a mental deficient, had managed to keep his fortune. To celebrate the event, she paid a drunken young man to kill the old burgomaster whose face she had spat into. After that she lived in a castle like a fairy princess, in a more fabulous luxury than her forefathers. As recreation she trained her husband to be one of the most foolish and extravagant imbeciles in Austria. On her eighteenth birthday she realized her ambition, and went to a man as clever and unscrupulous as herself—Jacob Anderthal.

"When do we leave here?"

"Tomorrow. There! Now to bed, or I shall eat you before that."

"Nice monster!" Nymph-slim, she came to her feet. Then: "I wish John Kingdom were not dead. I've nobody to hate. I must have somebody. It may be you, if you're not careful."

"Go, Medusa!" roared Anderthal like an amused gorilla, and she fled. From behind the door came the ripple of her laugh.

IT was nearly midnight. . . . The night had rose-scents in it from the garden outside; a moon lay in white witchery over the lake below; a nightingale sang: but Jacob Anderthal closed the windows.

He made sure that the curtains were drawn. It had been John Kingdom's villa. Almost it seemed as though Anderthal wished to keep the aura of John Kingdom imprisoned in it.

He sat his big shape at a bureau and unlocked it. The house was guarded. His own men were hidden about its vines and jasmine. But Anderthal's fingers seemed to hang on hungrily to the sheet of paper he opened, lest it should be snatched from them.

*To anyone whom it may concern: My cousin, John Kingdom, holds me a prisoner on this date, August 2nd, at the Villa Marigolda. We resemble each other greatly, and he has had me made almost indistinguishable from himself. I guess he means to kill me, or do something devilish with me. My name is Brian Kingdom. I am hiding this where he and Chundra Dah can't find it—*

It ended there. Somebody had come upon Brian Kingdom's trembling hand.

Jacob Anderthal sucked in his cheeks. He was no longer the genial ape, but intent, absorbed. For this he had bought the Villa Marigolda from the trustees. He had stripped and searched the house with his own hands; and thrust into the crack of a wainscot, had found the crushed piece of paper. It was not luck. He had a sixth weasel-scent, and it had not failed him. He had always known that John Kingdom lived. . . . Tomorrow the chief of police, and then a squad of gravediggers in the churchyard of St. Sulpice, by night, to make sure. Then—

Anderthal hunched forward a little. He sighed. An owl flew hooting over the villa, and the small waves washed softly in the silent night below.

A sound inside the room, a discreet cough. Jacob Anderthal moved and swung his great hand to the drawer of his desk, to the automatic that lay there.

"The unexpected visitor must expect quick and hostile movement, I agree," said a grave voice. "But be assured it is entirely unnecessary, sir."

Anderthal's pistol-point did not drop from the protuberant middle of his visitor. It was Chundra Dah, the Babu servant of John Kingdom, but no longer in the sarong and turban of servitude. He was dressed like any other gentleman, in well-fitting clothes.

"Stay there," said Anderthal slowly. "How did you get in?"

Chundra Dah smiled. Childlike pride, and childlike mystery.

"Ah! Does it matter? Corpulence cannot pass through the needle's eye any better than a camel; so it was not that way. Let us dismiss it. The written hand is never satisfactory, sir. The writing, too, is meager in quantity. What about me? Interrogate me. I know a lot about John Kingdom, please excuse swank."

QUITE motionless Anderthal sat, and watched. Chundra, smiling, benevolent but very earnest, clasped his hands across his stomach.

"Lo, the poor Indian! And confoundedly poor, I assure you, sir. No offers for my information? Then will I give away Mr. Kingdom's joke, and pin my faith to your generosity. Of course, he is not dead. It was his joke on you. He always called you the simple ape, please excuse. *Anthropopithecus* is scientific appellation, Mr. Anderthal. I will unfold you the plot—"

The lights of the Villa Marigolda went out just then—extinguished as though a giant hand had descended upon the house. Chundra Dah made no sound as he swooped and clutched the piece of paper from Anderthal's invisible hand. The pistol gaped red in the dark, and Chundra thudded to the carpet. Then his voice came from the corner, not a whit less gentle than before:

"A little machine I fixed up by the main fuse. Chiefly a simple timepiece of the alarm species."

Anderthal's pistol went off again at the voice. A shadow brushed by him, clutching the weapon away crisply, half breaking a finger in the trigger-guard.

"Not that I'm afraid of explosion summoning your watchdogs, Mr. Anderthal," said Chundra's level, disembodied voice. "I have dealt with them faithfully. At the moment they are out of pain. It will be different when they awake. All save one, who will not awake."

Anderthal began to creep on hands and knees. He was big and agile himself, and his animal courage was enormous. It was the darkness that hindered, and that damned brown face he was unable to see. He heard a kicking on the door. Anna. But the Babu had locked it.

Jacob Anderthal, moving in the dark, found an icy red mist before his eyes. Not for years had he fought or killed

with his own hands. It had always been done by his underlings when required, and that was not often. It was Kingdom who had sent him on this murder-trail after his Hindu servant. . . . His hand found something. He plucked at it.

"Sorree, but no!"

He lashed round at the voice, and found warm flesh between his hands. He kicked with his knee in a murderous fashion he had learned in his youth. He was caught by a consummate wrestler, and sent crashing, with both his arms seemingly dislocated. The sound went on behind the door. Anna was screaming now. The voice came:

"Please note that the piece of paper is swallowed. At the moment it is halfway down my œsophagus. I am going almost immediately. Garrulity is my curse. The Countess sounds excited. She may receive injury if she enters. I hear you moving. My advice is to the contrary. I have a knife, but would hate to use it. It is so un-English."

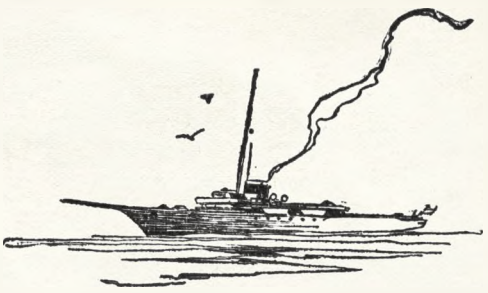
Luck had come Anderthal's way. Half-dazed as he was by that cruel throw, he had stumbled upon his pistol. He leaned his big hulk against the invisible wall, and fired it. There came a scream from the other side of the door.

The voice spoke, apparently in genuine concern.

"Now you have shot the Countess. Not seriously, I am relieved to say, judging by the sound. Good-by, sir. The comedy is ended. Ring down the curtain."

CHUNDRA DAH moved buoyantly, yet in utter silence, out of the garden of the Villa Marigolda. Only when at last he reached the fine white highway by the lake did he allow himself to pant a little. Avoirdupois was a donkey's-burden, and he had wasted considerable time in Geneva. Miss Crystal would be waiting for him in London. Nevertheless, Chundra knew it had been worth waiting many days to get that writing which he always felt Brian Kingdom had left behind. He was pleased.

Chundra Dah had been born in Calcutta, the son of a native lawyer. Once he had shot an elephant, by mistake. It was an old one, and had been rolling teak-logs for seventy odd years. His father had been rendered bankrupt by the damages, and though Chundra Dah's ancestry reached back into the misty ages, and he was undoubtedly an Indian



gentleman, he washed dishes in Japanese hotels, was a holy man in Siam for ten years, and for a time had attended to seasick people on the P. and O. Boats. Then one day he realized his life's ambition and gave his body and soul and his half a hundred wits to a white man who appreciated them—John Kingdom.

At the Gare de Cornavin in Geneva, Chundra peered anxiously into the booking-clerk's pigeonhole and said:

"I want the fastest train you have to London, please."

In the Paris train he sat timidly, a dark and shy colored gentleman. At the frontier he was obviously nervous about his passport, which was in perfect order. In Paris itself, with an umbrella and a small grip, he hurried bewilderedly through the traffic, obviously afraid to trust himself to a Parisian taxi-driver. Once in the Calais train, he puffed a sigh of relief and spread himself a little. The cockney tourist next to him nodded in a friendly way. He knew, himself, what it was like to be a foreigner.

"This cove will go to your country next, I shouldn't wonder. Settle the Indian problem for us."

He pointed to the headlines in the New York *Herald* he held. Chundra put on his glasses, and peered over the cockney's shoulder. He read:

BLACKMAILER OF NATIONS
MAKES SECOND NIGHT RAID
ANOTHER RADIO FROM THE STRATOSPHERE
REAL BOMBS NEXT?

Chundra Dah said: "Outrageous!"

The cockney said: "They'll hang him, if ever they get him. But he hasn't begun yet; that's my opinion."

Chundra murmured again, "Outrageous!" and looked up at the sky nervously as the train rolled in to the waiting channel steamer. He passed over the gangway, clinging tightly to his umbrella.

SEATED in the cabin of the big mail air-liner as it drummed over the last red roofs of suburban London, Crys-

tal could not help but reach out for Larry Raeburn's hand and press it furtively. A pulse of excitement was in her throat, which was quite natural, she told herself. It was not every day that a girl went to take up residence in one of the Isles of Greece before returning to civilization a wealthy woman. Her eyes misted a little as she thought of all John Kingdom's goodness.

Larry was rather quiet. He had wanted her to marry him before they started. Somehow she felt it would be betraying John Kingdom's wish. Once or twice she had thought that Larry was jealous that she should be rich with John Kingdom's money, and a little doubtful about the mysterious Mr. Van Horn.

"It's all going to be splendid, Larry!" Then with her eyes dancing: "What's to stop us getting a Greek priest along and marrying us? I expect Mr. Van Horn would see about it."

Larry grinned, cheerful again. To hell with Shieling if he had no use for him. A squadron of war-planes droned past, and, below they were experimenting with a searchlight that pierced the bright sunshine like a bar of molten metal. Europe was agitated and enraged, but not, as yet, terribly alarmed. In the last raid the lunatic bomber had been seen for an instant, dropping vertically like a plummet before shooting back into space at lightning speed. A helicopter it was agreed, but such a helicopter as had never been seen before. Rumor said that it was almost certain now that it came from somewhere in the Soviet States. . . .

They were in Brindisi at evening next day. Chundra Dah, silent and efficient, saw to everything. In London for the first time in her life, Crystal had had to speak coldly to Chundra. She was still haunted by the look of compassionate concern which came into his eyes when she told him Larry was coming. Not for her but for somebody else, it seemed to Crystal. Chundra had protested almost agitatedly, but he was impassive again now, sitting in one of the seats behind them.

IT was nightfall when the *Elvira* glided out of Brindisi. A vine-scented wind blew Crystal's hair. Larry kissed it almost fiercely, and she clung to him with an equal fierceness, realizing how much she loved him.

"We'll get that Greek priest!" said Larry, on a deep breath, releasing her slowly. "It must be the air, but I want to kill somebody for you, and win you that way. It's been too easy. I guess we'd better turn in, Crystal."

EVENFALL again, and the trim *Elvira*, sailing slowly through a maze of tiny islands. Mountains dying on the horizon, purple seas fading to deep indigo. A shepherd's horn from somewhere. Then open seas again that rolled as dark as wine and, abruptly, a small, conical shadow; a sea-mountain of dark rock. Larry Raeburn found himself on the bridge by McLintock, the young Scotch captain, gripping the rail with more than a touch of excitement.

"This Martos?"

If there was something veiled in the keen, hard-muscled face of the young sailor by his side, he did not notice it. Larry was looking for some launch that would bring Van Horn out. Save for a cable at Brindisi, the old hermit had not revealed himself. Larry felt that he was going to dislike the American. Then they were right within the cleft, which seemed to have opened its flanks for them, the anchor-chain ran out in deep water, and the electric launch was being lowered.

"Miss Crystal?" Chundra's voice spoke respectfully. "And Mr. Raeburn too—I think we are expected."

There was a landing of porphyry steps and then a steep ascent by a concreted causeway that went past the pale ruins of an old Greek temple. But from somewhere came an incongruous sound. It was the humming of a large and very powerful dynamo.

"There lies the villa," said Chundra, pointing.

It was then that Crystal's nerves began to tingle. A bowl of darkness lay below them, with the softly-lighted windows of a big house. It was as if it had been dropped there out of the sky. . . . Down the long steps. . . . Larry's voice a little tight: "Where is this Mr. Van Horn, Chundra?" But no answer.

A pillared portico and a graceful, low, white building, bigger than the Villa Marigolda. Chundra himself opened the door and stood aside. Crystal caught that momentary compassionate concern in his brown eyes, for somebody. Not for her. Not for Larry. He said, his voice shaking for the first time she ever remembered:

"There is great surprise, Miss Crystal. But you are brave young lady."

She knew then. Intuitions are born out of love and gratitude. The same piece of shrapnel had caught her and John Kingdom long before. She knew that John Kingdom was not dead. So it was that when Chundra closed the door of the room behind her and she saw the taut, small figure standing there, though she turned very white she hardly swayed.

"Crystal! Sit down, my dear. I had to do this. I swear to God there was no other way. Didn't you suspect? Didn't something tell you? Crystal, my dear!"

Both her hands were in his. He kissed them and then pushed her into a seat. Unsteady laughter came from him. Never had John Kingdom looked so virilely alive, so conquering. Crystal was shaking her head, crying a little.

"Why?" she whispered.

No answer came from him just then. Happiness swept down on him in a warm wave, and sheer happiness was new to his iron soul. If he moved, he knew he would take her in his arms and that would be too sudden.

Then, looking up, he saw the door had opened, rather abruptly. The two men stood staring at each other, John Kingdom and the boy he had saved from obscure poverty, if not from the gutter, with the woman they both loved between them.

Kingdom said slowly: "Raeburn! I didn't expect you."

THE color was coming back to Crystal's cheeks. She said:

"Larry would come. He was a bit suspicious of Mr. Van Horn." Her laugh showed how near to a momentary breakdown she was. "Where is Mr. Van Horn?"

"I am Mr. Van Horn," said John Kingdom.

Deliberately he turned to Larry Raeburn; then he thrust out a hand. "I'm glad to see you, Raeburn. You'll stay?"

A ghost of a smile. Something had died out of him. He had been burning and now he was cold. His handshake was an irony, though there had been affection between the old John Kingdom and Larry Raeburn: that odd passionate love for youth and cleanness and strength which was almost a religion with one, and a simple hero-worship on the part of the other.

"I'll stay," said Larry impassively. "I'll say this is a thundering shock, though. . . . What's the idea—sir?"

The "sir" came with difficulty. Larry was aware of a deep jealousy, a terrible suspicion, coming from the certainty that all this had been planned beforehand. John Kingdom who had not died, wanted Crystal here alone. There was no Van Horn—no dead John Kingdom.

John Kingdom said, almost dryly: "A big idea. The biggest the world has ever known. Presently you shall know."

"Some idea!" said Larry, hating himself for the faint sneer.

He felt Kingdom's touch on his arm, looked into the depths of the fine, magnetic eyes, and all at once something within him twisted and left him silent.

The soft vibration of a gong began to shake through the villa that lay in the depths of a remote Grecian island.

Chundra Dah had taken up service....

SOFTLY glowing electric candles lighted the table. The room was exquisitely furnished. The John Kingdom who had come back to the world obviously kept a very fine chef. Crystal had no need to bring her clothes from the yacht. A great blue-and-gold room was hers, and everything down to the tiniest trinket was there.

"Princess of Armageddon again!" Larry had whispered as she came down, with a touch of bitterness she did not catch just then.

Chundra brought coffee. Kingdom broke a silence to say slowly:

"I've given them all a bad scare. It hasn't started yet, I'm afraid. . . . Sit down, Raeburn!

"I'm going to save them all from madness," said John Kingdom. "I'm going to cast out fear and hatred. I'm going to blackmail them into a peace that will last. One man can do it. A man like me, using men like you, Raeburn—Larry. . . . I bought this island five years ago. It's not on the map, and on hardly any chart. The Grecian Government forgot it the moment after Van Horn, an eccentric American who had managed to remain rich and wanted an island of his own, had paid them half a million real dollars for it." Kingdom added musingly: "Van Horn was real. I made him so. I've used him over half the world, and hundreds of people know him. It would take me hours to tell you what Van Horn and Kingdom did between them in the last five years.

"Do you remember that steamer with new planes aboard for the Italian Government, which sank in the Adriatic a

few months ago, Raeburn? It didn't. At least, not until after it had landed the planes here. They were hush-hush, you'll recollect. Naturally. They were helicopters which could reach the stratosphere five miles up, and travel at five hundred miles an hour, unseen. They were finished, complete, proved. Their inventor is a boy of twenty-three. He happens to be an unhinged pacifist like myself. I corrupted him." A twitch of the mobile lips. "He's on this island now. Understand, there's nothing of Jules Verne about these planes. They'd have come in a few years in any case. You know how the scientists are poking into the stratosphere? But I snaffled them first, that's all. From here they can get to anywhere between London and Tokyo in a very few hours. They can swoop out of the sky, drop their bombs and get back again before defending planes can even beat round. Enough to make my old friend Anderthal's mouth water! And just by luck I got them first."

Kingdom put out his cigarette. There was a deep, soft silence in the room.

"Bombs too: And gas. That was easy. No need for new discoveries there. It's all waiting for the word go. From harmless color gases to stuff that will make children cough up bits of their lungs for a minute or two before they die. I've workshops, laboratories, and men. Such men! There're black-shirts and blue-shirts and red-shirts in this crazy Europe, all with the right kind of divine fire in their own opinion, heaven help them. Looking for something God handed to them, and they never got it because somebody stole it. But none like mine. You'll see them, Larry boy—"

"And then what?" broke in Larry a little huskily. Crystal saw how white were his knuckles on the table. She closed her eyes. Even yet it did not seem possible that it was John Kingdom's voice that was speaking. Then Larry again—almost desperately: "How long will it be before you're run to earth here? That's what I mean."

A SMILE from John Kingdom, tired but glacial. The shrapnel in his head—his shrapnel and Crystal's—was throbbing there as usual.

"A month perhaps—perhaps less. The planes get back here at night. Drop onto the island like hawks. I'll show you. A month will be enough. I'll get their diplomats, their cowardly masters, their old powerful men who escaped in the last war and want another. I'll get their cities as enemy planes would. Then they'll realize."

"With—real bombs?" whispered Crystal. She felt mesmerized, borne away on some sea of dreams and ideals and brutal forces, all inexpressibly commingled.

Kingdom's face was a mask. "If necessary. In the first hour of the next war there will be more slaughter, a greater holocaust of humanity than has ever yet happened. Innocent people. Not soldiers with trumpets and bayonets. It's coming. I guess John Kingdom, late of Kingdom and Anderthal knows something about that. I'll give it to them in homeopathic doses. Show them what it's like. Oh, only the tiniest taste of the real thing, Crystal." His voice sank. "Then they'll get together like they're all sick to do, if only they dared, if only they were sane like me. . . . I'm watching for signs of a little war. That will be the beginning. Any word of anything like that at Scotland Yard, Larry? . . . Sorry, boy. I want no answer. I'm the Angel of Peace," said John Kingdom, and came to his feet. No arrogance. A quiet smile and eyes that shone even a little quizzically.

HE had gone, leaving Crystal and Larry alone together. It seemed to both that they shook themselves out of some hypnotic trance. Somewhere above the villa a seabird mewed in the darkness. Urgently Larry's fingers dropped to Crystal's hand and closed over it.

"Listen, Crystal: We must get away from here, somehow. He's a madman."

"He's rock-sane," said Crystal, sitting still in the soft table-light, and looking at nothing. "That's the terrible thing about it. But we can't think of either sanity or madness, Larry. We're here. And—do you know he wants you, Larry? Wants you terribly."

Larry looked at her clear, rather white profile, the tiny lobe of her ear in her soft hair, the firm curve of her upper lip, everything which he knew so well. He looked away quickly then, at a thought that burned him.

John Kingdom wanted her, too—wanted her terribly.

**This moving and timely story of a dealer in wholesale death who undertook to browbeat Europe into disarmament grows in power and fascination with each chapter. Be sure to read the next installment—in our forthcoming September issue.**

*The wicked flee when none pursueth—but this innocent dark detective had a very real enemy on his trail.*

*By* ARTHUR K. AKERS

Illustrated by Everett Lowry

# *Bugwine In the Lion's Den*

AS the significance of all those notices plastered on the sides of the circus ticket-wagon penetrated, Assistant-sleuth "Bugwine" Breck heaved a horse-sized sigh of relief. Loving Aroma Adams was pleasant but expensive—and now he wouldn't have to keep his big-mouthed promises to take her to this show, because old show was broke—thus giving Bugwine a break, his first in weeks. Now he would get all the credit and none of the expense of escorting Aroma; and a boy who was competing with a new male movie-star for her favor needed all the credit he could get!

Cheered by this emergence of his luck from practically summer-long æstivation, Mr. Breck turned his left-shod feet jubilantly toward Strawberry Street.

But Strawberry Street quickly provided fresh proof that luck never lasts: across the front of Latham Hooper's movie-house there still flapped a painful banner reading, *"Extra! See Washburn Billups of Demopolis, inside, in great Bank Hold-Up Picture."*

Bugwine gulped. That Mr. Billups' movie-stardom consisted solely in his having been caught in a news-reel shot of a New Orleans street throng craning at the recent site of a daring hold-up was no drawback with the movie-mad Aroma, nor comfort to Mr. Breck, who knew she was even then inside, raptly viewing the goatlike features of the dazzled Washburn. Also that Mr. Billups was complicating Bugwine's business further by following the film personally through southern Alabama, hitch-hiking and sending Aroma daily picture postcards reading, "I played this town today," in approved trouper style.

Mournfully Mr. Breck plodded toward the Columbus Collins detective agency—to receive a new shock: A white man was coming out of it! In the Gulf country, only two kinds of "white-folks" ever entered a darky's place of business: the Law and the collectors.

Then Bugwine's perplexity deepened; for this white man represented neither the law nor the profits, but was Mr. Peter Reynolds. Mr. Reynolds was at the moment the local enigma and anathema—he was loud, brusque, moneyed, and because of certain dubious business ethics, had failed to make a favorable impression socially, among the white gentry.

"Dat why de movie-gent'men gwine be dar too," Mr. Breck rebutted. "Turnin' de crank and takin' all dem pictures of me and de lion."

*"Ugh-oh!"* escaped Mr. Breck at the sight. "Somebody done cotch up wid Columbus!"

But Bugwine was wrong. "Come on in here, boy!" rasped his plaid-suited and battered-derbied chief at sight of him. "Us waits three months to git a case—and den when us *is* git one, *you* got to be off lookin' at lions!"

Mr. Breck swallowed—for practice: a client meant a boy was liable to wrap himself around some cookery again.

"You reports for duty at Mist' Reynolds' plantation, two miles down de river road, at two o'clock," directed Mr. Collins. "And, boy, whatever he say do, you say 'Yassuh!' Besides not gummin' dis up, like you do everything else you tackles."

"Always gits my man," said Bugwine resentfully. "What kind case is hit?"

"Mist' Reynolds tell you dat. You be dar, is all. And don't stir me up axin' questions, shawt dawg; don't stir me up! Got a whole mess on my mind. But you work dis right and you gits in de papers, right whar Aroma can see it. Remember *dat!"*

Such generalities proving unsatisfactory, Mr. Breck turned to his weakness for strength—a persimmon beer alongside which the new 3.2 product was but a pallid, puerile thing. Bugwine stayed himself with flagons of it. Until: *"Whuff!* Sho laps noble!" he pæaned approvingly. Then—"Feets, git ramblin'! Cain't keep de white folks waitin'." And down through the afternoon shuffled Bugwine Breck, all set and sizzling for whatever assignment lay ahead.

MR. REYNOLDS he found sitting glumly in a rocker on his veranda, eying the wooded island in the river toward which his acres slowly sloped.

He eyed his visitor, and a further shadow crossed his florid face.

"Here me, Colonel! Bugwine Breck, de human bloodhound," Bugwine hastened to correct any bad impression produced by the size of his feet or the potency of his beer. "Columbus Collins, de big detectin' boy, sent me."

"Oh, yes!" Recognition came to the rescue. "Yes. He recommended you very highly. Personally, though,"—as the breeze shifted,—"you don't look so hot to me."

The beer pleasantly prevented Mr. Breck's recalling that Columbus' recommendations often back-fired right smack in a boy's face. "Yassuh," he hastened to set this white gentleman straight, "eve'ybody recommend me. Always gits my man."

"He said," continued Mr. Reynolds "that you knew a lot about lions."

Bugwine started slightly, but strove to please. "Yassuh," he confessed modestly, "aint nobody round here understands lions like me. Works in a circus once."

White-folks would quit joking in a minute and get down to business!

"Well," resumed the planter, "I wanted to be certain about you first: I've just bought me a lion—"

Bugwine shot three feet into the air, and came down cold sober. *"S-s-suh?"* he stuttered.

"I say I bought a lion, from that busted circus in town. And Monday I'm going to show these people around here that they can't high-hat *me* any more: if I can't go to Africa, I'll bring Africa here, with big-game stuff, a lion-hunt—"

*"L-l-lion*-hunt, boss?" Persimmon beer wasn't slowing a boy's brain down any now; just his feet.

"Yes. On my island, out in the river yonder. We'll turn the lion loose over there and invite everybody to a hunt that'll knock their—"

"Says *'we'* is, suh?" Bugwine grew suddenly meticulous about his pronouns.

"We. We're ferrying that lion across to the island in his cage Monday morning before six. The island's big enough to give him a sporting-chance, is all. Then at ten you and the dogs will go back over there. That's when and why I wanted an old lion-hand like Columbus says *you* are, to go ahead of the hunters, as a native beater, and flush the lion out of the brush for us—"

Sounds similar to a dog-fight in the kitchen of a Chinese restaurant signalized Mr. Breck's first real grasp of the nature of his new assignment—followed seventeen fast minutes later by a big door-banging at the Collins detective agency.

"Hires *me* out for a lion-tamer, is you!" sputtered a wild-eyed and wrathful Bugwine there. "Craves *me* to flush de lion out de bushes, huh? Well, lemme tell you somep'n, big boy, you done step in my face yo' *last* time now! You—"

AN elbow clamped skillfully about Mr. Breck's neck; his rebellion sank to a gurgle, while a practised palm rubbed his stubby features rudely upward, even as a vast foot descended anchoring and agonizingly upon his own.

"All time gummin' up our business!" rumbled the voice of his chief harshly in his ear. "But lay down on *dis* case —de only one us had all summer—and I 'sterminates you wid a scantlin'. Stall him, dat's all; stall him till us eats."

"Stall him till de *lion* eats, liable be!" escaped muffled from under the elbow.

"Lion-hunter I tells de white man you is—and, boy, lion-hunter you gwine be!" Columbus continued, adamant. "What *you* tell him jest now, nohow?"

"Aint tell him nothin'—exceptin' I got some business to 'tend to wid you, first."

*"Dat's* lucky—for your gizzard. And your business done 'tended to, too—by me. Business wid Aroma! I jest finish talkin' wid her, after she come out de movie to eat."

"Talkin' wid *Aroma?"*

"About you. And, runt, is dat gal swell' up! She aint nothin' now but a strut—tellin' everybody round de barbecue-stand how she know you!"

BUGWINE spun dizzily as self-interests collided. If he had any luck with this lion, it meant he was likely to have even more luck now with Aroma: old movie-star like Wash Billups would start looking like a dime's worth of catmeat to her directly, alongside a *lion*-hunter! All Bugwine could lack then would be getting in the movies too.

"All right; I hunts lions den," surrendered Mr. Breck. "But craves to see Aroma first, so I can cash in wid her on it quick."

"Bugwine, I sho is de luckiest gal!" the ardent Aroma reacted to the news. "Here Mist' Billups in de movies, and now you fixin' to be in de lion—"

Bugwine paled precipitately: that was just what he most feared! Until—

"—Hunt!" Aroma completed her thought and corrected his.

Mr. Breck refilled his overalls so fast they rustled. Old lion-hunt wasn't until Monday: Sunday would be plenty soon enough for a boy to start his worrying. Meantime he could look down upon Washburn Billups from the stratosphere of Aroma's new admiration. "Sends for me all over Alabama when dey hunts lions!" He stuck to the simple truth, however: Alabama had never had a lion-hunt before.

*"Aint* it so!" giggled Aroma gratifyingly. "Only, cain't many folks look at a lion-hunt, while *eve'ybody* sees you is you git in de movies, like Mist' Billups."

Bugwine winced.

"Twice dey has to shoot me, to make me turn loose of de last lion I hunts," he improvised in fresh effort to shift the spotlight back to himself.

"Well, I got to git on back to de movies; old bank-robbery film fixin' to run again," Aroma recalled her fan-ship. "And Mist' Billups writ me he be playin' in Dothan tomorrer."

With Aroma gone, Bugwine again lost altitude before realities. Now, he was not only committed to Columbus and Mr. Reynolds to lead the lion-hunters, but he would be wrecked with Aroma if he

didn't—making it increasingly desirable that a boy study his lions, for loopholes. Making little moaning sounds to himself, Mr. Breck corralled his large and reluctant feet, to head them in the direction of the ex-circus grounds. He would have a look at this lion, take steps to get on the good side rather than the inside of it later.

By now, it was practically dark, also lion-feeding time. But no one was visible about the parked cages as Bugwine shuffled nearer, except one forlorn and shadowy figure, leaning disconsolately against one of them as though he were about to lose his last friend.

BUT as Mr. Breck stumbled cautiously past the attachment-decorated ticket wagon, memory moved to his rescue. He was evolving a minor strategy, constructing it from a dimly recalled page of his Second Reader—the one about Androcles and the lion. If a boy, mused Bugwine, couldn't mess with any thorns in a modern lion's paw, he might at least feed him a peanut—

Hair-raisingly from directly above Mr. Breck's ear in the darkness, a vast coughing roar split the night.

*"Whuff!"* panted Mr. Breck weakly when he was able to slow himself at last, some four miles north of town. "Boy, you wouldn't have made a good stomachache for dat lion, could he have got loose! *Zowie*—he hit dem bars! Feets, you sho hit de road noble; done took my skin three miles to cotch up wid me now—and *still* feels I got some more runnin' comin' on!"

Ten miles out on the Birmingham road that night, the lights of a speeding southbound truck picked up a lone pedestrian, hustling hard toward the north.

"Hey, boy!" The truck screeched abruptly to a stop as its driver hailed him. "Where's Demopolis?"

"Right back of me, suh. And gittin' more back-er eve'y minute!" The interrupted pedestrian eyed the odd-looking truck skittishly.

"Oke. But what's the matter? Sheriff after you?"

"Naw suh; lion is de matter—"

*"Lion?"* A spring seemed to have been touched here. "Is he loose?"

"Naw, suh; aint nobody loose but me —yit."

Conversation developed instantly on the darkened truck-seat. Then, "Hold everything! Maybe *you* can make some sense to this thing for us, boy. Sounds less—and more—like a wild-goose chase every minute now. Here, we've been helling down the highway half the night, and— But first, what's your name?"

"Name's Bugwine, suh; Bugwine Breck. I hunts lions." Bugwine couldn't help the latter touch, under the expansive influence of an audience again.

Instant delighted surprise ran perceptibly along the truck-seat. "The hell you say! Then you're the boy we want!"

Old uneasinesses recurred: every time a boy mentioned lions lately, somebody fetched one out! And how did he know what was in this strange-looking truck?

But on its darkened seat fresh argument had already arisen. "I tell you the telegram said, *'With native beaters,'* one voice contended positively.

"Looks like one native beating it, to me!" laughed the other. Then, "Climb aboard, Bugwine! Your name might be Breck now, but by this time tomorrow night it'll be—*Douglas Fairbanks!"*

"Says *suh?"*

"I say you are fixing to break into the movies now. This is a news-reel sound-truck, on our way to make pictures of a big lion-hunt tomorrow. And we need you along to help us find it—and get yourself filmed too, get into the movies in a big way, right in front of the lion, as a native beater."

Mr. Breck whirled, collided with himself headlong, going and coming. Going from the lion and coming toward film stardom! "Y-you means, white-folks," he gasped, frog-eyed, "dat *I* gits in de movies too?"

Washburn Billups was a movie actor, Bugwine had been almost a lion-hunter; now, by a miraculous turn of fortune, Bugwine was fixing to be *both!* Let Aroma try to resist *that* combination!

"Right!" the movie-man confirmed his wildest dreams. "All over the world. Every negro in the country can go into a theater then and see you, Bugwine Breck, hunting lions!"

MR. BRECK kicked clouds aside—until the other side of the picture occurred. Then he quit being a fugitive and became a battlefield: if he returned to Demopolis, he would put it all over Wash Billups. True, but—and shudders shook Mr. Breck—what if the lion ate him before the movie could be made?

"White-folks, fan me while I makes up my mind!" at length implored a Bugwine for whom the whole horizon had become a whirl: cameras looking

like lions, and lions looking like cameras, as he faced them both.

Shortly after which Mr. Breck climbed aboard the truck.

All that Sunday morning the grapevine-telegraphs of Demopolis darkydom silently but surely clicked and spluttered. There were no drums, no wires, no short-waves nor signal-fires, but the news got through. By noon the roads were black with ancient cars, wagons, buggies, carts, and ivory-toothed pedestrians, all converging on the Reynolds' plantation where a disconsolate lion paced his tarnished cage and seemingly grieved for missing meals and master in great roars that chilled and shook the hastening horde.

UNDER the stimulus of these roars, Bugwine discovered a further oversight. And armament began occupying his thoughts on a scale equal to a European diplomat's. Since he could not swim, they ran, in case of island eventualities, self-defense might be the alibi and the answer to a lot of things.

This led to one "Ducktooth" Carnes receiving a caller—and lion-hunting a fresh turn. Mr. Carnes owned a bell-mouthed fowling-piece, a muzzle-loader upon which Bugwine had long had his eye anyway.

"Craves myself to borrow your gun, Ducktooth, to tend to some huntin' wid," the visiting Nimrod strove for nonchalance. "Mine's in de shop."

"What shop?"

"Pawn-shop."

"One barrel of mine aint loaded but halfway up," said Mr. Carnes, recognizing permanent storage when he heard it.

"Dat's all right; loads it myself," volunteered Bugwine glibly. "You jest let me have de gun and room to bust up a little flock of scrap-iron in. Me, I always gits my lion—sort of *sprays* him."

"Sprays? Lion? *Huh!*" crescendoed Ducktooth excitedly. "You and who else?"

"Me and Mist' Reynolds. I sort of goes on ahead of de white-folks and flushes out de lion—"

"You means dat old lion Mist' Pete buy from de succus?"

"Uh-huh. Why?"

"Uh—nothin'. Jest axin'. Hears dey's a white man used work wid dat show is been round tryin' to buy de lion back, is all. Say him and dat old lion is buddies. Mist' Reynolds aint listen to him: say he gwine git hisself in solid wid de quality around here, if he has to shoot *two* lions to do it. But I aint know he was aimin' to gum-up de hunt by havin' *you* around it."

Mr. Breck bridled at reference to his past unbroken record of blunderings. "Dat why de movie-gent'men gwine be dar too," he rebutted stiffly. "Turnin' de crank and takin' all dem pictures."

"Pictures of what?"

"Of me and de lion, dat who! —Me and de lion!" Bugwine crushed him.

Indeed, under the influence of an audience, Mr. Breck was practically at the point of regretting that he had but one life to give to the movies as he eyed himself with the gun, first in Ducktooth's mirror, then in his mind's eye on half the silver screens of America.

But heights do not last. No sooner was the reflated Bugwine back under the watchful ægis of Columbus, when the inevitable sour note sounded. Mr. Reynolds had sent for him.

"And I goes wid you, too; see dat you aint gallop out on me no more," volunteered Mr. Collins grimly. "You is de sort of boy what would bust up de white-folks' whole hunt—and de agency's fee —jest to keep yo'self from gittin' lion-e't."

Mr. Reynolds was chewing on a cigar and pretending to fight off three reporters from out-of-town papers.

"And there's my head beater now," he expanded to them, as Bugwine came into view under escort. Bugwine would be another reason for his not having to bother with that nut from the defunct circus who kept hanging around trying to buy his lion. For, contemplating the social triumph scheduled to follow his big-game hunt, Mr. Reynolds wasn't open to offers now from ex-lion-men or anyone else.

THEN Bugwine Breck stood owl-eyed before him.

"All right, boy, here's the layout," Mr. Reynolds launched loudly into his plans. "And be sure you get it right: you can't risk any mix-ups with a lion, y'know."

"Sho cain't!" Mr. Breck's brow grew beaded as well as grayish.

"So, at six o'clock tomorrow morning you are to help load the lion on that flatboat down at my landing, cage and all, y' understand?"

"Loads de lion," repeated Bugwine thickly.

"Yes. Then, when you and the other boys have got his cage over on the island,

they get on the boat and wait for you while you open the cage door, so the lion can get out to be hunted later."

Important details that had escaped the little sleuth during his inflation-period came up and smacked him heavily in the chest now. "You means, white-folks, me and de lion *both* gwine be loose on dat island when—when I opens dat cage door?"

"That,"—Mr. Reynolds was getting impatient with dumbness,—"is where the raw meat will come in."

"*Who* gwine be no raw meat?" Bugwine's eyes could have been knocked off with a stick, so far did they protrude under new misunderstanding.

"You'll have it with you! To throw in the lion's cage, to keep him busy there while you are fastening the door open and making your get-away. After he eats it, he comes on out, of course; but you will be gone by then."

"*And how!*" Mr. Breck's eyes were occupying all the facial area his mouth didn't need.

"But remember," resumed his client warningly, "you can't risk making any dumbbell plays with a lion. And I've asked a great many big white people to my hunt—been mighty damn' exclusive. Everything must go off all right! They're even making movies of it, y'know."

"Mess up nothin' dis time, boy," hissed Columbus *sotto voce* in his aide's off ear, "and you'll be *glad* to meet dat lion —to keep from meetin' *me!*"

But again Bugwine couldn't listen for looking—at himself in those movies! With Aroma watching Wash Billups going into total eclipse in Bugwine's favor.

"Dat white man what used to work for de circus, he back axin' to see you again, Mist' Reynolds," intruded a plantation darky at this juncture. "Say he crave to new-proposition you about dat lion—"

"Well, tell him I'm dead! Tell him I'm too busy! Tell him anything, but get him off of me!" Mr. Reynolds waved all obstacles to lion-hunting aside. "Now, you boys from the newspapers—"

In the movie-men's own language, then came the dawn. But not for Bugwine. Still guarded by Columbus, it was still night for him, torn as he was between pride and fear; pride at being in the movies, and fear of being in the lion.

**Nearer and nearer sounded the roars of the hunter, the wilder screeching of the hunted—as Bugwine's meat-given lead lessened.**

In the morning mists the news-reel men were stirring. Bugwine stirred too, with meat for the lion's breakfast—at the first whiff of which that unhappy beast flung himself roaring again against his bars, to rock the countryside and ruin Bugwine.

But nothing halted the preparations, not even the former circus-man's renewed importunities to purchase the lion that was to make Mr. Reynolds, socially.

"Time to get the lion over to the island now!" rang that worthy social-climber's

command as he dashed busily about, magnificent in knickers, golf hose, and pith helmet.

Saucer-eyed helpers began rolling the beast's cage to the water's edge, its occupant expressing his opinion of flatboats in fresh roars that split the rising river-mists and aroused Bugwine's knees to fresh flutterings.

But for Mr. Breck, shivering amid the sudden excessive slack in his overalls, retreat was impossible now: not only because of beer-born boastings behind him and stardom in front of him, but because of Columbus beside him.

WHEN loaded, the flatboatmen lustily pulled their craft from shore and headed it for the island, with Bugwine and their fearful freight securely aboard.

All too soon they were across, with the boat held firmly against the island's bank, while Bugwine's aides showed an increasing disposition to let a good lion-man attend to all the lion-business from then on.

With the cage once ashore, haste heightened. Visibly the oarsmen itched now for the open main.

"Y'all niggers keep dat boat handy now till I opens up dis cage-door," quarreled Mr. Breck in higher key as he dragged himself, his muzzle-loader and the meat atop the cage.

"Don't let nothin' hold you back when you *does* fling dat meat in and leaves dat door open, neither!" quavered the knob-eyed coxswain, "or you liable miss de *last* boat!"

*"Arr-rrr-hhh-oof!"* raged the lion hungrily beneath him, as Bugwine's fingers fumbled at the catch. Lions sure made a boy feel sick! Then the lock clicked once, twice—and Bugwine's business got too fast for him! For as the door opened, and before he could throw the meat inside, the lion came out!

Instantly everything was a blur for Bugwine. Blur of rearing lion reaching for him; blur of river-spray where the screeching boatmen were hanging up a record for Cornell crews to envy but never equal—with Mr. Breck left alone on a small island with a large lion!

Instinctively, convulsively, Bugwine flung his meat. Fifty feet south of the cage, it struck the ground, with the lion after it. Instantly then Bugwine came off the cage-top, in a long fast diagonal toward the north, with all the distance that island could offer not going to be half enough! Bugwine craved Distance in a big way! As soon as old lion lapped up that appetizer, he was going to be hot after his main meal. But, resolved Mr. Breck despairingly, as he went through a blackberry thicket like a snow-plow through a pea-patch, *he* could be traveling while that lion was gobbling—get himself an early start, until any lion that lunched off of him was going to have to work up a whale of an appetite in overtaking him, first! This was no time to be waiting around on flatboats to carry his S.O.S. to the white-folks either! Bugwine opened his mouth in a squall that loosened both his tonsils at their moorings without interfering with his footwork, an S.O.S. shortly made the more realistic by the hunting roar of a lion that had finished his *hors-d'œuvre* and begun to bound lightly upon the trail of a speeding *entree* already far up the island now.

"My God! The idiot's let the lion loose *now!*" gasped a staggered Peter Reynolds as the noise crossed the water, his eyes took in the distant blurred streak that was Bugwine, northbound along the island's shore, still a half mile ahead of the lion. "I *told* him—"

"—And I tried to tell you, Cap!" interjected the unshakable circus-man. "That lion—"

But it was no time for talk. A life was at stake. Action alone could avoid tragedy instead of triumph as the climax to this lion-hunt. *"Quick!"* snapped Reynolds hysterically. "Into that motor-boat! Guns are in it! Step on it! We got to save him!"

Already, however, the movie-men, quick thinkers by profession, had beaten him to it. At the first illuminating squall from Bugwine they had guessed the rest and were loading cameras, guns, sound-apparatus pell-mell aboard the boat, where the animal-man was already a drawn-faced stowaway.

"Rotten light yet, but Lord, what a scoop if we can make it in time!" exulted the camera-man as the boat *put-putted* madly into midstream.

SPRAY flew. Their wake widened. They passed the speeding flatboat, still making rather better time than the *Europa*.

From far up the island sounded the roars of a lion puzzled by an interruption to the trail where Bugwine had taken to the air like a hen, for a shattering of the world's-record running broad jump in his flight—bafflement that added valu-

"Always gits my lion!" proclaimed Mr. Breck.

able seconds to a now southbound boy's life, as he tore down the island's farther shore.

"Head for the landing-place where the cage is!" ordered the agonized Mr. Reynolds. This could ruin him! "Hurry! It's murder! We *got* to save him!"

"You wouldn't listen to *me!*" muttered the stowaway. "I *tried* to tell—"

"Get us there for the ending, *please!*" implored the calloused camera-man.

"You're in at *my* ending now!" raged the gray-faced Reynolds. "All those guests disappointed! Invited to my lion-hunt, and now—"

"Cheer up! They weren't coming, anyway!" snapped a raw-nerved newspaper man disgustedly. "You gave 'em *your* measure, when you thought up turning a gang of hunters loose on a defenseless lion like—"

"Defenseless, hell! *Shut up!*" raved Reynolds. "We got to save him!"

The boat was grating bottom. The sound-man was leaping out. "Head up the island, Bill, past the cage!" he was shouting. "We'll never have another chance like this! Grab a gun and come on—we *gotta* get that picture before the lion gets Bugwine!"

Nearer and nearer now, across the narrow strip of island, as the laden movie-men plunged diagonally off into the bushes toward the oncoming chase, sounded the roars of the hunter, the wilder screeching of the hunted as Bugwine's meat-given lead lessened. The start it had given him was fast going now!

"He can't hold out! He *can't!*" the formerly florid-faced Reynolds was pallid now, blocked in his disembarking by the frenzied precedence of the news-reel men. But just here he stumbled awkwardly in his haste, collided with the unloved and unwanted circus-man—and, in a clinch, both went overside into the water.

YET even as they plunged there rang upon the morning air proof that Reynolds' pre-plunge fears had been well-founded, in Bugwine's sudden piercing screech:

"*De lion! Aw, he's got me! De li—*"

And the rest was suddenly silence, as Bugwine's last despairing cry was cut off abruptly in mid-scream. A silence broken for the two hurrying movie-men, however—already far up the bank—by two almost simultaneous sounds: the renewed roar of the lion and a terrific explosion like a blast. Followed by a snarl, a vast thrashing in the bushes before all was quiet again; a quiet hideous in its implications—

Choking, swearing, spluttering, Peter Reynolds came up for air. So did the circus-man. But he was adding new phenomena to the bedlam. Unmistakably he was weeping now,—and with more than rage,—which was decent of him, flashed oddly through the muddled mind of the crushed and muddied Mr. Reynolds, considering that he had hardly known at all the now-deceased Bugwine.

But just here admiration went out of Peter Reynolds like a blown candle. He started, gaped—and fell back on a language learned in boyhood on the Boston docks. For suddenly, incredibly, in the direction taken by the movie-men and against a background of the latter's own exultant swearing, the undergrowth parted, and out of it struggled shakily—not the camera-men, but Bugwine Breck—a Bugwine who took a triumphant forward step, and suddenly stood a full foot taller than was his wont. While upon him were writ large and unmistakable all the signs of a bantam rooster preparing to crow!

"Always is git my lion!" proclaimed Mr. Breck in triumph. Then, as he paused, devastation swept Mr. Reynolds, confirming his worst and latest fears as his eyes told the tale—Bugwine was standing on the lion!

"You! *You!*" howled the hunter incoherently, as its significance swept and

scoured him. He leaped, and shouted. He cast his hunting helmet from him, to jump up and down upon it. "You double-barreled, double-dyed, double-crossing idiot!" he cried. "You make a laughing-stock of me! You make a laugh of my lion-hunt! You double-cross the movie-people! And now, *now*, God help you, *you shoot my lion*, too!"

The circus-man, by now beside himself as well, was running forward, uttering awful, sorrowful oaths.

Bugwine staggered and stammered perplexedly in a world gone mad. Surely, shooting a lion in self-defense was no crime; he only wished he had remembered Ducktooth's gun sooner, and saved a lot of wear and tear on his soul and soles. Then another feature of Mr. Reynolds' tirade recurred, froze him, stuck out ruinously above all else. "Double-crossed de movie-folks, suh?" he repeated as memory and fear clutched anew at him. "Is you mean I does all dat gallopin' about in front dis lion, and dem gent'men aint made no movie of me doin' it?"

"Of course not!" his client blasted him. "How could they? You—you—" Again language was failing. So were Bugwine's legs as he looked ahead into the blankness and blackness of his future. He had shot the lion too soon! Wash Billups *still* would be king of the movies—and of Aroma's heart. . . . Fright and flight had been all for naught.

But just here the movie-men were panting up, ignoring everybody; everything getting madder, crazier all the time, it seemed to the flattened, fuddled Bugwine, with their triumphant, "Well, we got *one* swell picture, anyhow! A close-up of Bugwine shooting the lion!"

"A close-up? Of *me* killin' de lion?" Mr. Breck staggered, swelled. He couldn't remember everything, old business happened so fast; but cameras couldn't lie. And so the movie-men had got him after all! Then he was *made!* Made, with Aroma! Made, in every darky movie-house in America! What matter then that Mr. Reynolds was so angry, that the circus-man was making strange sounds of grief before him, caressing a tawny coat?

Suddenly it mattered a lot. The bottom fell out of Bugwine's business all over again, with Mr. Reynolds shouldering his way angrily forward. "A *close-up*, eh?" he shouted. "*Fine!* You shot my lion; now I'll shoot you—into jail! With the picture as evidence. Cameras

**"You!" howled the hunter. "You make a laugh of my lion-hunt. And now you shoot my lion too!"**

don't lie! I'll teach you to destroy my property—kill an eighty-dollar lion; bust up my lion-hunt; humiliate me before my guests; make me the laughing-stock of the county! You'll see yourself in the movies, all right! And so will the judge! I'll—"

Then it was, however, that the petrified Bugwine—sunk again in sight of Hollywood's very shores—felt something new and startling develop in a situation that already could stand no more. Neither could Bugwine. A feeling signalized first by his own wild yell and gazelle-like leap before the others, led by Mr. Reynolds, emulated him—followed, in the smallest fraction of a second, by an earnest scattering to the four winds of all save one.

SO Bugwine's ultimate, if accidental, triumph—snatching film stardom from defeat, Aroma from Washburn, and sheepish forgiveness at last from Mr. Reynolds—came when he was still too far and busy to hear its dawning in the animal-man's murmured:

"—Nothin' but a scalp-wound to knock you cold a while, after all, eh?" as an aged and reviving lion gratefully licked his familiar hand. "Well, I bet I can buy you back *now*, all right! And then we'll hit the road again, Big Boy, me and you—in your old cage, as soon as I can build a fire under it big enough to smoke out of it that new movie-star yonder—what's barricading himself inside it now with everything that's loose but the kitchen-sink!"

# Once

Illustrated by
L. R. Gustavson

Sheriff Johnson said mildly to Collyer McGinus: "You're the man. Your opinion has more weight with me than all the rest of them." He paused, his small white head bent forward as he searched McGinus' face with old blue eyes. He went on: "Son, this is trouble, probably. Roselti is no small-time bootlegger turned to kidnaping. Roselti is a big shot, and his mob's down here. They'll make every effort to deliver him. Now, you're to be the pilot of the plane, and I want to know what you think of transferring Roselti to Raiford by air tomorrow morning."

Collie McGinus swiveled his chair and looked for a moment out the window toward the east, across the width of Miami to the far blue Atlantic and the bay. He knew the circumstances fairly well; for on the Atlantic-Miami run he spent every fourth night in the latter city, and had followed these sensational events as they transpired. Vincent Roselti had kidnaped Senator Gammishaw's daughter, and after two weeks had been paid a quarter of a million dollars for her safe return. Capture had come almost immediately, then a long-drawn trial that ended in conviction. And now —this.

"If you put him on the plane," McGinus said, swinging back to meet the old man's eyes, "I don't see what his mob could do, once I get him in the air."

"No way his mob could force you to land?" the Sheriff asked. "The whole thing comes down primarily to the protection of my own men—not just the safeguarding of Roselti. I have definite information that if I make the transfer by car, we'll be ambushed. Some of my deputies will be killed in a fight like that. The same thing would happen if I went by train. I must protect my men, so my worry is not Roselti, but the certain fatalities of a fight with his outfit. You see how that puts it up to you?"

McGinus smiled. "No way I can see for them to make me land. This will be a special section—a Kingbird, which is our reserve ship here—and I'll be the only member of the crew. If they shoot me in the air, the plane will crash—Roselti with it. So I don't think you need to worry about that. You worry about getting him to and from the fields."

"I have that arranged. . . . Now, they could set up machine-guns on the ground under the path the plane follows, somewhere up the line, and shoot up at us, not meaning to kill anyone, least of all Roselti—but to cripple the plane so you would have to land. Can you prevent that?"

# a Pilot—

*The gifted pilot-writer who gave us "Murder Island" here contributes another thrill-filled story of air-adventure.*

## By LELAND JAMIESON

McGinus ran lean fingers through his wiry brown hair. He laughed easily: "I'll pull over the Atlantic a few miles, and we'll fool 'em."

Sheriff Johnson got up from his desk, extending his thin, wrinkled hand. "You make it seem so easy," he declared. "But let me warn you, there's danger in it. It's dynamite. We're dealing with murderers. You remember that, when I bring Roselti on your plane tomorrow morning."

McGinus rode down in the elevator, chuckling at the older man's ideas. Johnson thought of everything. Well, he had become an old man in his profession only by that means, McGinus soberly reflected, a strange, deep unrest suddenly pervading him. He tried to shake it off; this thing would be mere routine, once in the air. . . .

A few minutes after McGinus had assured Johnson of the ease and safety of this mode of transfer, Potatoes Durango, Roselti's lieutenant, sat in a dimly lit room of a post-Repeal speakeasy on Third Avenue talking savagely with a small, lithe individual who went by the name of Dicky Velari.

Durango said harshly: "That air stuff won't go. The way to snatch Vincent is to take the choppers and knock the cops off. We got to do that, or Vins gets the hot squat. I just got the dope—Johnson's taking him to Raiford by air tomorrow morning, in a special plane. I'm going to get set with the typewriters and snatch Vins when they're going to the field with him—just two roads they can use, and we'll watch 'em both from daylight on. We'll get him; that's a cinch. But we got to do it on the ground. The air stuff's out."

Dicky Velari, a former rum-running pilot who had turned mobster in these later months, poured himself a drink.

"Don't be a sap," he grated. "You turn on the heat, and you'll rub Vins out just like they did Nash in that Kansas City job. Leave this to me. I can turn this trick so nobody will ever tumble to a thing. We'll all disappear. The airplane will disappear, along with the pilot, Johnson and his deputies. We'll get Vins out of this mess"—he made a gesture of confidence—"just like shooting fish."

"Spill it," Potatoes Durango said.

"I'll get on that plane with Vins, and then I'll—"

Durango grimaced. "Fat chance!" he cut in. "You can't get on no special plane. Even if you did, they'd frisk you plenty careful. You'd never hide a rod from that old man."

Velari said with slow exasperation: "I won't need a rod, if I get on. And I'll get on—or I don't know old Johnson! He's—"

"You're nuts!" Durango cut back. "Choppers is the only way."

"But let me try it!" Velari flared. "If you get away with it, it's clean. They'll never tumble to what happened. And if I slip up and don't get on, we can still grab my own plane and get to Jacksonville in time to try the choppers when Johnson starts to drive to Raiford, see?"

He scraped back his chair and went to the phone. He dialed a number, and while waiting added to Durango: "Johnson's known all over Florida as a kind-hearted old man. . . . Hello, Jerry? Listen—go down to the Seaboard traffic office and get yourself a ticket to Jacksonville on tomorrow's regular passenger-ship. Get Sloat and Prosser and Bonner to do the same thing—space your calls. Have the boys keep buying tickets until that ship is sold out, and then have four or five put in requests for tickets—in case of cancellation by anybody. I want that ship sold out, with a waiting-list. Get it? . . . . What time does Vins take off from the field?"

"I couldn't find out."

"Any idea?"

"Sometime before the regular plane, but they may vary that. I couldn't find out."

Velari racked the receiver and swung back to Durango. "If this works, we make a clean get-away. Now, I have to call Soapy Duggan in Chicago and have him send me a wire late tonight telling me my wife's dying. Get it? The regular ship is sold out—got a waiting-list, so even if I should talk some passenger into giving me his ticket, there'd be another guy ahead of me. But the plane taking Vins has two or three vacant seats. If Johnson has any sympathy, and I can act, I'll get on there with Vins."

Durango ground out his cigarette-butt, his black eyes hooded. "Okay," he said softly. "But lemme tell you this, kid: you better get on that ship. I'm passing up choppers to give you a chance."

COLLIE McGINUS, as he drove to the field next morning, kept thinking of the methods these gangsters might use to get Roselti. He tried to see an angle of attack left open for them, but could not. Sheriff Johnson would take every precaution on the ground, and he himself would take care of them in the air. It was perfectly safe.

Yet a tight, hard uneasiness rested somewhere in his mind, a thing he could not define or analyze. He sometimes believed in hunches, and, although he could not identify it, he had a hunch of something now. It was with him when he reached the field.

Machine-guns were there. A man with one was stationed on the hangar roof. Another stood behind a car parked inside the building, silently vigilant. Two deputies with shotguns graced the field manager's office. The place looked like an arsenal.

The special trip was scheduled to take off at seven o'clock—fifteen minutes before the regular passenger and mail run, thus sparing Roselti the curiosity of the passengers. It was now six forty-five.

As McGinus parked his car, he saw that the Kingbird was on the loading ramp in readiness. The Condor had not yet been pushed from the hangar; all motion in the building seemed suspended, awaiting the departure of the first plane. An atmosphere of tension seemed to cling here like a high humidity, somehow stifling. McGinus, never an imaginative man, turned away to the weather

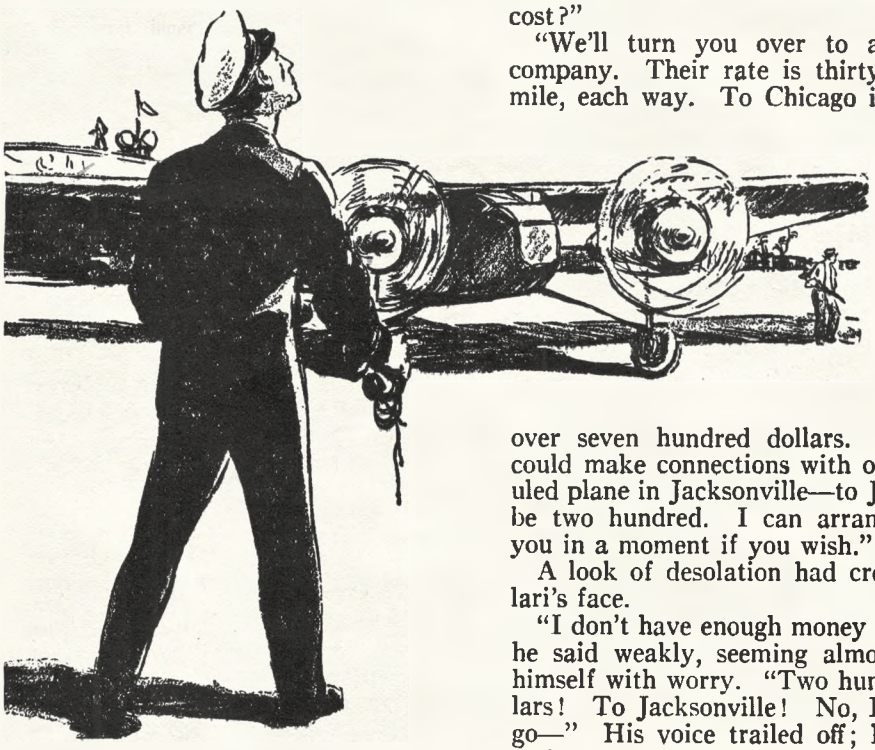
**Machine-guns were there. . . . Deputies with shotguns. . . . Roselti wore handcuffs and leg-shackles.**

bureau building, thinking that he would be relieved when this day's work was done. . . .

The weather north was unsettled, but nowhere bad. Miami had broken clouds that passed overhead in long squalls filled with wind and a biting rain at times. Palm Beach reported an overcast, with a ceiling of nine hundred feet, and occasional hard showers. The whole coast above Palm Beach had rain, but everywhere the ceiling was from five hundred to a thousand feet.

McGinus scrutinized the weather map, and went back to the hangar office, anxious to get started. Sheriff Johnson was here now, standing at the traffic counter with Roselti and a deputy—Roselti, a very ordinary-looking man who wore handcuffs and leg shackles, who looked up at the pilot's entrance with a burning frenzy in his eyes.

Almost at the moment McGinus entered the office from the hangar, a car slid to a stop before the door outside, and a small man wearing a gray felt hat jumped out and ran inside. He seemed unaware of the three already at the counter, but turned on Bryan, the field manager.



"Look," he said, somewhat out of breath. "I've got to get out of here by plane. My wife—dying. Just got the telegram. Called your downtown office and they said your ship had been booked full—had a waiting-list and it was impossible to get on. I came out here, hoping there was some way I could go. I've got to go!"

Velari paused, and for the first time his eyes seemed to take in Roselti, Johnson and the deputy. But he showed no interest in them. He swung once more to Bryan, and his tone was pleadingly impassioned.

"Is there some way you can help me get out of here by plane? I'm trying to reach Chicago before—" He faltered; his voice seemed to break a little in spite of his effort to control it. "Before my wife is—gone." He took from his pocket a crumpled telegram and spread it on the counter glass for Bryan's eyes.

BRYAN, with a practised imperturbability, was sympathetic. "That's too bad," he said. "I wish we could help you. Perhaps I could arrange for the charter of a plane."

Velari seemed to grasp at this idea with desperate hope. "How soon?" he cried. And then: "How much will it cost?"

"We'll turn you over to a charter company. Their rate is thirty cents a mile, each way. To Chicago is a little over seven hundred dollars. But you could make connections with our scheduled plane in Jacksonville—to Jax would be two hundred. I can arrange it for you in a moment if you wish."

A look of desolation had crossed Velari's face.

"I don't have enough money for that," he said weakly, seeming almost beside himself with worry. "Two hundred dollars! To Jacksonville! No, I—I can't go—" His voice trailed off; he turned and stared out the window across the flying-field.

Collie McGinus, standing there, felt an acute pity for the man. But he said nothing; this plane was chartered by Sheriff Johnson to transfer Roselti, and Johnson probably would not want a passenger.

VELARI, noticing the Kingbird on the ramp, turned to Bryan. "Is this the plane that's going out?" he asked. "If you'd just let me go—"

"That's a charter trip," said Bryan, working now with the papers Sheriff Johnson had given him to sign. "It isn't taking regular passengers."

"Is it full?" Velari cried. "If it isn't full, maybe I could buy a seat from those who chartered it." His face, contorted with emotion, lighted momentarily as this thought came to him. "If you'll tell me whom to see, maybe I can buy a seat from him."

A mechanic came to the door, stuck his head inside and said: "All set." Bryan nodded to him. McGinus, radio headset in one hand and handbag in the other, started toward the plane. Velari, hearing this, turned on the three men at the counter.

"You're taking this plane?" he cried in torment to Sheriff Johnson. And at the Sheriff's nod, he thrust out the telegram which a moment before he had shown Bryan. "Here, sir," he begged. "It's my wife, sir! I'll pay you what I can, if you'll only let me go!"

His voice had the intonations of hysteria; the man himself seemed to have reached the verge of tears. And Johnson suddenly took the telegram, read it at a glance, and then turned to Bryan at the counter.

"What about this?" he inquired gruffly. "I can't deprive a man of his last hope. Will your company permit him to ride with me?"

Bryan shrugged. "It's your airplane," he said. "Personally, I don't think it's wise, circumstances being—"

Velari clutched Johnson's arm. "I'll pay you anything I can," he repeated. "You understand, I know. I've simply *got* to get there while she's—still alive."

Johnson's eyes were hard, but his tone was kind enough. "I'll search you," he declared, tossing the telegram to Bryan with the order: "Call downtown and see if this is genuine."

Velari, almost obsequious with gratitude, took off his gray felt hat. He unbuttoned his coat and held back the lapels. The pearl tops of what seemed a matched fountain pen and pencil set showed in the inside pocket. Sheriff Johnson went over him with minute care, and then, to Collie McGinus, standing poised in the doorway, said:

"There's no harm in him, son. I've frisked him to the skin. We'll let him go."

"The telegram," reported Bryan, racking the phone, "is real."

Velari was last to board the plane. With quick, calculating eyes he saw that they had put Roselti in the right front seat, with the deputy across the aisle from him. Sheriff Johnson sat behind the prisoner. Velari stepped in and took the place behind the sheriff.

The dispatcher closed the cabin door and stepped back and called, "All clear." Collie McGinus taxied to the runway end, revved up his engines and roared down the field and slipped into the air.

He thought about that hunch of his, as he got the radio reports of weather on the line ahead. There was nothing to it; he was in the air and nothing had happened. He forgot the hunch, and settled to the grind of flying. Now and then, boring up the coast far out to sea, he ran into rain squalls and bucked through them on his instruments. The Atlantic was smooth beneath these flurries, leveled by the pelting drops. The miles, slid monotonously under him, and finally he relaxed.

PALM BEACH was a blur through the rain, when it happened.

McGinus felt the small shift in the plane's balance, as if some one had walked up the aisle. But he was in rain then, on his instruments, and he did not turn to see who was moving in the cabin.

A minute later he burst out into clear air, and turned to see that everyone was comfortable. Even then he did not sense that anything was wrong. The wiry man with the gray felt hat was in the aisle, bending over the deputy as if in conversation. Suddenly this man looked up, turned a little and poked a gun through the cabin door. His porcine eyes were glittering.

"It's a stick-up! Give me that gat!" he snarled.

McGinus' gun was in plain sight, hanging on a hook beneath the instrument-panel. He clearly understood Velari's words; but now, in an effort to delay, to grasp the full scope of this situation, to give somebody in the cabin time to act, he stalled by shouting: "What?"

Velari jabbed his shoulder with the weapon. "I ought to give it to you!" he said with cold ferocity. "Hand me that rod!"

McGinus hesitated. He knew that surrender of his gun would swing the final balance of power to this man. He was not convinced that Velari really meant to shoot. He would be killing himself by doing so; the plane would crash.

Instead of shooting him, Velari slapped him with the barrel of the automatic. The blow momentarily dazed McGinus. He did not lose consciousness, and he was aware that Velari had leaned forward into the cockpit and had obtained the gun himself.

McGINUS sat fighting against a grinding pain above his temple, trying to see his instruments through eyes that blurred when focused. The plane veered off, a wing went down, and a slow, descending spiral started. Then he was all right, and brought it back upon its course, while he tried to understand. Why hadn't Johnson or the deputy done something while this gunman stood there with the gun, his back to them? He shook his head to clear it, to steady the jerking of his eyes, and looked around again.

The first thing he saw was that Roselti's hands were free, and that they too held a gun that covered the entrance to the cockpit. Then he saw Velari in the aisle, bending low over Roselti's leg-irons. Beyond them, he could see Sheriff Johnson bent forward, crumpled down against the seat in front of him. The deputy's shoulder, limp and sagging, was partially visible around the left edge of the cockpit door.

Velari unlocked the leg-irons. Roselti, his eyes bright, stood up and stepped out in the aisle, moved past his confederate and walked back to the seat Velari had vacated, holding his gun to cover McGinus. He said something to Velari, and the other nodded quickly; McGinus could not hear the words.

It happened in a space of less than a minute. Velari thrust his head into the cockpit, shouted: "All right, wise guy! Go on to Palm Beach, and then turn straight east and keep going. Forty miles out, there's a sloop painted black. You find her, see—or else!"

Collie McGinus forgot that his head was a racking pain. He tried to think coherently, to crowd back the tight fear that made him cold when he realized what that sloop at sea would mean. He knew now what was planned. When he reached the boat, and landed in the water near it, Velari and Roselti would escape. But for him there would be no possible escape. He would go down with the plane.

What had happened to the sheriff and his deputy? Well, no matter now; Roselti and Velari had their guns, and the officers could be of no assistance. Collie McGinus clung desperately to the belief that Velari would have more sense than to try to kill him now. He was the pilot, and without a pilot, the airplane would crash.

Velari jabbed him murderously with the muzzle of the gun. "Get up!" he said. "I'll fly this crock and find that boat. I'll find it, then."

McGinus turned, lifted his head and stared directly into the other's narrowed eyes, estimating the man, trying to gain delay. He knew that the surrender of the plane to this gunman-pilot—he was convinced suddenly against his will that Velari was a pilot—would mean his murder the instant he stepped back into the aisle. Forlorn as it looked now, he hoped somehow to thwart Velari before that landing in the water became necessary. How he would do it he had at this moment no idea. But he would be giving up every possibility of it by getting up from the controls.

"I'll take you there," he said. "It's kind of soupy—I'd rather fly than watch you spin us in!"

"Wise guy," Velari sneered. "If you don't find that boat—"

Palm Beach was visible on the west, blurred by a fine white rain. McGinus made a slow turn into the east. The Atlantic was a dull gray mat ahead that merged with rain and clouds at the low, close horizon.

HE was giddy as he plunged through this mess of weather; and he was afraid, as he had never been afraid in all his life. He had flown mail for years; countless times he had faced quick death, and had avoided it by nerve, by sagacity, or by his sheer ability to fly. More, perhaps, by his ability to fight. Now, in this predicament, he could not fight. Revolt would start the spitting of Velari's gun. Going on, unless by ingenuity he could outwit these cold-blooded mobsters, would only bring death in the end. Going on now, however, gained delay.

Twenty-five minutes against this northeast wind would put him forty miles at sea. As he sat there, navigating carefully, he understood the fear, the abject helplessness, of the condemned. He understood the terror of that man Roselti in the cabin. A cold, sticky perspiration burst out through his pores, somehow sickening. His stomach-muscles crawled, tightening and knotting.

THE squalls broke down in slanting columns of leaden wind-whipped rain. Behind, now, the gray-brown coast had disappeared, leaving him plunging through a mist-filled room of which the ocean was the floor, the clouds the ceiling. He jerked involuntarily in apprehension when the plane bored into a mass of scud; that reflex of almost every pilot of the old school who flew weather like this before instruments were made to guide him without vision of the earth. Then he was out of it.

But instead of relaxing when once more he could see the bleak, gust-shattered waves below, his nervous tension doubled, trebled, soared as he saw one glimmer of bright hope. Velari was a pilot: He knew enough to be willing to take this Kingbird forty miles to sea and land it there beside a boat that lay in waiting. So he knew enough to be afraid of fog.

Velari was standing in the cabin aisle just outside the cockpit, a gun steady in his hand, his quick, searching eyes boring past the cockpit in the scud and rain ahead. The Kingbird, now, was brushing the base of the main overcast, and here and there scud swept by below.

The thing depended entirely upon how keen, how good a pilot Velari was. The thing depended entirely on deception.

Gradually, almost imperceptibly, he climbed, but not enough that the rate-of-climb showed much reaction. The needle moved, and stayed in a new position almost on the mark. Three minutes later the plane slid slowly up into the base of clouds.

McGinus, his breath bated now in unconscious physical restraint, looked back into the cabin. Sheriff Johnson and the deputy were just as they had been before. But Roselti, on the rear seat, and commanding a full view of everything that took place in the plane, was a changed man now, saturnine and deadly.

They were in the clouds. To divert Velari's attention from their prolonged blind flight, McGinus said: "I'll have to report my position by radio, or they'll start wondering if something's happened to the plane." He reached toward the transmitter switch.

Velari struck down with a quick, vicious thrust of his gun-barrel. "You should worry! What's happened to these clouds? They getting lower? You'll never find that boat, sitting up here in the soup. Get down!"

Without hesitation McGinus yelled: "Bank of fog, I think! Look out the window and see if you can spot a hole as we go through it. We'll break out after while."

That was it. Don't get Velari worried yet. Save that part until he needed it.

Velari tried to look down through the right window of the cockpit. That was impossible, because the right engine nacelle entirely blocked the view. He turned back and leaned over in the cabin, to look through the right front window. And in the moment that his back was turned, Collie McGinus did the thing that would make his plan a slow success or bring destruction quickly. First he looked back.

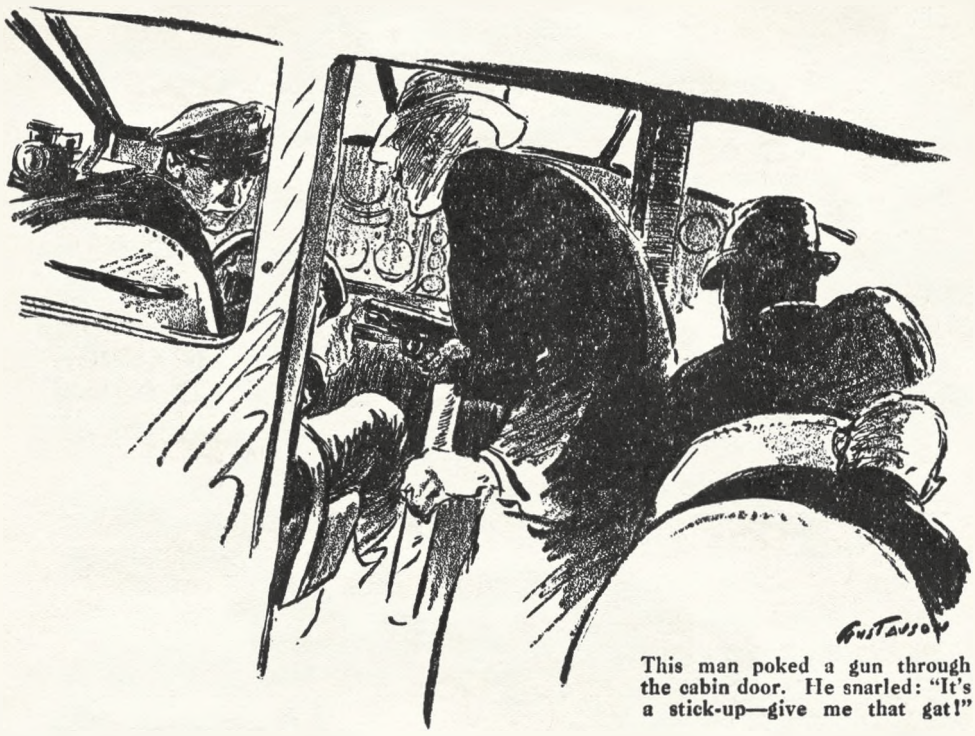
Roselti, following Velari's example, was staring down into the mist.

McGinus instantly reached forward to the instrument panel and turned the knobs that moved the altimeter dials. The reading had been eighteen hundred feet. He moved it to five hundred. He was already eight hundred feet within the clouds.

Velari spent three minutes staring downward, trying to find a hole. Then, his face darkened by anger, doubt, mistrust, he swung savagely upon McGinus. "No holes!" he said grindingly. "You ease down out of here—and then you stay below the ceiling."

Collie McGinus' heart throbbed in his throat. He started to speak, and could not at that moment trust his voice. Velari had not looked yet at the altimeters. McGinus turned, praying that he wouldn't think to look at them. "Keep looking for a hole!" he yelled. "I'll go down slowly—you keep looking for a hole. We may be caught up here! The ceiling has been dropping ever since we left Miami."

VELARI turned away again. Roselti suddenly got up and came forward. "What is this?" he demanded of Velari. "If he can't find that boat, you find it. We aint got time to mess around. You go ahead and fly."



This man poked a gun through the cabin door. He snarled: "It's a stick-up—give me that gat!"

McGinus waited, straining his ears to hear Velari's answer. If the fellow felt confident of his ability to fly by instrument, and took the controls, he would discover the deception quickly when he broke through the bottom of the clouds. . . . No, he wouldn't! He wouldn't, because he would be afraid to descend. The altimeters would show him ready to crash into the water while the plane still was hidden in the clouds. No pilot lives who will argue with an altimeter in a fog.

Velari said: "Vins, this guy knows the airplane. If he smacks the water, he's out there in front—so he won't smack the water. You just let me handle this guy, and if fog hasn't rolled in over the *Sachen,* we'll find it. I've done everything by the book so far, haven't I?"

Roselti, his eyes menacing, growled some answer, and moved back to his seat.

Velari swung once more to the cockpit. "Go down!" he barked.

"I've been going down for five minutes," McGinus lied. "Look at the altimeters! Two hundred feet now, and no holes yet! We're in a fog-bank—I'm afraid we're caught out here!"

He saw the change that passed like a quick mist over Velari's thin features. He saw cold fear. Velari snapped: "Ease down. Careful—but go down until you see the water. Even in fog, you'll see it from fifteen or twenty feet. But don't smack it!"

That was a factor that McGinus had failed to see. Your sight can penetrate fog that far—you can sometimes see the ground from fifty feet, even when the fog is dense—but you never go that low when flying over land, because of obstructions which might reach up to trip you. On water there are no such obstructions. You can go down until you touch your wheels. And before you get that low, you'll see the water. Velari knew that; Velari would disregard the altimeters, knowing they were flying over water, and force McGinus to go down. . . . They would break through the bottom of the overcast. And then—

Desperately he argued: "You'll not see the water from ten feet, a day like this, with fog and rain mixed up together!"

"I said go down!" Velari barked. "Don't give me any jaw."

McGinus pulled his throttles. He hauled the nose up until the Kingbird was on the verge of stalling. He mushed down, flying by his turn-and-bank, his eyes darting repeatedly to the altimeters.

Down. At a hundred feet, by the reading, he gunned the engines slowly, until the exhausts sounded in a rising thunder. He flew at a hundred feet, losing foot after foot, trying with all the skill at his

command to make it seem that he thought the water was there somewhere below him, ready to reach up and suck him into it upon a wave. Velari stood behind him, staring over his shoulder through the cockpit glass ahead, glancing in more and more apprehension and uncertainty at the crawling needles of the altimeters.

They went down to fifty feet, and saw nothing but the gray-white flood of mist. To twenty-five. And then Velari lost his nerve. He shouted: "Climb! The stuff's too thick. You'll crash; you'll never find that boat out here."

RELIEF as from dull pain came to McGinus with those words. He climbed, turning slowly from the east into the northwest. He said: "Where shall I go? This plane just has three hours' gas."

"Head back. Head back to Palm Beach, and get below this stuff. . . . Here, give me those headphones. When does a weather report come in?"

"I've got to have the headphones to listen to the beam—to find my way back in this stuff. Keep looking for a hole. You realize this coast may have fogged in tight, and we may not find a place to go?"

Velari grated: "For your own good, you'd better find a place! And quick about it!"

McGinus held his northwest course, and when Velari had turned away to look through the cabin window for a glimpse of earth or water, tuned his radio to bring in the beam signal that would guide him into Titusville. He wondered, speculated, on how much of this nerve-punishment Velari could withstand. He flew at three hundred feet by the altimeters, but still well up in the clouds. But Velari must be thinking every minute that the plane was caught in fog, unable to get down.

This was the kind of thing Velari could not fight. It was invisible, but just as real and deadly to him as another gangster's gun. Eventually, McGinus knew, it would wear him down. This was the beginning; the real crisis, now, would come at Titusville, and the success or failure of a purely psychological idea would depend upon how Velari reacted to the terror of prolonged flying in these clouds, believing he was caught.

McGinus felt the shift of balance in the plane, and looked back, to see Roselti once more walking up the aisle. With puzzling gesticulations he argued with Velari, and then suddenly flung the other man aside and thrust his head into the cockpit. "Land!" he snapped. "I don't care where, but land, right now!"

The pilot shook his head. "You're committing suicide to make me do it!" he burst forth, trying to sound convincing. "I'm heading toward good weather, but I can't land now!"

Roselti stuck the gun against McGinus' ribs. "I'll give you ten minutes to get down!" he snarled.

Velari touched his arm. "Come on, Vins—you don't know what you're doing. He'll land when he finds a place to go—he'll be the first one to get bumped off if he piles up. Leave this to me, Vins."

The gangster eyed first one and then the other. He looked out ahead at the ceaseless mist that condensed to water on the windshield. Then he walked back and took his seat, scowling, nervous, obviously afraid.

The long squeal superimposed upon the signal *A*, and broken by the characteristic letter *I* at intervals of twelve seconds, grew steadily in the earphones. There were no marker beacons on the coast of Florida, and McGinus could not tell how near he was to Titusville.

As minutes passed, he discarded every plan his racing mind could fabricate. A trick had served to thwart that landing in the water, where he would have died; but no trick would serve him now. He thought in desperation of going down and landing in the field at Titusville, and trusting to these mobsters' mercy. But that would gain him nothing. The first thing they would do would be to murder him, and then escape. Time passed. The beam squealed louder with each minute's flight. Velari, his thin face pinched from prolonged fear and nervous strain, his eyes red from staring down into the clouds, leaned forward and demanded: "Where are we? Almost to the place?"

McGinus nodded. "Forty minutes. "We'll get down okay."

HE had been climbing, until now his actual altitude was above three thousand feet. He was nearer Titusville than forty minutes. He would be there in less than five. His pulse lifted at the thought of how desperate this attempt would be. He had it now; he knew what he would do.

"Look out in front and watch when I start down," he told Velari.

Then, feeling oddly detached from these sharp realities about him, he methodically checked his safety-belt. He glanced back, and saw that Roselti was sitting staring downward, his face molded in deep lines of strain. The beam shrieked in his ears, and then fell sharply silent as the plane passed above the station far below.

With a slow movement of trembling fingers he eased the throttles back. Velari obediently stood in the cockpit doorway bent forward, his head directly underneath the horizontal member, the track, on which the door slid back and forth. McGinus let the plane accelerate to a hundred and forty miles an hour. He checked everything again. Velari was straining his eyes to see below.

THEN, with a driving thrust of the control-wheel that threw it almost to the instrument panel, McGinus nosed sharply down. The plane seemed to drop violently away beneath him, but his belt held. Velari, however, standing there without a belt, was thrown with tremendous force, and his head struck the cross-member with terrific impact. His nerveless fingers dropped the gun, and it fell into the cockpit. His senseless form slid down, half in and half outside.

McGinus scooped up the weapon and twisted in his seat. His belt impeded him and he flipped it off his thighs, and turned to look back in the cabin. Roselti had been down, thrown there after having been flung against the ceiling. But Roselti was not helpless. His gun came up at the same instant that McGinus fired. Point-blank, that range. McGinus did not miss. . . . He turned back to Velari, and with the pistol-butt tapped Velari rather brutally upon the head.

Then he twisted back to the controls, conscious of the wail of screaming, tearing air against the plane as it dived out of control. He kicked rudder with all the power of his leg, brought the turn indicator into center, rolled the wing until the plane was flying straight, and pulled the nose up from the dive. The altimeters crawled down steadily, passed the zero mark and kept on going. Then suddenly, nine hundred feet above the earth, the plane burst from the clouds. McGinus made a slow turn, and saw the field. . . .

A physician and a coroner came out from town and went about their work efficiently. Collie McGinus felt certain Sheriff Johnson and the deputy were dead, and that certainty left him with a melancholy and a kind of hate. He watched while the physician made his leisurely examinations. He saw the man remove thin, sliver-like steel knives from the officers—slivers of steel which had been driven in at the bases of their brains.

"This one," said the physician, indicating the deputy, "is done for. The knife cut his spinal cord. The other seems knocked out by shock, but the knife missed the fatal spot, and there's been little loss of blood. He's in a critical condition, but he'll come through by and by."

McGinus nodded, strangely comforted to know that that fine old man would live to talk about this day. It made him feel that the effort he put forth was not entirely wasted, after all. He gave a deposition, and watched the Sheriff lifted in a litter to the ambulance, to a place beside Velari.

He took off again, and turned north beneath threatening dark clouds, to go on into Jacksonville. His mind traced back recurrently to Johnson, to himself, to Velari—who had mapped out murder so cold-bloodedly. For himself, now that the sharp stimulation of excitement had worn thin, he felt extremely stale and tired, old. He could not erase from his mind the picture of that deputy.

BUT weary as he was, there was a warm satisfaction in the realization that he had struck upon the one idea that could have saved Johnson and himself. The idea had seemed so utterly forlorn in the beginning—a weak and futile thing.

But he knew pilots. And he thought: "Once a pilot, always a pilot—they always think the same. They get too old to fly, but they never get too old to be afraid of fog that hugs the ground."

Then he quit thinking abruptly, and got on his instruments, for the Kingbird had been swallowed by a slanting column of black rain.

**In the occasional spare time afforded by his job as pilot for an Eastern air-line, Mr. Jamieson has been completing a splendid novelette of air adventure in the Caribbean region. You may count upon enjoying it in an early issue.**

# Red Sea Pearls

"AND business in pearls, how is it?" asked Paul Rodgers, the red-headed Intelligence officer, lighting a cigarette.

"Bad, very bad," replied Kra Krishna, the Hindu. "Strange things are happening to the dhows. They—"

He hesitated. Behind a pair of steel-rimmed spectacles, his eyes swiveled suspiciously toward the window. Yet, beyond that opening, the stark merciless sunlight beat upon the dead city of Suakin, a white sepulcher on the shores of the Red Sea. Save for a few stray fishermen or pearl-merchants, the palaces of Suakin were deserted except for devouring hordes of white ants under whose attacks walls crumbled away mysteriously in the blinding light.

"Suakin is a city of dead men," murmured Rodgers, noticing that suspicious glance. "And dead men do not speak."

"*Aiee,* that is true, Rodger' sahib," sighed the Hindu. "I would that dead men did speak, or even whisper. Then the mystery of the lost dhows might be told."

"Lost dhows!"

Kra Krishna, the most successful pearl-dealer in the whole Red Sea region, nodded moodily. At that moment, more than ever, he resembled a fat brown Buddha upon whose ears some one had blasphemously hooked a pair of steel-rimmed spectacles. His mountainous and half-naked fleshy body seemed spilling over from the chair in which he had inserted himself. Since the day Rodgers had unmasked that famous slaver Vladimir Korolenko, he had not seen Kra Krishna. Now, after some idle days in Port Sudan, Rodgers had motored the few miles of desert, crossed the strip of coral reef that led to the dead town of Suakin, and had called upon the astute and prosperous Hindu merchant who had made millions from pearls.

"Six dhows were lost when the pearling fleet arrived here a few days ago," muttered Kra Krishna. "Six dhows, my friend, and each of them carrying a small fortune in pearls."

"And the crews, the divers, and the *nacoudas?*" asked Rodgers.

"Not a trace. Not even a dumb thing pushed by the tides."

"Wreckage?"

"None."

"What kind of weather do the other dhows report?"

"Excellent. Fair winds and good sailing. One *nacouda* reports seeing the lost dhows, bunched together, sailing into the sunset near Cape Guardafui. Then the black night—and in the dawn, nothing. The jinn, they say, must have gathered the dhows in their giant arms and carried them to the sky."

And the fat body of the Hindu sighed and sagged like a punctured tire.

"A mystery, indeed," murmured Paul Rodgers, thoughtfully smoothing the back of his fiery çasque. "But it will surely be revealed to you soon."

"How, sahib?"

"By the pearls. Depend upon it, they are not lost. They will come on the market, and as Allah wills it, they are bound to pass through your hands."

"*Aiee!* What you say is good sense," nodded Kra Krishna, "but other dhows have been lost, weeks ago, and no new pearls have come to me."

"And what of the *Arami,* the pirates of the Red Sea?" Rodgers asked.

A sickly grin spread over the brown face of the Hindu.

"Even pirates must sell their loot," he explained. "And they come to me always to sell. No, the *Arami* are not responsible for the lost dhows. In fact, two of their own dhows are missing."

Rodgers flicked the ash from his cigarette into the little brazier at his side.

"Of course, you have reported the matter to the authorities?" he asked.

Kra Krishna shrugged his shoulders.

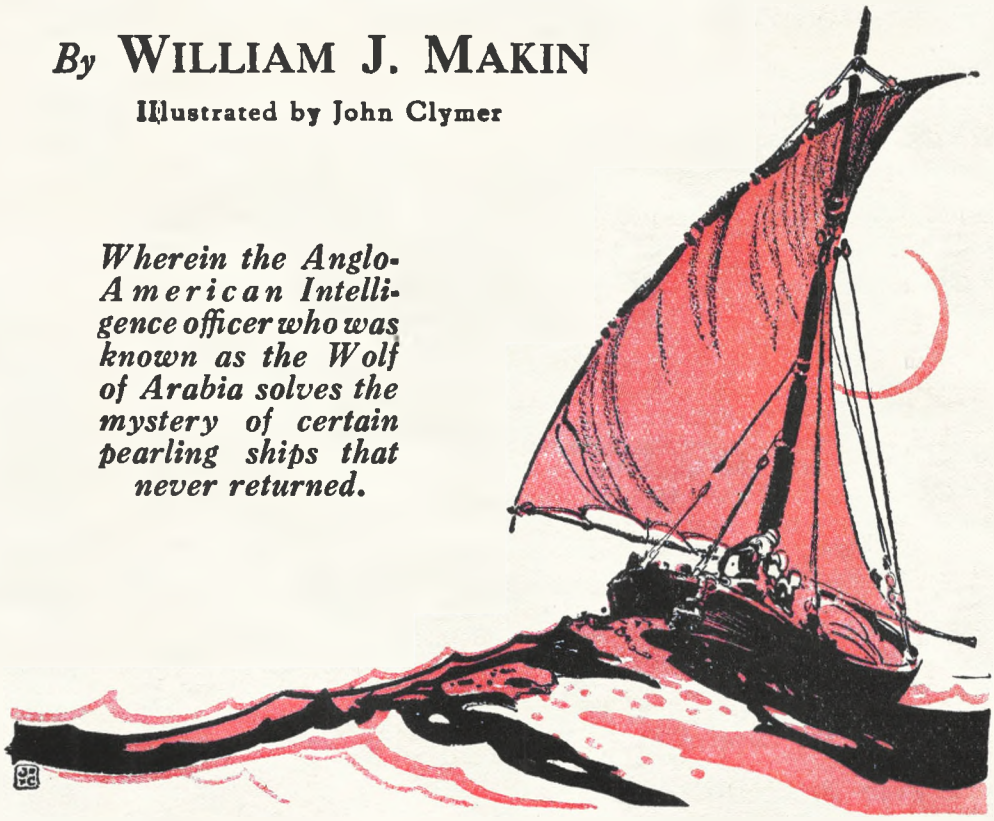
"There are two British naval sloops in the Red Sea," he whined, "and one of them has now gone to Malta to be refitted. The captain of the one that remains told me that he has no time to look for lost dhows; he is concerned only with the dhows that are afloat, those which carry cargoes of 'black ivory' to Arabia. He searches, you understand, for slavers, not for missing pearling dhows."

Rodgers nodded. He realized that

*By* WILLIAM J. MAKIN

Illustrated by John Clymer

*Wherein the Anglo-American Intelligence officer who was known as the Wolf of Arabia solves the mystery of certain pearling ships that never returned.*



the financial distress of a pearl-merchant of Suakin with stories of jinn that gathered dhows into the skies, was not likely to appeal to the imagination of a naval sloop officer. But as for himself, the mystery of the lost dhows as related by Kra Krishna appealed to him.

There was a heavy silence in the room of the pearl-dealer as Rodgers considered the problem. It was broken only by the heavy breathing of the Hindu as with an effort he stretched out his brown hand and spilled some champagne from a bottle into the glass that stood on a table near Rodgers.

The officer's slim hand waved the hospitality aside. "There is one way of solving the mystery, Kra Krishna," he said at last.

"And what is that, Rodger' sahib?" asked the Hindu. His shrewd eyes were watching through the steel-rimmed spectacles for the gleam of an expression on the clear-cut, sun-tanned features of the white man.

"It might be possible," Rodgers mused, "to take a dhow and lose one's self with the lost dhows. A man might sail into the sunset and challenge the jinn."

"*Aiee*, a man!" retorted the Hindu. "But he would be one in a thousand. No Arab would dare such an adventure, unless led by that man in a thousand. Where am I to find him?"

Rodgers carefully lighted another cigarette.

"Will you give me a dhow, Kra Krishna?" he asked.

"It is waiting for you, by the beach, Rodger' sahib," was the reply; and the Hindu's dark eyes gleamed with excitement.

"I shall need a crew of three good sailors, and two divers," Rodgers added.

"They will be ready by nightfall."

Paul Rodgers chuckled.

"You old villain," he said, "I suspect you knew I would be tempted to solve your silly mystery of the lost dhows!"

KRA KRISHNA'S face was wreathed in gratified smiles.

"I knew there was only one man who could be trusted with such an adventure." His pleasure was pathetic in its exuberance. "Permit me, my dear friend, to offer you a cigar. They are the very best."

"I'm sure they are," Rodgers smiled. "But not now, please."

"Permit me, then," went on the importunate Hindu, "to bring before your notice one of the Arabs who will brave the jinn with you. He is one of the finest divers of the coast. He is called Riyahd."

At the same time he clapped his pudgy hands together, a loud sound that brought a bony Arab into the room.

"This is Riyahd," smiled the Hindu, revealing teeth stained by betel-nut. "He is a man upon whom you can depend, Rodger' sahib."

Paul Rodgers gave the Arab a swift, appraising glance as he bowed before them. It seemed that the lithe bony body had been twisted by the pressure of the awful depths into which the brown fingers had clawed their way relentlessly. The man's ribs stood out against the bare flat chest. Like most pearl-divers, his eardrums had been split, leaving him slightly deaf. And his deep-set eyes were glazed with a film which suggested the wash of surf over coral reef. Altogether, Riyahd suggested a creature out of his true element, the sea, as he bowed humbly in the carpeted room of the pearl-dealer.

"*Salaam aleikum!*" said the officer, speaking in Arabic. "Peace be on you."

"*Wa aleikum es salaam,*" was the conventional reply. "And on you be peace."

THEN he straightened his bony figure and gazed at Rodgers. For a brief moment the two men took stock of each other. Then, with a smile, Paul Rodgers held out his hand.

"We adventure together, Riyahd," he said. "And we shall not return to Suakin until the mystery of the lost dhows is solved."

A brown hand clasped his.

"It is as Allah wills," said the diver simply. "Allah is great and merciful."

Then with a final bow, he withdrew.

"A good man!" Rodgers nodded after the retreating figure. "And now, Kra Krishna, I must get back to Port Sudan. I shall return here at eleven o'clock, to sail at midnight."

With a painful effort the mass of brown flesh heaved itself out of the chair.

"I am more than grateful, Rodger' sahib," said the Hindu. "Solve the mystery of the lost dhows, and you may demand from me what you will."

Rodgers smiled. "I won't forget your promise," he said. "We meet at the beach at midnight."

"At midnight," nodded the Hindu.

Laboriously he ushered his visitor from the room, and returning a moment later, glimpsed the glass of champagne still full and winking enticingly. With a grunt, he raised the glass to his lips and drained it at one gulp.

"UP with the anchor!" Rodgers commanded in Arabic.

Dressed in Arab costume, and barefooted, he trod the little wooden deck of the pearling dhow that swayed gently near the beach at Suakin. Four men, all of them Somalis, gathered at the capstan and thrust their black breasts against the wooden bar. It was midnight, and a full moon flung a silver radiance against the shining black bodies.

"God is great!" chanted the leader of the four men.

"He is great. Let us go forth!" chanted the others.

There was a creak as the capstan turned.

"To God! To God! Always God!" shrilled the leader on a higher note.

"Always—always!" was the response.

"Thanks to Thee, my God, we are going forth," chanted the leader.

"Thanks to Thee! Thanks to Thee!"

The black breasts were glistening with sweat as they pressed against the bar. Bare feet padded in a monotonous circle.

"Mahomet, give to us the blessing of God!" pleaded the leader.

"God is all-powerful! God is everywhere!" chanted the others.

"Lead us to the reefs where fortune hides!" cried the leader.

"May God lead us!" came the chanting response.

A triumphant creak of the capstan.

"Lead us to the place where the tears of kings lie within the shells."

"He is great!" grunted the crew.

"We shall descend to depths where man cannot live!" intoned the leader.

"He is great!"

"Where the jinn and devils whistle in our ears."

"God is the greatest of all."

The anchor came dripping and glistening out of the depths. It brought with it a triumphant tone to the chantey of the pearlers.

"To the good fortune that we seek! Let us go!" shrilled the leader.

"*Ya mal!*" shrieked the crew.

The rusty iron anchor came thundering to the deck.

"*Ya mal!*" cried Rodgers in his turn. "May Allah protect us!" He reverently

bowed his turbaned head. When he raised it again, an old patched sail was creeping up the mast. It billowed in the night breeze. The dhow began to steal toward the silver expanse of the sea.

"May the gods protect him and vanquish the jinn!" grunted Kra Krishna, as he leaned out of the window of his house in Suakin, and saw the dhow gliding toward the unknown. . . .

In five days Paul Rodgers came to know the dhow and its vagaries. Called *El Asfar,* "The Yellow," on account of the dirty chrome that streaked its hull, it proved a cumbersome but seaworthy craft. Squatting at the tiller at all hours, stripped to the waist, burned by the sun and whipped by the wind, this strange adventurer of the Red Sea was in his element.

He managed the dhow as cleverly as he did the crew. For the first two days at sea, the four Somalis and the Arab diver Riyahd watched him closely. They were doubtful of the mettle of the *nacouda* whose turban hid a flaming crop of hair. But his knowledge of the dangerous reefs in the Red Sea that had knifed many a dhow, the magic maps over which he pored every day, and the sureness of his quiet commands soon won them over.

When on the fourth day the dhow skirted the island of Perim, and passed into the Straits of Bab-el-Mandeb, the north monsoon beat against the old sail and the dhow heeled over dangerously.

Rodgers chuckled. "You villain, you knew I would be tempted to solve your mystery!"

BUT Rodgers knew to a nicety the capabilities of his craft. No orders came from him to reef the sail. The leader of the Somalis came aft to where the slim red-headed man squatted at the tiller.

"The crew are ready to sail into the jaws of hell with you, Master!" he grinned.

Rodgers smiled. "Perhaps they may have to," he replied.

The next day they were pitching in the rough seas of the Gulf of Aden. With a following wind, the dhow hurtled across the green troughs in the direction of Cape Guardafui. Rodgers was bound for the island of Tamo, a coral reef swept by monsoons, but hiding banks of oyster shells, and probably pearls. Tamo was known to all fishers of pearls. The depths there were dangerous for divers, but the treasures, if captured, were well worth while. . . . At long last Rodgers discerned that ridge of white spume in the distance which told of the island. Rocking like drunken trees in the middle of the ocean, were the masts of several anchored dhows.

"We search for pearls then, Master?" inquired the Arab diver Riyahd, as he squatted beside the man at the tiller.

Rodgers nodded.

"Empty dhows return safely to port, Riyahd," he murmured. "It is only the dhow with a cargo of pearls that is lost. Therefore, we must have a big cargo of pearls before we search for the beach of the lost dhows."

"Fortune may be against us," said Riyahd, gazing with film-flaked eyes at the approaching island.

"Even so," Rodgers agreed. "But you will visit the other dhows and tell stories of great pearls that have been found. You understand? *Ya mal* is with us."

"*Ya mal!*" responded Riyahd—and without a change of expression on his solemn brown face, he crawled the pitching deck to rejoin the crew.

FOR five days they had dived into those strange depths and sweated in the fierce sunshine. A heap of rotting shells smothered the deck of the dhow, and

everywhere a nauseating stench arose that told of this continuous rape of the sea-bed for treasure. A good deal of mother-of-pearl had been collected by the divers and crew of *El Asfar,* but of real pearls only a few small ones wrapped in the traditional piece of red cloth were in the possession of Paul Rodgers.

On the fifth day Rodgers, with only a cloth girding his loins, was paddling a dugout, while the Arab diver Riyahd gazed through a paraffin-tin with a glass bottom into the depths beneath. Twice he had flung the paraffin-tin to Rodgers and with hardly a splash had dived overboard and gone clawing to the depths for shells he had glimpsed.

THAT flat brown chest seemed to serve Riyahd well. He could stay below, working desperately on the sea-bottom, for three minutes at a time. Then his tortured face would come shooting to the surface, one hand would stretch out imploringly, and Rodgers would haul him into the dugout with the little cargo of shells at his waist.

Lazily paddling the dugout, occasionally eying the dhow that lay half a mile away, the officer mused thoughtfully over the mystery of the lost dhows. Obviously some clever pirates were at work; the cargoes of pearls were the lure.

Rodgers was determined that in a few hours the *El Asfar* should sail toward Cape Guardafui and offer itself as a fat prize to these pirates of the coast. He wished to meet those pirates face to face, and therefore had caused stories of rare black pearls and greenish-hued treasures, supposed to have been found by his divers, to be told to the crews of other dhows working in the vicinity. The news would ripple, like the waves, on many a strange beach!

Once again Riyahd plunged overboard, on his lips a muttered prayer to Allah for protection against sharks. Rodgers seized the paraffin-tin bobbing on the surface, and waited. The deaf Arab with the glazed eyes was groping somewhere on the bottom, clawing among the coral and strange fish for the shells.

One minute—two minutes passed.

Rodgers waited for the tortured face to break the surface. A little whirlpool on the surface told of the kicking legs of Riyahd below.

Another long dive. Rodgers found himself counting the seconds. Still Riyahd did not break the surface. The sea seemed to have become strangely calm, with the dhows in the distance looking like wooden toys on a sheet of glass.

Three and a half minutes.

Rodgers took the paraffin-tin and gazed into the depths. For a moment he could see nothing but a dark, greenish world smeared with ripples. Then, like a cloud passing, everything became clear. He could distinguish a coral reef, waving sea plants and gliding fish—and a dark, prone object, the legs lazily drifting in the current. It was Riyahd. He was poised with one outstretched hand like a statue overturned. Then the ripples crossed again and the scene was blotted out for Rodgers.

Yet that one glimpse was enough. Without hesitating, he flung the paraffin-tin aside and plunged into the sea. Down, down he clawed into the green depths. His eyes smarted, his body tingled and there was a strange rushing sound in his ears. But lower still he went, until he found himself touching that drifting body.

He could see what had happened. Groping over the sea-bed, the brown hand of Riyahd had come against a giant clam. With a snap the jaws of the clam had come together, closing on the diver's hand like a trap. Riyahd had tugged and struggled, but the giant clam held him fast until consciousness had left him.

Nearly blind in these depths, and with a feeling that all the air had been squeezed out of his lungs, Rodgers fumbled in his loin-cloth for the knife he carried. The blade came forth, and he hacked desperately at the roots of the clam. Twice he missed. Then a third stroke caught it fair.

AT that moment Rodgers felt something burst in his ears; the depths had broken an eardrum. He was drowning! With a last desperate effort he seized the drifting form of Riyahd and shot toward the surface. Through layer after layer of green he passed—it seemed to him he would never reach the surface again. Fantastic visions flitted through his mind. Then came an explosion of light, blinding him. He put out a hand to ward off the dazzle, and his fingers closed upon the drifting dugout.

Gasping and croaking for breath, his bruised limbs nevertheless worked mechanically. He found himself hauling and pushing the sodden weight of Riyahd into the dugout, by a supreme effort. The next moment he hauled himself into the dugout, where he lay gasping and exhausted.

But there was no time to lie drinking in life. A man was dying at his side. With a groan, Rodgers raised himself and began to work on the sodden figure. He raised the arms and expanded the lungs. The giant clam still had its viselike bite on the fingers of one hand.

For half an hour under the blistering sun, Rodgers worked desperately. His hands rubbed the hard brown skin, massaging the heart beneath. Again and again he expanded the lungs. . . . And at last the flesh beneath his hands shuddered; there was a quiver of the eyelids; the eyes opened and gazed at him.

With a sigh of relief, Rodgers fell back and lay exhausted. The dugout drifted for ten minutes; then Rodgers became conscious of some one paddling. He looked up. Riyahd, squatting gravely in the prow, was paddling toward the *El Asfar*. He had rid himself of the giant clam, but his fingers were bruised and bloody.

For some moments neither spoke. Then with startling abruptness, Riyahd flung himself forward and kissed the hand of the red-headed man.

"Master, I am your eternal slave," he babbled. "You saved my life! Allah has been merciful." And tears coursed down his cheeks.

Moved by this emotion, so rare in an Arab, Rodgers gently raised the prostrate man.

"It is the luck of the game, my friend," he said. "Allah willed it, and I did but play my part."

Riyahd nodded.

"The luck of the game, truly, Master," he replied. "Look what you brought up with my helpless body!"

He displayed an open shell in his hand. Against the gleaming mother-of-pearl was a little black callosity.

"A black pearl!" gasped Rodgers.

Riyahd nodded.

"And worth a small fortune," he added gravely, as he handed it to the dripping figure in the loin-cloth.

NOW the pearling fleet was in full sail for home. With their tattered white sails billowing in the monsoon, the dhows heeled over toward the jagged peaks of the coast of Somaliland.

A strange, mysterious coast! Coral reefs protected it from the approach of big ships. On the sandy strips and among the mountains lived those fierce, mop-haired Somalis whom Kipling has dubbed for eternity the "Fuzzy-wuzzies"

—cruel, vengeful men, who rarely smile. Time and again they have formed themselves into frenzied black armies fearlessly charging the machine-guns and artillery of white men's devilment.

Were these the pirates who ravished the lost dhows? Seated at the tiller of the dhow *El Asfar,* Rodgers pondered the problem in the afternoon sunshine. There must be some clever brain, cleverer even than a black brain, at work. It remained to be seen whether the stories of the great pearl cargo carried by the dhow *El Asfar* had reached the mysterious pirates.

One dhow, with its grinning, chattering crew grouped about the crazy mast, plunged past them. The Arabs in the faster dhow yelled gibes, and the *nacouda* raised a hand in derisive farewell. Rodgers grinned back; the last he saw of the dhow was a triangular sail sweeping toward the setting sun.

But before the fiery sun was swallowed up by the sea, a smear of smoke came

from the horizon. With the suddenness of a jinn, materializing in the brief twilight, a British naval sloop came steaming toward the pearling fleet.

Rodgers saw the glint of binoculars leveled from the bridge of the sloop in the direction of the dhow—the naval men were on the watch for slavers and arms smugglers. Rodgers laughed softly to himself; he realized that his half-naked body burned black by the sun was sufficient disguise, even to the keen eyes of the naval men.

But the next instant there was a puff of smoke and the report of a shot from the sloop; a blank shot had been fired. At the same time a flag was run up and a hoarse voice bellowed through a megaphone in execrable Arabic:

"Heave to!"

Obediently Rodgers snapped orders to the crew of the dhow. In a moment the crazy sail came tumbling and flapping to the deck like a live thing. Simultaneously, the hull of H. M. Sloop *Cæsar* came swirling toward them.

RODGERS heard orders barked in English from the bridge.

"Helm hard aport!"

"Aye, aye, sir."

Then a tinkle of instructions by telegraph to the engine-room. "Engines astern!" Then—

"Two points to starboard!"

"Aye, aye, sir."

Those sharp commands in English brought a feeling of nostalgia to Rodgers—who for nearly a fortnight had been cooped in a stinking dhow reeling and pitching on the uncertain surface of the Red Sea. He was tempted to reveal himself to that stern, buttoned-up figure on the bridge. Rodgers knew him well; Lieutenant Lamb had on several occasions ashore sat entranced while the Intelligence officer played Debussy at a cracked piano. But now the Lieutenant was merely concerned in a close examination of this dhow bouncing about.

"Where are you bound?" he demanded in that same execrable Arabic.

"To Suakin, with Allah's help," Rodgers grunted in reply.

More binoculars were swiveled toward the dhow. It was obvious that they had decided against launching a boat to board the *El Asfar*.

"All right. Off you go!"

As the curt command reached him and a tinkle from the bridge told of commands to the engine-room, Rodgers was tempted once again to reveal himself; H. M. Sloop *Cæsar* would be sure protection against any pirates.

But the necessity for playing a lone hand in this adventure decided Rodgers. He growled his orders to the crew. Once again the sail creaked up, the monsoon billowed it, and they followed in the wake of the other dhows.

By heaving to, *El Asfar* had lost way. Three dhows had proceeded ahead, now only one trailed behind. Rodgers eyed the dhow lumbering along in their wake—a heavy cumbersome craft with a large crew. They also had done well on the pearl reef, and the treasure was locked in the little chest upon which an old Arab *nacouda* sat as he steered in the wake of *El Asfar*.

Even as Rodgers turned for a last glimpse of the naval sloop slowly cruising along the coast, night descended swiftly. In a few moments they were pitching over black waves, pools of phosphorescence swirling about them, and a skyful of stars swinging above the mast—a typical Red Sea night.

But a strong current was carrying them toward the rocky coast. It was necessary to peer into the darkness for that smother of white foam which told of the knife-edged reefs jutting out of the sea. There was no moon to help him, only the blackness of the sea and the spangle of the stars. The cool stroke of the monsoon caused Rodgers to shiver. He reached out for the Arab *kuftan* that lay beside him.

IT was then he saw the light—a yellow light, swinging oddly against the black background of mountains. Riyahd saw it too. He crawled toward Rodgers.

"Look, Master!"

"I see it, Riyahd. What do you make of it?"

"A lantern, waved by some one ashore."

"A signal?"

"Yes, Master—the signal all dhows understand. It means, 'Come ashore. There is business to be done.'"

"What business can there be in these parts?"

"It may be, Master, that there is some Arab trader with a cargo of black ivory he wishes transported across the Red Sea. Shall we ignore it?"

Rodgers contemplated that swinging lantern in the night.

"No," he decided. "We'll take the dhow inshore. Light our lantern and signal back to him."

Riyahd crawled forward again. There was a little spurt of flame, the dhow's lantern was lighted, and a signal given to the watcher on land. There followed a series of light-flashes from the man ashore, which Riyahd interpreted as instructions regarding a safe channel toward the beach.

SKILLFULLY Rodgers maneuvered the dhow through the maze of coral reefs. As though celebrating this meeting on the lonely beach, a bonfire blazed up, revealing a group of figures standing there watching. It was at that moment the conviction came to Rodgers that here was the mystery unfolding itself. The dhow *El Asfar* was swirling toward the beach of lost dhows. The pirates were waiting, confident that the dhow and its cargo of pearls could not escape the maze of coral reefs which now webbed about them.

"Riyahd!"

"Yes, Master." And once again the flat-chested diver stood at Rodgers' side.

"Is the dhow of the old *nacouda* behind us?"

Riyahd turned and looked back in the darkness.

"Yes, Master, they follow. They also hope for a rich cargo of slaves."

Rodgers skillfully maneuvered the dhow away from a jutting edge of coral.

"Do you think you could swim to that dhow, before they get within the reefs?"

Riyahd measured the distance.

"I can try, Master," he whispered doubtfully.

"Then over you go," directed Rodgers. "Swim as though a thousand jinn were at your heels—for we drift toward the pirates and the beach of lost dhows."

*"Aiee!"* Riyahd drew in his breath with a hiss. "But even if I reach the dhow of the old *nacouda,* what then, Master?"

"You must set sail for the steel ship of the English, out there in the darkness. Find it, Riyahd, and ask for the Lieutenant Lamb."

*"Aiee!* Lieutenant Lamb."

"Tell him Paul Rodgers calls for help! He must come at once. *Presto.* Use the word *presto."*

"I hear, Master. *Presto'!"*

"Good. Over you go—and Allah be with you."

Almost before he had finished speaking there was a gentle splash and the Arab diver was stroking his way powerfully to the other dhow.

The lantern ashore was being waved impatiently. Rodgers had held back *El Asfar* until Riyahd had got away. Now he brought the crazy rudder over and headed the bows of the dhow direct for the bonfire.

There came a swirl, and a roar behind; the dhow was lifted clean by an advancing roll of surf and rushed at express-speed toward the beach. The crew shouted in alarm. A heavy, shattering thud, and the dhow was aground. The men by the bonfire came wading into the surf, and swarmed aboard the dhow. Three Somalis seized Paul Rodgers, carried him easily up the beach and flung him down alongside the blazing fire. The turban rolled from his head.

"Dear me, this is a surprise," a familiar voice gurgled in English. "So we meet again, Mr. Rodgers!"

With a start Paul Rodgers looked up. Glowing in the light of the fire was the fat, smiling face of Josef Talata, the Czech adventurer, gun-runner and now pirate of the Red Sea!

As he struggled to his feet, Rodgers realized everything.

The flaming bonfire revealed a horde of savage Somalis swarming the beach. Over their black naked shoulders were slung bandoliers crammed with cartridges. Each man carried a rifle of modern pattern. They were herding the crews of three dhows up the beach toward the darkness of the crags beyond. The dhows themselves, grounded in the seething surf, were being searched.

"YES," chuckled Josef Talata, as though guessing Rodgers' thoughts, "they're a fine band of ruffians! Watch them carefully, Mr. Rodgers. I flatter myself I've taught them to work well."

"A dangerous game, Talata," said Rodgers quietly. Out of the corners of his eyes he saw the three Somalis who had brought him ashore fingering their rifles watchfully.

"No more dangerous than other adventures in which we have crossed paths—eh?" was the reply. "There was, for example, the affair of bedsteads in the desert. You caused me to lose a valuable cargo then."

Rodgers bowed. He was determined not to be overwhelmed by the geniality of this fat rogue.

"Then there was the carefully and expensively planned attack on the gold-ship in the Suez Canal," the Czech went on, his mouth tightening in a hard line.

"That was something I find it very hard to forgive."

"Naturally," drawled Rodgers.

"I ought to have taken the advice once given me by the cleverest woman in the Middle East. She told me you must be stamped on, like an adder in the sand—crushed—killed ruthlessly."

"And the charming lady?"

"Was the Woman of Antioch. Yes, I thought that would move you, Mr. Rodgers! She met her death, fighting you. She could never bring herself to kill you, for deep down in that queer heart of hers, she loved you."

"Talata, you're a swine," Rodgers broke out, stung for the moment. "The woman is dead. Peace be with her soul."

"Yes, she is dead,"—and the Czech nodded—"but you, Mr. Rodgers, are alive. Allah has been good to me, and delivered you into my hands. I am not tempted to take the advice of the Woman of Antioch. You realize where you are?"

"Is it not called the beach of the lost dhows?" asked Paul Rodgers casually.

"It is," replied the Czech grimly. "And if you will watch those Somalis at work, you will agree that the name is justified."

The flames still leaping from the bonfire showed several Somalis with axes. They were clambering about the dhows, smashing and thudding their way through the timbers. Other natives were carrying the broken wood to the fire and hurling it into the flames. Sparks leaped up in the darkness.

"These Arabs," murmured the Czech, "are apt to conceal their treasure in secret hiding-places within the dhows. I take no risks. Incidentally, all traces of the dhow disappear in the flames. Not even a piece of wreckage to tell the tale of disaster."

"You destroy the dhows," said Rodgers suavely. "But what of the men?"

Once again Josef Talata chuckled.

"I'm glad you asked that question, Mr. Rodgers. A few, only a few, are useful as slaves. But dead men, like burned dhows, tell no tales. You saw that the crews of these dhows were marched away? Tomorrow morning the slaves will be selected. The others—" He paused significantly.

"Murder, eh?" suggested Rodgers.

Josef Talata shrugged fat shoulders.

"Call it what you will. Men must die that others may live."

"And myself?"

Rodgers asked the question with no illusions as to the cruel determination

"Allah has been good to me, Mr. Rodgers," said Talata, "and has delivered you into my hands."

of the man before him. In all his rascality, Josef Talata was logical; and in this case he was playing for high stakes. Now, the Czech was regarding him with an appraising look. Involuntarily, Rodgers felt a chill creeping along his spine.

"Yes, you may well ask, Mr. Rodgers! Once again I hesitate to follow the advice of the Woman of Antioch. A word from me, and these three Somalis would riddle your body with bullets."

"Dead men tell no tales," Rodgers retorted with a brave smile.

"That is so," chuckled the Czech. "But dead men are also useless carcasses, carrion for crows. No, I'll talk with

you first; an idea simmers in my mind. Meantime, pick up that box and follow me."

While they had been speaking, the Somalis had brought the loot and dumped it before the pudgy figure of this modern pirate. Brass-bound chests, boxes, sacks —each contained a treasure of pearls wrapped in the inevitable piece of red cloth. Rodgers recognized the chest from his own dhow; it was this chest which Talata now commanded him to shoulder.

"Pick it up, I tell you!" snarled the Czech, as Rodgers hesitated.

Rodgers bent, and shouldered the burden. The Somalis did likewise. The three guards with rifles followed; they watched every movement of this bedraggled, wet figure of a white man.

PRODDED by a rifle, he stumbled with his burden into the darkness. Soon a blocklike building loomed ghostly against the cliff-side. As the group approached nearer, one of the Somalis dropped his burden and began to recite a verse from the Koran. The moment's pause enabled Rodgers to discover that the cube-shaped building with a whitewashed cupola was the tomb of some long-dead sheik. In the darkness the cupola was shining eerily; this was caused by the pure whitewash that covered it, a preparation which Arabs make by burning the shells of sea snails.

Such tombs dot the landscape on both coasts of the Red Sea. They act as a refuge for travelers in these solitudes. Somewhere within, a now-forgotten sheik was buried.

"Inside, Mr. Rodgers!" came the command of the Czech.

Rodgers stumbled beneath the small entrance. The Somalis followed; they all dumped their burdens and gazed uneasily around. At a nod from the Czech, they hastily departed; they were obviously glad to be outside that tomb of the dead. But Rodgers heard the grounding of rifles outside. There was no chance of his escape. A call from the Czech, and they would be upon him.

"Not exactly comfortable," chuckled Josef Talata. "But superstition keeps it safe. Sit down, Mister Rodgers."

He indicated one of the chests which had been carried in. Rodgers chose the one from his own dhow. He glanced around curiously.

The thick walls brought a queer silence into this tomb on the beach. And a palm-fiber mat which covered the ground added to the silence. When Talata spoke his voice resounded within the walls, with a microphonic quality.

Behind Talata was a whitened piece of stone, almost like a cattle drinking-trough. Actually, it was the burial coffin of the sheik. As Rodgers' eyes slanted toward it, the Czech chuckled.

"Yes, that's the tomb of the sheik, though it's empty now. I removed the body one night and buried it in the hills beyond. I confess to a dislike of living with a corpse. But the spirit of the dead sheik is still there, so far as my men are concerned, and they do not disturb me."

Little shelves on which burial objects had once been placed, lined the tomb. Now the shelves held many little red cloth bundles. There were also several glass pickle jars, full of fresh water; at the bottom of each, was a bed of pearls an inch deep.

"My loot," smiled Talata, indicating these pearls. "I doubt whether Captain Kidd could boast of treasure of such value as is within these walls. Regard these, Mr. Rodgers."

He took down a glass jar and plunged his fat paw into the water, bringing forth a handful of pearls. He let them run about his palm, little magic moons shining in the light of the smoking lamp that dangled from the ceiling.

There was a miserlike intensity in the way Talata bent over those pearls. Night after night in the silence of this empty tomb, he had gloated over his treasures. This man who sent dhows to their doom was already a millionaire; fabulous pearls were in those jars, or tied up in dusty bundles.

"Beautiful pearls!" chuckled Talata.

Paul Rodgers thought of the many brave Arabs doomed to death or slavery by the greed of this modern pirate.

"And every one stained by a man's blood," he retorted coldly.

WITH a snarl, the Czech let the pearls dribble back into the jars and wiped his hands with a silk handkerchief.

"You're a sentimentalist, Rodgers," he said quietly. "Like all sentimentalists you concern yourself with other people's lives rather than your own. I suggest that you think seriously over what I'm about to say, for this time it is your own life that is at stake."

And having wiped his hands carefully, he put the handkerchief back into his pocket and brought forth a shining au-

tomatic pistol. His quiet deliberation caused a shiver to creep again up the spine of the Intelligence officer.

"So you've decided to kill me?" he asked.

"Most assuredly," nodded Josef Talata, eying him narrowly. "Within ten minutes you will be as dead as that sheik whose body once reposed in this tomb. Unless—"

He paused.

"I see. There are terms, eh?" Rodgers chaffed. Every inch of that tomb seemed photographed on his mind. But he could see no way of escape. His only chance lay with Riyahd: had he reached the sloop *Cæsar* in time? Maybe he had failed even to reach the other dhow, and his drowned body was even now being washed ashore by the surf.

"Seeing my execution is imminent," he went on, "perhaps you will grant me a final cigarette?"

"Stay where you are!" warned Talata, as the other rose. Obediently Rodgers sank back to the chest. The Czech fumbled in a pocket and tossed over a cigarette-case and a box of matches.

"Light your cigarette and listen," Talata ordered.

CALMLY Rodgers lighted a cigarette. His keen eyes stared through the haze of smoke at the man before him. The Czech was triumphant; he held all the cards.

"You're no fool, Mr. Rodgers," Talata observed at last.

"Thank you," said Rodgers ironically.

"And because you're no fool, I want you alive—as a partner."

Rodgers stared in astonishment.

"Then I'm not to be shot?"

"Most assuredly you will be dead within the next few minutes—if you don't agree to my terms."

"And what are they?"

"A quarter-share in the profits in return for your coöperation in these adventures. Mr. Rodgers," he went on, his eyes twinkling with excitement, "you and I can milk these Arab fools dry. Another six months, and we can clear away with enough money to keep us in luxury for the rest of our time. What d'you say? I know your value among the Arabs; I know what it is worth to me. Join me in this game, and a year hence you'll be a retired gentleman in the South of France."

"*Gentleman* is scarcely the word," Rodgers mocked.

"Or," snarled Talata, "you will be something for the jackals to feed upon, within the next three minutes!" And he leveled the automatic as he spoke.

"So I'm not to be given any time to think over this proposition?" drawled Rodgers.

Every minute was precious to him; he was gambling upon the scant chance that Riyahd had reached the naval sloop.

"I want your reply now, yes or no," said Talata grimly.

"To play the pirate, or die an honest man, eh?" asked Rodgers.

"Don't quibble. Yes or no?"

Rodgers shrugged his shoulders.

"Then I must say—"

He tried to keep his voice steady. At that moment he had glimpsed something in the smoky light that nearly caused him to cry out aloud. From the white-painted trough a brown arm was curling. A second later a head appeared—an Arab head, slowly raising itself out of the stone coffin. A leg slid out. A hand was fumbling in a loin-cloth for a knife. Rodgers realized he was gazing upon the flat-chested pearl-diver Riyahd.

"I must say," drawled Rodgers, with irritating slowness, "that—I'll see you damned first!"

The fat finger against the trigger of the automatic tensed itself. But it was too late. With the swiftness of doom Riyahd struck from behind with the knife. And the blow came upward, the Arab knife-thrust that is more deadly than the down-stroke.

Rodgers saw the fat face before him become dazed with surprise. Then the head sagged, blood frothed to the mouth and the body crumpled silently to the floor. Rodgers and Riyahd, both clad only in loin-cloths, stood stupidly on the matting, gazing at the body. In that awful silence the gasps of the dying man sounded painfully loud.

"THANK you, Riyahd," said Rodgers simply; and he took the diver's brown hand in his own.

"It is a poor repayment of the debt I owe you, Master," replied the Arab. "*Insh'allah!*"

They could hear the guards outside the tomb muttering among themselves. A rifle grounded sharply.

"What are you doing here?" whispered Rodgers. "Did you fail to deliver the message?"

Still gazing dully at the dying man, Riyahd shook his head.

"No, Master. I reached the dhow of the old *nacouda* and delivered the message. I asked him to sail the dhow at once and search for the English steel ship. But I could not sail away and leave you here, Master! As the dhow swung round, I dived overboard again and swam for the beach. I was carried ashore by the surf. The Somalis were breaking the dhows. I decided to hide, and wait. In the darkness I came across this tomb. I sat here until voices sent me groveling in the stone coffin. And so I lay while you talked in strange tongues. The rest you know."

Paul Rodgers shivered slightly as he saw the bloodstained knife still grasped by the Arab diver. It was the same knife he had used to cut away the giant clam that had trapped Riyahd under the sea.

At that moment a death-rattle came from the throat of the stabbed Czech. Brusquely Riyahd turned and bent as though to stifle the noise. But something like an ugly smile twisted the face of Josef Talata, as he lay on the matting, for the noise had caused one of the Somali guards to peer fearfully into the dimly lit tomb.

The whites of his eyes showed like eggshells as the scene dawned upon him: Josef Talata coughing his life away in a pool of blood on the floor and two half-naked men tensely watching!

With a growl, half of fear and half of rage, he leveled his rifle. But at that same moment Rodgers seized the pudgy hand of the Czech, and wrested the automatic from it. He fired at the Somali, who pitched with a groan across the doorway, his rifle clattering against the rocks.

"The lamp!" snapped Rodgers.

With the wild leap of a cat, Riyahd jumped for the ceiling and brought the smoking lamp crashing to the ground. The tomb was plunged into darkness. At the same moment three rifle-shots burst out, and the bullets came whining into the tomb to flatten themselves against the walls.

Stretched on the ground, Rodgers found himself to his horror lying beside the body of Josef Talata. Here at last was the reckoning between the two men —in the tomb of a long-dead sheik!

He saw a Somali head in the doorway. He leveled the automatic and fired again. The head disappeared with startling rapidity. But once again a volley of rifle-shots crashed into the tomb.

Rodgers cursed softly. It was only a matter of minutes now before the Somalis would overwhelm them. He could hear shouts, the scuttering of naked feet, the preparation for a rush on the tomb.

THERE came a howl as of a pack of hyenas in the darkness; the Somalis were crying themselves to the attack. But even as their naked feet padded in a mad rush over the sand, the darkness was split open by a beam of white light. It blinded the natives and they turned in trembling surprise. The white light came from the sea, knifing the darkness and revealing the macabre scene on the beach of the lost dhows.

"A searchlight! By heavens, the naval sloop at last!" cried Rodgers. He burst into Arabic. "The message was delivered, Riyahd!"

Only the silence of the tomb replied. He crawled from behind the dead body of the Czech. Now rifle-shots were stabbing the night—rifle-shots from a launch, filled with bluejackets, that the sloop had sent to thread its way through the maze of coral reefs.

The Somalis turned from the tomb to face this new attack. A savage rush carried them down the beach toward the surf. But at the same time the rifle-shots were merged in the clatter of a

machine-gun that cut a merciless swath through their black ranks. Blood trickling from their wounds, they pitched forward into the sea hissing over the sand.

"Steady, men! They've surrendered."

It was the voice of Lieutenant Lamb. The few survivors of that merciless hail of lead were kneeling on the beach in attitudes of abject surrender. Quickly the launch was beached and the bluejackets herded together the pathetically few prisoners. The searchlight from the sloop wavered over the scene, and came to rest on the stark white walls of the tomb.

Lieutenant Lamb, accompanied by three men, scrambled over the rocks and reached the narrow entrance to the tomb.

"Rodgers!" he called into the darkness. "Are you all right?"

HE flashed an electric torch about. Its circle of light came to rest on the kneeling form of Paul Rodgers.

"Thank heaven you're safe!" said Lieutenant Lamb, with a sigh of relief. "I was inclined to think that message a fake. If you hadn't passed on the word '*presto*,' you musical devil, I would have thought that old *nacouda* was bluffing me. As it is, we seem to have arrived just in time to smoke out this nest of pirates."

"Just in time!" said Rodgers bitterly. He lifted his head, and for the first time a man saw those gray eyes wet with tears. "You're five minutes too late!"

With a start, Lieutenant Lamb let the circle of his torch drop. The light splashed on the body of a flat-chested Arab diver, dead from a bullet through the heart. Riyahd had died quietly—in that last volley from the Somalis.

"A poor devil of a pearl-diver, eh?" asked Lieutenant Lamb.

Rodgers, his eyes still dimmed with tears, looked up.

"My friend," he said simply. . . .

The next morning H. M. Sloop *Cæsar* sailed from the beach of lost dhows and headed for Suakin. The steel ship carried on its decks a miscellaneous assortment of Arabs and crews rescued from the black pirates. And to the faint irritation of the captain and officers of the sloop, Rodgers insisted upon spending much time with these deck passengers.

All were relieved when Suakin was reached and the Arabs who had lost their dhows were deposited in the harbor. Rodgers made his way to the house of Kra Krishna the pearl-dealer. The fat Hindu, more Buddha-like than ever, was waiting for him. It seemed he had never extricated himself from that same chair in which he was squatting. He clapped his hands loudly, and the inevitable bottle of champagne was brought by a grinning servant.

"And so, Rodger' sahib, you return!" he burbled. "I knew you would. You have solved the mystery of the lost dhows. You have brought to an end the career of that jackal Josef Talata. I drink your health, Rodger' sahib. It is your greatest triumph!"

"It is my greatest failure," replied Rodgers bitterly.

"But did you not discover a wealth of treasure in pearls?" asked the Hindu. His eyes glinted with cupidity. "By the way, what is happening to those pearls?"

"They are in the keeping of the Governor," Rodgers replied. "They will be divided among those who have lost their dhows and among the relatives of those who lost their lives. I've no doubt, Kra Krishna, that the pearls will eventually pass through your hands."

"*Aiee!*" The Hindu smiled cunningly.

"For the dhow which you loaned me and which I lost, compensation will be paid," Rodgers went on.

"I am not complaining, Rodger' sahib," said the Hindu, raising his glass.

"But from you, Kra Krishna, I demand what you promised."

KRA KRISHNA put back his glass and nodded.

"I do not forget, my friend. I promised you whatever you asked. What is it?"

"Five thousand pounds."

Kra Krishna seemed relieved.

"Again I am not complaining, my friend," he burbled. "It will be paid to you today. I will write you a check at once."

"Make it payable to the Arab woman who was the wife of Riyahd," said Rodgers quietly.

"To the wife of Riyahd!" muttered the Hindu, in astonishment.

"Yes; he loved her. That is all, Kra Krishna. Good day!"

"Good day, Rodger' sahib," gasped the Hindu.

Silently the white man went out.

"A madman! A white madman," sighed Kra Krishna; and he reached out a brown paw for the glass of champagne which Rodgers had again left untouched.

*The surprising story of a white-faced mare named Quicksand,*

# The Hard Luck

*By* JONATHAN

Illustrated by

It was this telegram from Tommy Tharp that did the work. And how was I to know our old enemy Lum Bagley had his fine Italian hand in the affair?

You see, my old blind mare Lamentation could trot a mile as fast as any man's horse. She trotted me into a stake, down to Florida, into a small fortune, a wedding with Mrs. Maude Bocaw and the ownership of a race-track. Yeah, Charley Perkins, married and a business man!

But poor Lam' died, aged twenty years, and she lays under a marble monument twice as good as I'll ever deserve. Then the bottom fell out of Florida, my race-track too—if it ever had a bottom. And it darn' near fell out of my married life.

I've took care of little Tommy Tharp all o' these fifteen years, and I'm not gonna leave him flat just because the U. S. and Florida get that way. So I take out of the bank enough money to pay Tommy for his share of stock in the race-track, and I put my note in its place. I put up the deed to my race-track, worth nothing net, and the deeds to these business blocks, worth even less, as security for my note. Tommy goes away, for he sees an old pal is in the way when a man of fifty marries a widow of forty-seven.

Now, Maude finds out about this note of mine, and she gallops down my throat about it. Right about this time, when we're in maybe the fourth heat of a finish fight, there's a knock at the door. We've got no servants left, so Maude goes to the door herself and comes back with a telegram for me. Here is what it says:

CHANCE FOR A BIG DEAL ON QUICKSAND PERIOD WIRE FIVE HUNDRED FIRST THEN COME UP TO CONEY ISLAND FIRST TRAIN OR AIRPLANE PERIOD

Tommy Tharp is the name signed to the telegram and it is dated Cincinnati, but I thought Coney Island was in New York. Looks like it might be something, though I don't like this name—*Quicksand*. But it might be good, at that!

"Well?" says Maude, suspicious.

"I'm goin' to work," I said. "Chance to make some dough."

"Yeah?" says Maude, not givin' me any laugh. So I have to tell her what it is all about, as near as I can figure from the telegram. We have it hot and heavy for a while, but I'm set on hookin' up with Tommy again, sight unseen. Maude says I can't have five hunderd to wire him, and I finally compromise with her when she sees it's no use to argue. I decide to go up to Coney Island and investigate this Quicksand business before giving Tommy any jack, if ever.

"But no airplane, Perk," Maude says, wipin' the tears from her eyes.

"Not me," I said. "And I'll wire you, Maude."

"For money, I suppose," she sniffs. "It will be no use!"

"But you know where I buried that thousand in the garden, just in case," I said.

"I moved it," she snaps.

"All right, I'll come back and dig up the stake we buried for *you*, then," I said, quick as a wink.

"Yes? I moved that too! Somebody in this family has to have sense!"

"And dollars also, the way it looks to me," I said.

I know she's only playin' safe, to keep the money out o' my reach so's I can't gamble it away. But just the same, it makes me sore. So I bat right out o' there, leavin' her cryin' like nobody's invited her to go to the dance, poor thing.

I even take an airplane from Jackson-

*and of a race which was not to the swift.*

# *Handicap*

## BROOKS

Bert Salg

ville, part of the way, because I'm not broke by any means. I've got better'n two hunderd in my pocket, and Maude never knew anything about my old ace in the hole. Ever since I first started beatin' the bushes with old Lamentation, I've always kept a five-hunderd note pinned to my undershirt. And I didn't get out of the habit even when I was rich! So I'm heeled, some, when I hit Cincinnati, and find out that Tommy knew what he was talking about.

Coney Island is the name of a race-track up the river, and in the river on an island, above Cincinnati a ways. That is where I got into Quicksand—or Quicksand got into me, whichever!

That is what they tell me at the hotel, in Cincinnati, where I put up for the rest of the night when I get there about midnight—that Coney Island is a race-track. "Trotters?" I asked the clerk hopefully.

"No, cert'n'y not—runners!" he says.

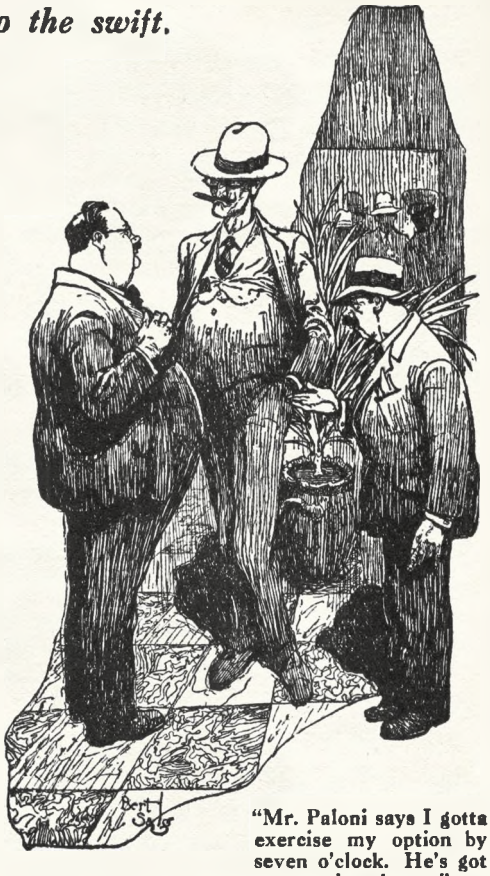
"Well, well, Perk! Here for the wind-up?" says a voice to me when I'm follow'in' the bellboy to the elevator. I looked around, and bless my quarter-boots if it aint old Tom J. Morgan, who used to be an awful good man with a pacer, from Moberly, Missouri, years ago. He looks kind o' seedy.

"Hi, Tom, old-timer," I said, shakin' hands. I remember him—staked him to three hunderd thirty years ago, one time at the old kite-shaped track in Terry Hut. On the Circuit, in those days. I never forget a face.

But I wouldn't dun him for the dough, because I know he'll settle when he can.

"What have *you* got, some of these durned jumpers?" I asks.

"No," he says, sort o' sad. "I'm purty low, Perk, but I'm not *that* low! I'm not in this game, only on it. I'm a steward at this Coney Island meeting. Haven't got a horse I could call my own. Only a measly sal'ry."



"Mr. Paloni says I gotta exercise my option by seven o'clock. He's got another buyer."

"Well, well," I said. "Maybe you're in luck, at that. A runner would be worse than no horse at all."

"Oh, I don't know," he says. "Remember little Dick Thompson? He's handlin' for Ed Bradley now, on the big time. Dick was a good man with a trotter, in the old days."

"Who's Ed Bradley?" I asked him.

"My gosh, Perk, you don't know anything about racin' nowadays!" Tom laughs.

We talk about this and that; and he says he's seen Tommy several times, but Tommy aint doin' so good. I don't tell him I'm up here to see Tommy about a deal he wants me in on. No use spillin' everything you know, even to a guy who owes you money. After a while I tell him I'll be seein' him again, and I follow this bellboy upstairs and go to bed, tired.

Well, next morning after I've et my breakfast and sent off a wire to Maude to tell her I got here all right, I learn how to get to Coney Island, and I go up there. After loafin' around an hour, I

bump into little Tommy Tharp, darn his hide. He's got fat around the middle, but is not changed any other way, except he is all excited. He don't even stop to say hello.

"Perk, you got here just in time," he says. "Look! We can grab something good, and maybe clean up! This Quicksand can run a quarter faster'n anything on hoofs! I got a chance to grab her for a song."

"Go ahead and sing," I said. "They don't pay off at the quarter, even in these fool jumpin' races!"

"Same old Perk—always got y'r little joke," Tommy grins. But he's too much in earnest to lose any time. "Look, Perk—come and see her!"

SO I go along with him, and on the way he tells me his troubles. He let prosperity go to his head. Instead of going out and gettin' himself one horse and makin' it earn him another one, why, he plunges and buys three! Forms a stable, right off. And then what? Well, one breaks a leg and has to be shot. Another one loses eight races in a row and gets claimed for five hunderd dollars. He spends that five centuries on the third one and it cracks a hoof without even winnin' him a thin dime. He's still got it, and is broke, so flat broke that he's swaybacked.

"But this Quicksand, Perk," he says, while we're walkin' along among the barns, "she's good, honest! Out of Quickaneasy, by Sandy Bottom, he a full brother of Rock Sand!"

"Who was Rock Sand?" I asked him.

"Omigosh, don't be so ignorant! Here she is," says Tommy, stoppin' in front of a stall. "Oh, boy," he yells, "just lead her out so we can see her."

This Quicksand is a picture mare, no less! I never was one to hold it against a hoss to be good-lookin', like some, but on the other hand, I never bought one on looks. Never saw a purtier mare in my life, I'll say that.

"But good grief, Tommy," I said. "Look—she's got a white face!"

"What of it? No law against that!" says Tommy.

"No, but a white-faced hoss aint any bottom! That's good—Quicksand, no bottom!" I said, snickering. "I mean, I never saw a white-faced one that would last, had any guts," I said. "They won't go all the way."

"Don't be so old, Perk," says Tommy, gettin' mad. "I'm as good a judge of hossflesh as you are, and you're thinkin' about trotters, not runners."

"Runners *are* different," I said, sarcastic. "But you said y'rself she runs a quarter faster'n anything on four legs—and a quarter's not enough."

"Yeah? But I didn't say which quarter," says Tommy, right quick. "Look her over, Perk. Aint she a love?"

Well, I will admit she is what Tommy calls a love. She is handsome, and I look at her eyes, and she looks honest, if I'm any judge. Besides this, she is affectionate, because she reaches out her nose at me and feels my hand when I hold it up. Regular pet, and I got a soft spot for an affectionate horse, if it is honest. So I weaken.

"Maybe you're a better judge of runners than I am, which is none at all," I said. "I don't know—"

So he grabs me when he sees I'm softenin' up, and makes me promise we'll take this purty little brown mare with the white face and honest eyes.

"At five hunderd dollars, she's a steal," says Tommy. "But the guy needs money—and we're just in time!"

"Time for what?" I said.

"Why, haven't you heard?" Tommy is surprised. "The Hard Luck Handicap! Biggest thing at this meeting. To be run tomorrow. Got to get in today. It's for non-winners at this meeting or any other meeting, and every starter puts up two hunderd dollars, winner take all! Chance for a stake, Perk. Twelve to start—twenty-four hunderd dollars if we win!"

"Nothin', if we lose," I said.

"We'll win; we can't lose," he says.

I FORGET all about Maude and my troubles back home, and tell him I'll go along with him, fifty-fifty. I'll put up the five hunderd dollars I've got pinned to my undershirt, and we'll enter Quicksand in this Hard Luck Handicap! Can't be much worse off than what we are already.

"But it takes my last five hunderd," I said.

"Wha-at? How'll we enter, then?"

"Never mind, I'll figure it out," I said. "Where is the fella who owns this Quicksand? Let's make the deal before I change my mind."

"No hurry about that. I bought an option on her with my last twenty-five dollars," says Tommy. "The first thing is to see if we can get in this Hard Luck Handicap."

"*If* we can get in?" I said. "Are they choosy who runs?"

"The twelve unluckiest get in," says Tommy, "And the stewards decide."

So we go over to the stands and after pokin' around awhile we find the three stewards havin' a sandwich and a bottle of beer together in the café before they go up to take charge of the afternoon's racing. Tom J. Morgan is with the other two but he only nods to me. Tommy asks one of them if he can talk to them, and this one says to shoot.

"It's about startin' in the Hard Luck Handicap," says Tommy. "Perk and I want to start Quicksand tomorrow afternoon. We're buyin' her, and—"

"But we've about decided on the twelfth starter," says one of the stewards. "Can't have thirteen."

"Maybe we ought to listen to Tharp's hard-luck story, though, in case," says another one.

"WELL, I'm entitled to start," Tommy argues, all in earnest. "I had some money and I bought three dogs. One broke a leg and had to be shot. One was out o' the money eight times in a row and got claimed on me for only five hunderd dollars. I spent nearly all o' that on vets tryin' to cure up my third hoss, which has got a split hoof."

"You've had it easy," one of the stewards laughs.

"Win a race at this meeting?" asks the second one.

"I aint won a race at this meeting, or any other meeting," says Tommy.

"But this Quicksand—she's won a race?"

"Year ago last spring she won a race—but only on a foul," Tommy explains.

"So she *did* win a race," says this steward, a kind of toughy. "That's not so good. We got eleven horses that never won. And the twelfth one, the owner's wife died last week, his house burned down day before yesterday, and on top of all that, his jockey broke a leg."

This stuff gets my goat. What do they know about hard luck? So I speaks up, myself. "Listen, gents," I said, "I'm Tommy's partner here, on this Quicksand deal. My old blind mare died, I lost my race-track and three business blocks, and my wife hides some money I had stuck away for a rainy day. On top o' that she tells me to get out and go to work so we can eat, and then I come up here and find Tommy's stuck with a white-faced mare! Now you gents tell us we are too lucky to break into that handicap!"

"I'll wire you," I says. "You know where I buried that thousand in the garden." "I moved it!" Maude snaps.

"Well, now, that might make a difference," says this tough steward, all impressed. "And you're his partner?"

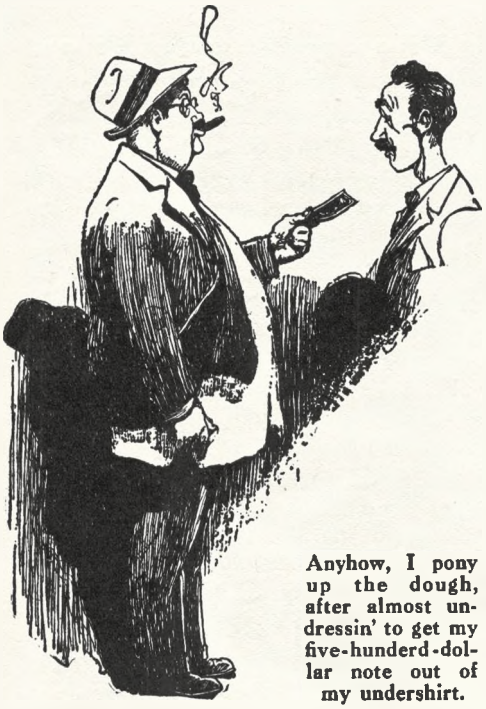
"I'm puttin' up the dough to buy this Quicksand," I said. "But I'll have to beg, borrow or steal the entry-fee."

"No, you put up the fee, and beg, borrow or steal the rest of the mare's price," says the steward. "You can't give us a note."

"We could let in the guy whose house burned, as Number 13," says Tom J. Morgan, putting down his beer. "We said twelve, and twelve is a dozen. But we can make it a baker's dozen—thirteen—can't we?"

"If you do, give us Number 13," I said. "If we're gonna be unlucky, we might as well go the whole hog."

So the stewards laughed about it, and finally said they'd take our money and leave our mare in the race. But it was a good thing I went along with Tommy—they'd've turned him down flat. A good thing, I mean, supposin' we do get the mare, and get in the race, *and* get anywhere with her! Anyhow, I pony up the dough, after almost undressin' to get



Anyhow, I pony up the dough, after almost undressin' to get my five-hunderd-dollar note out of my undershirt.

my five-hunderd-dollar note out of my undershirt.

"There's only one other condition that the owners know anything about," says this toughest steward. "We don't care what jocks you use. We don't care how much weight they tote. Nor if you give your goat a shot of coffee or whisky or what have you. Nothing is barred, in this Hard Luck Handicap. But every owner has to bet one hunderd dollars on his dog to win! Get that?"

"What?" says Tommy, all sunk.

"Good gosh—but we haven't got it," I said. "Or won't have, when we buy this Quicksand. I'm short two hunderd dollars of the price, now."

"That's some more of your hard luck," laughs this toughy. "Might as well be three hunderd short, as two hunderd. But the winning owner is disqualified, if he can't show a hunderd-dollar win ticket when the race is over."

Well, of all the dumb— But I grab Tommy and lead him out o' there. He's lower'n what I am, even. Sunk—dished!

"And they call this the sport of kings!" he growls.

"Listen," I says to him, "haven't you got any money at all?"

"Not a dime," he says. "And I owe a feed-bill for my hoss, besides stall-rent and also a feed-bill and stall-rent at the boarding-house for myself. But say!" He gets hopeful. "Here's the answer! You got some money. Bet a little of it this afternoon on some of these races, and win enough to stake up! There's the idea!"

"Not for me, nix," I said. "I wouldn't bet on any of these blame' dogs—"

"We could win enough—"

"Oh, yeah? I don't know anything about these races," I said, "and you know even less, Tommy Tharp! If you knew your way around in this stuff you wouldn't be stony right now! Nope, bettin's out. The only bet we'll make will be the century on Quicksand tomorrow."

"If we can raise the century!" groans Tommy. We're out in front of the stands leaning against the fence, and it's considerable after noon. But the way I feel, it's midnight or worse; everything's dark.

"I've sunk two hunderd dollars already," I said. "I got to bet another one hunderd dollars tomorrow. That leaves me two hunderd dollars—and the price of this white-faced baby is five hunderd dollars!"

"Yeah, and that other three hunderd might as well be three million. Gosh, Perk, I'm sorry I dragged you into this thing," says Tommy. "If I only knew somebody I could make a touch on—"

"Or if I did," I said. "Old Tom Morgan owes me some money, and I might—"

"Nix, nix," Tommy butts in right quick. "Don't you go near one of them stewards while the meetin's on! They're touchy. Been rumors around, and they're strict as heck. Don't say anything to him—they'd rule us off for life!"

"Yeah? We're not so darned *on,* are we?" I said. "But even so, I guess I won't see Tom. If he had any dough, he'd pay me. He'd've paid me before now, if he had the dough and knew where I was. Nope, that's out. There's only one chance. I'll wire Maude for some money."

"Say, that's the stuff!" And Tommy brightens up a lot. "Then we can go—"

"Don't get excited," I said. "There's not one chance in a thousand she'll come through. But I'll ask her, and it only costs the price of a telegram to try. Only I'll have to be darned careful she don't know it's a race-horse deal. Let's hunt up the telegraph-office."

ON the way to the bettin' shed, and over in back of the stands, I do some tall thinkin' while Tommy does a lot of babblin', and I write out what I think is a right smart wire to my wife

down in Wassumpqua. This is what I say to Mrs. Charles E. Perkins:

CAN CLOSE SAND AND GRAVEL DEAL WITH FIVE HUNDRED PERIOD PLEASE WIRE MONEY TODAY.

"Sounds like Greek to me," says Tommy.

"Yeah, but she saw your wire about Quicksand, and I don't want her to think this is a horse deal. That is a smart telegram," I said, and shoved it over to the operator with a dollar to pay him for gettin' it off in a hurry. "Now then, Tommy, you can stay around here this afternoon if you want; look after your hoss—"

"And keep an eye on Quicksand too," he says.

"Never mind; you got your option, and nobody'll run away with her."

"But I don't trust the man I bought the option of!"

"Good galosh," I said. "Is anything *else* rummy? Who's the man?"

"Orlando J. Paloni," says Tommy. "I never heard of him before, and nobody around here knows much about him. May be a crook, for all I know. I'll watch that mare."

"Tommy Tharp," I said, "you're a blamed little fool, and I'm wishin' I'd never come up here on that blamed wire of yours. Dealin' with crooks, as well as white-faced hosses! I'm about to walk out on yuh, and kiss that two hunderd dollars good-by!"

"Aw, listen, Perk, yuh wouldn't do that!" Tommy whines. "Listen, Perk—"

"I'm about done," I said, gettin' disgusteder every minute. "I'm goin' down town to the hotel and wait around for Maude to send me the money—if she does," I said. "You come down there this evening for supper, and we'll see what we do next. I'll be there, and I'll buy you some food, at least. *Good*-by!"

I GO on away from there, leavin' Tommy bluer'n indigo, and get on back to town. And I set around in the hotel lobby all afternoon, sinkin' deeper and lower every hour, an' kickin' myself for a fool. Old horseman fallin' for a mare with a white face! His pardner dealin' with a crook. Got to bet one hunderd dollars to win whether I want to or not. Need three hunderd dollars. Well, that afternoon was longer'n from here to the other end of Brooklyn Bridge. But it finally come to an end with a bang and a jerk.

I'm settin' in a big leather chair chewin' the end of a cigar, along about dark, when I see little Tommy Tharp come in the lobby, bringing a tall sorta thin fella with some stummick. At the same time a bellboy is yellin' my name, and I hail him. He hands me the telegram I'm waiting for, and I give him a dime. I open the envelope, and read:

GET AWAY FROM THAT RACE-HORSE'S HEAD PERIOD MAUDE.

Out! No ways near first base. But here comes Tommy with more bad news.

"PERK, meet Paloni," says Tommy. "This is my pardner, Mr. Perkins," he tells this fella, who wears a mustache and horn-rim glasses. The fella nods to me, and don't say a word. "Perk," says Tommy, "Mr. Paloni says I gotta exercise my option by seven o'clock. We didn't say anything about a time limit, as I remember it, but he says he's got another buyer and he'll give us to seven, so's to be fair."

"Funny, there'd be a rush of buyers for this mare, all at once!" I said. I give this Orlando Paloni a good hard look while I'm talkin'. "Also, it's funny he put a time limit on his option *after* he gives the option. But he can't do that, Tommy."

"Ah, but he can, and does, sir," says this Paloni, in a voice that sounds like he's got an oyster under his tongue. "At seven o'clock Mr. Tharp pays me, or loses his option." He don't look at me, or Tommy, either, for that matter. His eyes sort o' rove around aimless and nervous. Familiar, this guy, though I never knew any Italians.

"So?" I said. And then I get an inspiration. Here comes Tom J. Morgan across the lobby—and he's got to stand and deliver, for he's owed me three hunderd dollars for thirty years. I wigwag him, and he comes over to where we're standing. "Tom," I said, "here's a little deal I'd like you to help on. Paloni give Tharp an option on Quicksand at five hunderd dollars, no time limit. Now he tells Tommy he's got to close by seven o'clock, or else. We're gonna exercise our option, but I'm waitin' for some money. Don't know how soon it'll come."

"Money has wings," laughs old Tom.

"Flies the other way," Tommy Tharp groans. Paloni looks at the door.

"Problem is, will Paloni close his option at seven o'clock, or will he wait till I get my three hunderd?"

"If there was no time limit in that option, he waits," says Tom J. Morgan. He looks at me kind o' queer, and I can see he remembers the time I staked him. "But why quarrel, gents? Paloni prob'ly would be glad to take your note for the balance—eh, Paloni?"

"One can not eat notes," says this fella, disgusted.

"But one would take a note?" laughs Morgan, and walks right away from us. I s'pose a steward is a kind of he-guy in this runnin'-horse game. I'm starin' at this Paloni and he's awful nervous. All of a sudden I tumble!

"Tommy," I said, right quick, "you run and ask Mr. Morgan to wait a minute for me, will you? Quick!" And as soon as he's out o' earshot, I snap onto this Orlando Paloni, hard: "Listen, Lum Bagley, what have these stewards got on you?"

"You knew me, Perk?" he whines. "This mustache, and the glasses, and—"

"YOU'RE fatter, too—but it's them eyes jumpin' around! Every other crook I know controls his eyes. You'll never learn. Now then, Lum, I'll give you a hunderd bucks, and my note for four hunderd, due in fifteen days! What say?"

"Aw, listen, you can't run a bluff on me!" But he sees Tommy bringin' old Tom J. Morgan back, and he fidgets, shuffles on both feet, like he might break into a gallop any second.

"Yes, or no," I said. "Quick!"

"Yes," he sort o' growls. Then he turns to Morgan. "We're all set, sir," he says.

"That's good—though, of course, it's none of my affair," says Morgan. "Perk, you'll find it an interesting game—not like the trotters in the old days," and he takes me by the arm and leads me away a couple o' steps. "But interesting. The queerest thing is, the race is not always to the swift. Also, the first shall be last, and the last shall be first, as the Bible, or something, says. Yes, sir, it's an interesting game, if a man keeps his eyes and ears open. But Perk," —he stops and squares around to look at me, then points a finger at me and scowls, like a steward settin' down a jockey for foulin' or something,—"Perk, I have not forgot the three hundred dollars I owe you. Can't pay it yet. But if you'll remember what the Bible says, maybe we'll call it square. Behave y'rself!"

And away he goes. I'm flabbergasted, dumb. What in hokum is he talkin' about? But never mind—the thing to do is close this deal. So I go back to Paloni (alias Lum Bagley, the worst crook unhung, as I can testify after nineteen or thirty-seven deals with him these last twenty years—but Tommy don't recognize him) and we square up. I set down and write out a note. Make it payable to Lum Bagley, too.

"But, Mr. Perkins," he says, lookin' at the way I've wrote it, while I'm diggin' out a hunderd-dollar bill. "You've made it—"

"Correct," I said. "Prob'ly tomorrow night I'll take up that note. You might see me here about this time, if the police aint got you by then!"

So I grab Tommy and we go up to my room to wash up before I throw a feed into him and me. He's all ears and curiosity at the way I've balled this whole business through. But I don't tell him anything, for I'm sour on him for havin' been so blind he didn't recognize Lum. And besides, I'm darned busy tryin' to figure out what old Tom J. Morgan was drivin' at, quotin' the Bible on me, and all that stuff. So it's a long hard evening, and I get a headache from overtrainin' what I use for brains.

Myself, I prefer trottin'-races, baseball and tennis to runnin'-races, football and golf; because they know enough to go in out of the rain! But these runners, they go, rain or shine. What I mean, it comes up rain for this big Hard Luck Handicap, and the track gets muddy and greasy. All the owners, and jocks, and trainers and hosses get soaked. And the crowd, too—except it takes a soaking in the bettin' as usual, and stays dry under the sheds. Big crowd. Everybody laughing and talkin' about the Hard Luck Handicap, feature event of the wind-up day.

BEFORE noon I'm out with Tommy messin' around with this purty white-faced mare of ours. And she *is* purty, no mistake. Hard to blame Tommy for fallin' for her.

"Shame to send anything as purty as she is, out into that blamed mud," says Tommy. "And that reminds me, speakin' of mud: Have you got any more money, Perk? We'd oughta get her shod for this mud, or she'll run last."

"Last?" I said. The word gives my old think-tank a jolt. Where have I heard it before. "Run last?"


**Quicksand scrambles right out into the lead with her little skinny kid of a jockey kickin' and clawin' at her. They stretch out into stride, Quicksand throwin' mud back at the others.**

"Yeah, she's shod slip and light," he says. "There's a blacksmith around here, and if you got any more money—"

"Haven't got much," I said, still thinkin' hard. "But isn't there a pair of pliers around? Have a look. Maybe we can save some of this blacksmith bill."

So Tommy finds some tools, and I have a look at Quicksand's shoes. Try a couple of them, and find two loose nails in one and one loose nail in another. Pull them nails out, and one shoe gets good and loose.

"I'll take her around to the blacksmith, now, and let him fix her up," says Tommy. "If you got a little change—"

"Never mind, it's my money and I'll spend it myself," I said. "I'll just take her around there myself."

And I did, but Tommy was sore when I come back half an hour later. "Why, yuh didn't get her fixed up at all!" says Tommy. I tell him the blacksmith was too busy and couldn't get to Quicksand. He says it's a crime to put a mare out to race in all that mud, the way Quicksand's shod.

"Oh, never mind," I said. "Maybe she'd do just as well, running barefoot. If it was me, I'd want hip-boots! You leave these shoes alone, Tommy. Get ahold of your jock, and tell him this: to get Quicksand out in front early and send her along hard. If she kicks enough mud in the face of them other dogs, maybe they'll get discouraged and quit. So we'll win!"

"Okay," he says. "They're all dogs, except Quicksand, or they wouldn't be in this race. She'll run away from 'em."

"I'm on my way," I said. "Be over in the stands. I'm gonna buy me that hunderd-dollar win ticket on this white-faced baby!"

"We'll—we'll win, Perk," mutters Tommy.

"Sure," I said, thinkin' what a square-shootin' guy old Tom J. Morgan is. And also rememberin' that every time, year in and year out, that old Lum Bagley tried to pull a fast one or unload somep'n on me and Tommy, we always crack down in front. So I give up my hunderd bucks, after a cup of coffee, and stick this win ticket in my left hip pocket. We can't lose!

WELL, sir, there was a hoss race! The big crowd has a swell time, laughin' at these thirteen plugs. It bets, too, and has a lot of fun figurin' whether the thirteen that never beat nothin' else can beat each other. They come out to parade, and Quicksand is Number 13, sure enough. That ought to be lucky! It's drizzlin' rain, and the old track is a mud-hole all the way. But Quicksand's white face shines out among them plugs at the barrier, like a full moon. Tommy finds me, down by the fence under my old umbrella.

"Ain't she purty, Perk?" he says, lookin' up at the sixteenth post, where the barrier is. Did I say this race is at a mile and a sixteenth? Yeah. "And look, Perk—she's away in front! Out there—hooray!"

No holds barred, and the Hard Luck Handicap is off! Quicksand scrambles right out into the lead with her little skinny kid of a jockey kickin' and clawin' at her. In four jumps that white face is bobbin' up and down, out in front. They stretch out into stride and when they pass the judges' stand, our Quicksand is throwin' mud back at the others and buildin' up a lead. Tommy is right!

"Didn't I tell you?" he says, grabbin' my arm.

"We'll collect," is all I say. I'm sort o' steamed up myself, for it's the first hoss race I've had an interest in for years. All eyes watch Quicksand tow 'em around the first turn, and wonder how long she'll last. Straightens out down the back-stretch; she's still leadin' all of 'em. Mud's terrible. One big black hoss goes out after her and chases her awhile, but drops back and slides along with the bunch again. Black hoss? They're all black now, what with the mud our little Quicksand has flung on 'em!

"Look, Perk, look—she's takin' 'em right around that bend over there!" Tommy Tharp is so excited he can hardly keep his shirt on. I suppose he's never had any hoss in front as long as Quicksand is. "We'll win sure, Perk!"

And it looks that way, all around the long turn. Quicksand's white face is bobbin' up and down, still in front. I'm excited, myself. I forget all about Tom J. Morgan's Bible quotation, or whatever it was. Maybe we can get down in front— But no, they show up where the bend heads down into the stretch, and little Quicksand's got company now!

Hoss comes up outside her, and gallops right along with her. And here comes another one, on the inside. "It's a hoss race, Perk," yells Tommy. "But we'll show 'em!" Three together; but no, only two, now. They both pass our little white-face, sort o' seem to swallow her up. She disappears, but they come on. And then some more, all around her at the last eighth post. We can't even see Quicksand, for hosses and mud!

"Omigosh, Perk," groans little Tommy. "We're sunk. I'm sorry, Perk! Cost you all o' that dough, too! But look, Perk, I'll pay you back, honest—"

"Oh, shut up, Tommy," I said. "Look for the mare, will you? Where is she?"

GONE! Swallowed up, like real quicksand swallows up a hoss or a cow. Here they come lollopin' in the slop, rollin' and weavin', but somehow comin' on down to the finish. And when they get right down by us, they're strung out some, and we can see better. But the numbers are covered with mud, and the horses are all black, and the boys and their silk shirts are all the same color, and—well, we can't tell! I sneak a look at the front hoss to see if it might possibly be Quicksand, but it's not. Run my eye back over the bunch—

"I found her, Perk—look," says Tommy. "But gosh, Perk! Oh, heck, she's plumb last!" And the poor little guy is whipped; about to cry, mebbe.

"Well, she finished, anyhow," I said, hangin' on to my hunch. "They didn't tromp her down into the ground. Mud didn't swallow her, after all." She's slippin' and slidin' along, pitiful. Can't run at all, in that muck. But then, I never yet seen a white-faced hoss with enough bottom to hang onto a lead when

other hosses went up to grab that lead. They fade, that's all. No bottom. Quicksand, yeah!

"Might as well've sunk in the mud," Tommy groans, "along with your money! Perk, I'm sorry. But I'll make good; you won't lose—"

"Oh, shut up!" I said. "Watch the numbers go up!"

"Why? Yuh think mebbe she's fouled, and we win anyhow?" asks Tommy, hopeful.

"I don't know, but you can't tell about a Hard Luck Handicap," I said. "Look, there they go!" And just then there's a big yell from the crowd, with a lot of hootin' and yellin' and booin'. But most everybody in the crowd is laughin' about thirteen losers tryin' to win a race. And nobody cares. "Look at them numbers, Tommy!"

Another yell goes up from the crowd, and I grab my program with one hand and hang onto the fence with the other. Because right beside the old number 1, there's a dirty Number 13. And 13 is our white-faced Quicksand's number!

"You see, Tommy," I said, my old heart tryin' to knock out a couple o' ribs. "See? 'And the last shall be first,' and the next to the last shall be second, and so forth, and the swift is not always to the race!" Guess I'm excited, myself—and why not, even if I did have a hunch! I'll write a receipt for old Tom J. Morgan; I'll tell that crooked Lum Bagley where to get off! And if I don't give Maude the laugh! "Quicksand can't lose for winnin'," I said.

"I don't understand," says Tommy. And then he tumbles, awkward. Can't believe it, even if this *is* the Hard Luck Handicap. Finally he sort o' straightens up and gets dignified. "Well," he says, "if anybody thinks I'll take first money for runnin' last in *that* bunch of dogs, they're crazy!"

"SHUT up," I said, grabbin' his arm. "We're goin' out there in the winner's circle with our mare!" And I drag him out on the track, right in the mud up to our ankles. And he flags down the boy bringing Quicksand back. He's about to slide off.

"Gee, Mr. Tharp, we'd 'a' win, except she lost a shoe—mebbe two shoes—right up there at the head of the stretch!" That's the jock, with the old jock alibi.

"Stay up there, kid," I said. And I grab the bridle to wheel Quicksand into the winner's circle. Right then you should have heard the yell that this big crowd sets up, with hollerin' and laughin' and razzin' to a fare-you-well. But we should worry, long as we win. Win two thousand four hunderd dollars and get our hunderd-dollar entry-fee back!

"Yeah, she loses a shoe or two," mutters Tommy, givin' me a dirty look. I only wink at him. "But this is not fair to the betters," he says. "All o' the people with win tickets, and—"

"It's their Hard Luck Handicap too," I said. "Fair for one as another! All them losers are entitled to win, once!"

What? Oh, that hunderd-dollar ticket I bought? Yeah, exactly $1,413.26, that's all!

BUT not exactly, either. Because that night, down at the hotel, we bump into old Lum Bagley, still hidin' out as Orlando Paloni, an Italian ex-Count or something. He wants to laugh, but it hurts too much, see?

"There's Paloni," whispers Tommy. We're in the lobby, stallin' around. So I walk right up to him, with Tommy draggin' along behind me.

"Hello, Lum," I said. "How're all the Bagleys by this time—sick?"

"*Sh!* Not so loud, Perk," he says, lookin' around to see if anybody heard me.

"Whaddayuh mean, 'Lum', anyhow?" asks Tommy, surprised. Then— "Omigosh," he groans. "And I never knew him!"

"Listen, Perk, be a sport," says Lum. "How much d'yuh want for my mare?"

"Half the price you're gonna sell her for," I said, prompt as pepper.

"Oh, be reasonable, come on," he says. "I can't do that, but I need a break. You had yours! Gimme a chance, Perk—I'm flat."

"And crooked," I said. "Well, Mr. Paloni, gimme back my note for four hunderd and my one hunderd cash, and she's yours," I said. "I don't like her. No bottom—Quicksand, see? If you hadn't tried to trim Tommy when I wasn't around, I'd *give* her to yuh. But, well—the note plus the hunderd!"

He wants to beat me down, but I'm tough. I get my note and tear it up. Also the hunderd. And I should worry how high he sells her to a rich Louisville guy who wants her for a saddle-mare, show purposes. She'll win, anywhere, on looks. On foot? Never!

So I split with Tommy, and I'm goin' on home to laugh at Maude.

# The

*WEIRD and impressive indeed is this story of strange adventure in the interior of Papua by the distinguished author of "The Eerie Island," "The Flaming Sword" and other noted stories.*

*By*

## BEATRICE GRIMSHAW

**Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson**

I DON'T mind talking to you (he said)—you've been in the big bush yourself, and you know.

It's those new chums I can't stand, the fellows out from Home that knows it all before they ever set foot on a coral beach. They know everything, and they believe nothing; if you tell them anything that couldn't have happened at four o'clock in the afternoon in the Strand, London, they think right off you're "having the loan of them."

It was one of that kind that went up the Kikiramu with me the year after the war; he couldn't learn anything, he thought—but the Kikiramu learned him.

His name was Harlow, a nice fellow enough, if he hadn't been so sure and certain that human knowledge began and ended with what they stuff down their throats in lectures. Cambridge, he was—science of some sort; one of the lost chicks of them exploring expeditions that come out every year in the dry, to find what no one's ever found before. And maybe some of them does find it, those who get fever and die; but the rest of 'em never finds much beyond the last plantation in the hills, where they can get a drink.

And they spend their money, and go home, them who can; but the rest stops, and sometimes it's bad for them. I've known one to sit down in an armchair in broad daylight in front of a hotel and blow his brains out with a revolver that was bought but not paid for at the store.

Harlow hadn't got to that yet; he had a bit left, and he was all on to gamble and make it more, like they do in the books about Monty Carlo. I'd been south with a good shammy *(to Sydney with a lot of gold)*, and I was back, broke. Where there's gold in New Normandy—and it isn't an island proper, but a country of itself, so gold takes finding—I'll find it. I've lived that way, cleaning up a thousand or so a year, but spent it as quick as it came, ever since the Second Jubilee.

Well, we got together, and went up the Kikiramu, mates. You know how it is when you're mates with a man; you've got to find the best in him, and he in you; and you've got to stick, no matter what happens. I could tell you things—but you've lived in the bush yourself: you know. . . .

After we'd had a week together on the river, crawling up it in a canoe, and

# Forest of Lost Men

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *Names, dates and to some extent circumstances have been altered; but the Forest of Lost Men exists.*

**He danced before them and sang to show it was peace, and they led him to the men's house, which was full of all manner of queer things, dried heads among them.**

camping among the alligators in the mud, and being bit by sand-flies and mosquitoes about all the time, though sometimes worse, I got to like Harlow quite a bit, because all the time I was learning him, and it's natural.

I learned him to "crack hardy" when it rained on us twelve inches in six hours, and the flour got melted, and the bed-sacks, so that you could have wrung a horse's ration of water out of them. And when we walked so far the first day we landed that we ached too much to sleep, but by four o'clock we had to be up and on, for a worse day! Things like that. It done him so much good, you wouldn't believe.

But for all I was making him over, I couldn't get him to change his mind about the things and people in the bush, which he knew nothing of any more than a monkey knows about mathematics. Of course, he let on he knew everything.

We got to the field, which was at the bottom of a river gorge thousands of feet deep, and I staked claims for both, and we set our boys to work getting down to the wash. There was unknown tribes about us in the bush, which was a hundred or two feet high, and as thick as hairs on a new hairbrush. I didn't take any notice of them, and they took none of us, except sometimes when they came and pegged spears among us, themselves hid so that you couldn't see 'em. I'd fire a shot at random, and let it go. But Harlow, he was keen as terriers after rats, about those useless heathen. Keener than he was after the gold. Most of the work was done by me, in fact; as soon as he knew (for I was fool enough to tell him) that the Lakalakas was unknown to whites, you couldn't hold him.

"Let them alone, and they'll let you alone," I told him, one night when we were sitting together as far away from the boys' camp-fires as we could get, fighting mosquitoes over a little smoke of our own. "If once you get them snake-headed," I told him, "they'll show their spite—catch a boy and roast him alive on a stick, maybe. They're used to being shot at," I told him, "but don't you go trying to find any of their vil-

lages, not if you value your life, and want to keep your signed-on labor."

He said, sitting there over the smoke, with his face dirty, but white under the dirt, and his eyes as big and blue as a girl's full of that sort of ginger that one likes to see: "The name of science," says he, "is sacred," says he. "If I don't come to the claim tomorrow," he says, "you'll know I've gone to look."

He didn't come. That was the best day we'd had so far; it was Saturday, and I cleaned up, and it ran about a hundred ounces for the week; so, if you understand, I was pretty busy, and pretty well pleased, and hadn't much thought left for young Harlow. I reckoned he'd be all right.

When he came back, he dropped like a pig when you club it, right in the doorway of the tent. "I'm done," he said. "But oh, Tim Monahan," says he, "I'm so happy I could die this minute!"

Then he told me what he'd seen. He had that sort of beginner's luck makes a man lift gold out of a creek first time he tries, and maybe never again. He'd found what no one else had found,—a village of the Lakalakas—and they hadn't killed him for doing it. They were more or less pigmy, he told me, not the size of a boy of twelve, but bunches of muscle, and all naked except for boar-tusks and shells; and they had spears all carved and painted, like the ones they use to peg at us in the dark. He danced before them and sang, to show it was peace, and they were that pleased they took him by the hand, and led him to the men's house, which was full of all manner of queer things—heads and dried guts, among them. And it was too dark for photos, but he said, when he went away, "I'll come back," and made signs about returning.

"What do you think of it?" says he.

"I don't think," says I. "I've enough to do looking after two teams of boys and two men's claims, without taking time off to think."

"I'm sorry," says he, all grieved. "I didn't—I'm afraid I've not been exactly playing the game; but after I've got my photos," says he, "it'll be all right." And he went to sleep.

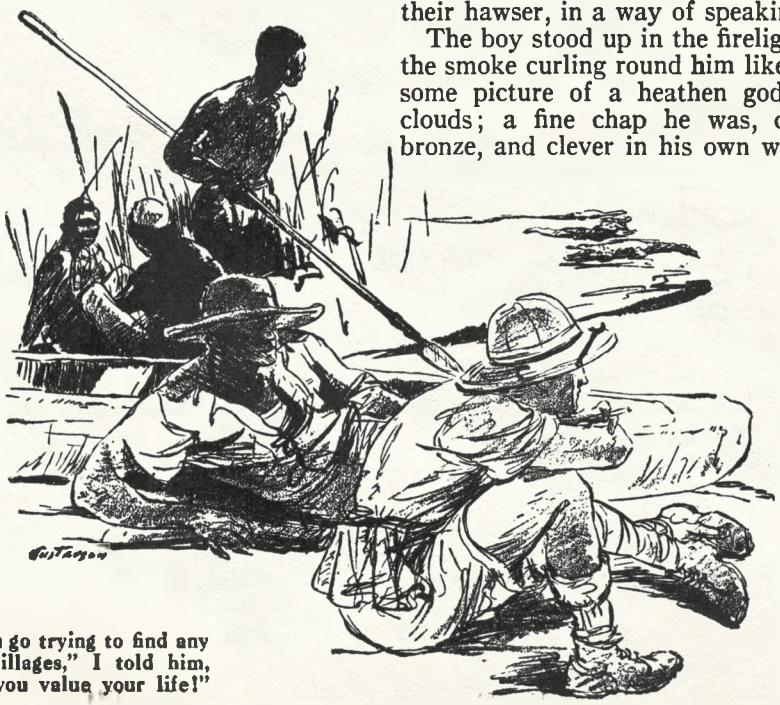
I called up my head boy by and by, a wicked young savage that I liked quite a bit, and he knew it, and would tell me things.

"What do you reckon they let him go for?" I said. "I remember a mate of mine when the Wakaka field broke out, that was taken and eat alive for less—eat by bits, cutting off what they wanted. And I went through a village for it, afterward. . . . What do you reckon?"

The boy said, straight away: "They think him mad."

"Oh!" says I. I understand. Savages won't kill a madman. But they will do queer things to him, if he gets across their hawser, in a way of speaking.

The boy stood up in the firelight, with the smoke curling round him like he was some picture of a heathen god in the clouds; a fine chap he was, clean as bronze, and clever in his own way; and



"Don't you go trying to find any of their villages," I told him, "—not if you value your life!"

it came to me then, how little we knew about any of them, after all.

"The Lakalakas," he said, "are very great sorcerers."

I didn't laugh, at that; nor you wouldn't. You know. . . .

"Well," said I, passing him out a fig of tobacco, to keep him going, "what sort do they do?"

He said something then that I can't translate; it was a native word meaning something like enchantment, putting spells on you; but, if you get me, it had to do with your surroundings too, and the way they was related to you.

"Oh," says I at once, "you mean the cursed forest."

He didn't say any more; he bit the fig of tobacco, and moved away, and I knew he meant: "You've got enough for your money." So I shut up.

But I thought a bit that night in spite of what I'd said about thinking; and in the morning I said to my mate: "You've got a nice little locket hanging on your watch-chain."

"If I have," said he, "whose business is—"

"I'm not asking what's in it," I said. "I lay she's a bonzer little lassie, anyhow. I reckon you'd better think about her, and think twice, before you set out after them Lakalaka men again. You got away once," says I, "and I reckon they won't kill you; but—"

"You mind your mining," he says, "and I'll attend to my science."

Well, I don't believe in interfering with people's fancies, even with the best intentions; many a man has spoiled a nice profile doing it. So I said no more. But I noticed him opening up the locket, later on that night, and looking hard at what was inside. If I happened to be walking behind him just at that moment, it was no fault of mine; and if I had a girl with that kind of hair that shows gold even in a photo, and eyes like hers, I wouldn't mind anybody taking a look. . . . She was handsome enough, too—I don't mean Harlow's lass. But she couldn't do with the mining; women are that way. And gold-mining, you never know how the years go. . . . I pay a bloke in Sydney to keep a few flowers on her grave, but most like he drinks the money. . . .

Well, I'm sorry; this isn't my yarn. I meant to say, that Harlow was as near as nothing to taking my advice, and keeping off of the Lakalakas. But he didn't. And next day he went out, and didn't come back.

When he'd been away a day and a night, I started after him. I took two or three carriers with me, loaded no more than thirty pounds apiece, because I thought there was maybe going to be work. One of them was the boy I'd been talking to; Hanua was his name.

"If you see one of the Lakalaka dogs," says I, "sing out." For though you never see one of the tribe unless they wanted, the dogs gave them away sometimes, coming and going for a drink, or looking at you out of the bush; small black dogs they were, that never made a noise, and didn't look natural nor real. Like the ghosts of dogs that have died and gone to hell, I used to think.

To walk through that country, it's like an ant going up and down the teeth of a comb. We climbed till the sweat ran off us like rain off a roof, and we went down sliding, and climbed again; and so it went on all morning till about one o'clock, when I called a halt, and got out the food.

WHILE we were eating our tin and biscuit, Hanua, sitting near me, caught me by the arm and pointed. The small wicked face of a black dog was looking out of the bush, just where you couldn't have taken two steps without cutting your way. I think it smelled the tinned meat, but it would come no nearer, not even when I threw a bit at it. It just lifted its lips and cursed us, like, and then it wasn't there.

But now I knew the Lakalakas was following us.

So did the carriers; and before I had time to do anything but pull my revolver out of my belt, not even time to threaten them with it, they had dropped their loads and was away. You can't follow a naked native into the bush. In two minutes, with hardly as much noise as would wake a sleeping cat, they had got down the side of the nearest gully, and was running along the stones at the bottom; and that was all I ever saw of them again. Or anyone else .... What? I don't know, and I don't want to think; some of them was decent boys enough.

Hanua, he finished chewing the wad of meat and biscuit he had in his mouth, and then he says: "You-me go look, suppose you die, me die." And he wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, and stood up. And I clapped him on the shoulder, and I says: "Suppose no die, you live with me."

It was up and down again after that, up and down fit to break the heart of a goat or any army mule, only neither one of them could have gone where we were going. And hot. And there was snakes; I trod on a tiger snake, and he just missed me; and one of them pythons swung out of a tree, yards of him, at Hanua, but Hanua slashed his head off with his clearing-knife, and never looked behind. We didn't have any time to spare; we were making for the village in the hills, and wanted to get there before dark, always provided the Lakalakas didn't spear us first.

Why they did not, considering they must have been following all the time, was what I didn't understand, and didn't much like. We saw no more of them, nor their dogs. And when we come, after an hour or more, on a bit of flat ground, the relief was that wonderful that I could have laid down and slept, just where I was.

IT was thick with forest, bigger and blacker than any I had seen before. I couldn't remember the like of the trees, not exactly; they had red papery trunks, that bled like arms and legs when you hit them; and their leaves, a good way up, were long and thin like worms. A kind of fir-tree, maybe, but I didn't know it. It smelled bad in there, the sort of smell there is in a butcher's shop on a hot day; but there was nothing to account for it—it seemed just to be in the air. The bush ropes that tangled everything together, and that you had to cut through, same as in other places, wasn't like common bush ropes, not plain brown and green; but they was spotted red, and dirtied up with white, as if some one'd been spilling blood and brains on them. . . . What? Oh, yes, you do see that sort of thing in the bush, but not that much of it.

I stood on the edge of it all looking in, and I didn't like the look of it, but it was on the line I'd marked out with the compass, and we couldn't afford to waste time. So in we went, and Hanua, he pulled a long breath or two through his teeth, and said nothing, but I knew what he thought.

"Come on, old son," I says, clapping his shoulder. "It can't take us ten minutes to go through, judging by the lie of the hills and the river, and I don't hold with that heathen rubbish, anyhow." For you see, there was chat about that place, though no other white man had ever seen it; and they said that it was cursed, in a way, and that when you got in, you couldn't get out again.

YOU may believe me or you may not, but I've looked up the place since, and there isn't room for it, anywhere, unless in a spot that's no more than half a mile across. Judging, that is, by the lie of the river, which we did map out careful, and did know—rivers with gold in them gets mapped out soon and good. I tell you, there's no room for it—but all the same, the boy and I walked all afternoon, and we didn't get across it. The compass was no good; I reckoned there must be an outcrop of ironstone somewhere about, though I can't say I seen it. We blazed the way as we went, and we didn't come back on any of our blazes.

When it came near dark, we undid the bit of tarpaulin that we carried instead of a tent, and we didn't light any fire, because of the Lakalakas. And Hanua and me, we sat down beside one another, because I reckoned he was a man, for all he was a naked savage, and we talked a bit, quiet, in his own native talk.

He says: "This is the Forest of Lost Men."

I says: "I've heard of it, but I don't understand. What is it?"

He says: "The sorcerers of the Lakalakas are greater than any other sorcerers, and they have put spells, big spells, on this place, and it goes for miles and

miles. And it isn't really there, more than a little bit of it," he says; "but once you get into it, you go on walking and walking, and you walk till maybe you die."

"*Koi-koi!*" says I, which is what you say in the Islands, when you mean damn' nonsense.

"No *koi-koi*," he says, and sits with his head on his hand.

We never slept; it wasn't a place to sleep in. There was queer noises, like children crying, but there weren't no children there. You weren't quite sure if you was there yourself; but all the same you knew, worse luck, that you was nowhere else. When the light came, late, through all those trees, we up and ate a bit. And we walked. And we walked. Like they used to do in Flanders, when the roads was a thousand miles long before a halt. And we walked.

And that night we slept a little, but we were hungry, because the food was near gone. And next day we walked. And we walked. And there was almost nothing left to eat, and no water except what we licked off the leaves of the trees in the early morning. And all the time it was the dark trees with the wormy leaves, and the bush ropes spotted dirty white and red. There was no footmarks, nor anything of that kind; but we found a bit of necktie stuck on a thorn, and it was blue with stripes, the color of Harlow's school tie, which he thought a lot of. So we knew we were on the right track, if that was any good to anyone, we being all in the same box now.

End of the next day, Hanua says: "They been following us somewhere outside this place," he says; "and when we drop, they'll come in. The sorcerers will come and take us away," he says, "and even the dogs will be full tonight," he says.

All of a sudden I gave a whoop. "The dogs!" I says. You see, I'd got an idea. I was a cattle-hand once in the Northern Territory, and it learns you to be quick. Or dead.

"I reckon," I says, talking to myself for a bit, "that you can't enchant a dog. If there's such a thing as enchantment. Because," I says to myself, "you must have a soul for them games, and a dog he has no soul."

WE'D kept one little bit of meat for the last, and I took it, and used the last of the matches to make fire with. And I hung the meat before the fire on a scrap of bark fiber, and I cut myself a length of small bush rope, tough as a whip. And I waited.

"They've been following us," Hanua says. . . . "Even the dogs will be full tonight!"

It was near half an hour before the thing I was waiting for, happened. Just as the light was beginning to go, at the time those dogs come out to get a drink in the rivers, and hunt food in the bush,—because their masters they don't feed them, except when there's plenty of roast enemy about,—just then, I saw a small black wicked face looking out of the bush, and a small black snout working up and down, at the smell of the cooking meat.

Hanua, he didn't move no more than one of the trees, and I stayed quiet. The dog put out its head, and half its body, and then it stopped. But that was enough for me; I had the loop of the bush creeper around its body, from twenty feet away, before you could wink, —and it kicking like a roped bullock, more than you'd think that anything ten times its size could have done.

We got the tarpaulin over it in a minute, and it bit right through it like it was an alligator, and near took a piece out of me. It did get a bite at Hanua, before we had the rope knotted safe around its neck, and let it go.

We kept hold of that rope the way a drowning man keeps hold of the life-line they throw him from the beach. And we followed the dog, where it went. And in ten minutes—you may call me a liar if you like, because it don't make any difference to me—we were out of the wood, and it was only a black patch of trees behind us, looking not much bigger than you could throw a stone across.

We cut the line, and let the little devil of a dog go; and Hanua, he burned his arm with a firestick, to take the poison out. And we got back to the camp, I don't just know how, for it came on dark in no time at all, and the compass was still cronk—is to this day.

Afterwards we had all the men on the field out looking, and maybe we found the wood that was cursed, and maybe we didn't; there was nothing to tell us. If we did, it wasn't working, for nobody got lost. But I reckon we never came across it at all.

We didn't find Harlow, either. Only the other half of his necktie, floating down the river, miles away. . . .

What? Oh, no, they don't kill lunatics; and they didn't kill him. He turned up again, like his necktie. It was in Sydney, a year after, and no one knows to this day what he saw, or how he got down to the coast again. The yarn he pitched—and he quite believed it—was that he had looked for the Lakalaka villages, didn't find any, never saw the tribes at all, and had an attack of fever in the bush that took away his memory.

I don't know about fever. Something did; that's sure. The less you know about those matters, the better; I'd sell a lot of what I remember, for half of nothing with the tail cut off.

I sent his share of the gold we won. It was after that that he got married, to the girl in the locket. . . . Me? No. The bush has got me, and you know what that is.

**Beatrice Grimshaw has written for you a splendid series called "New Barbary Nights"—stories of the wild new Papuan gold-diggings, which can only be reached by airplane over dangerous jungle. The first of these, "The Valley of Golden Silence," will appear in an early issue.**

# Murder

***THE Chief of Police himself is the victim in this fascinating mystery story of a "protected" city—by the gifted author of "Death for Cinderella."***

CHIEF OF POLICE HANWOOD was murdered in his own office, in full view of the police-department heads and the reporters assembled to hear him declare war on the forces of crime. None knew who killed him.

This is how it happened:

The city which we will call Blankville, because that is not its name, had been singularly free of the wave of crime that had been sweeping the rest of the country. Chief Hanwood announced his determination to keep it that way, and told Deputy Chief Curceo to call a meeting of every man in the department above the rank of sergeant to hear him outline his campaign—and to be sure the reporters were present. He called the meeting for a Saturday afternoon, so the story would "break" simultaneously in the Sunday morning newspapers.

It was a bleak, drizzly, shivery day in late autumn. The Chief's office was in the corner suite on the second floor of a grimy, smoke-blackened stone building. The odor of disinfectant seeped in from the adjoining city jail.

"His Honor the Mayor is determined that we shall keep the name of our fair city unsullied by the foul hand of organized crime," declared Chief Hanwood, reading from a statement prepared for him by the Mayor's secretary. He had arisen from his swivel-chair between the roll-top desk and the walnut table. The gray light from the window at his left softened the lines seaming his cheeks.

Deputy Chief Curceo cupped his hand and whispered to Feeney, the red-headed *Alarm* reporter:

"Listen, John—that lousy riveting-machine on the new building over on Walnut Street makes such a racket you can't hear the Old Man speak. I better close that back window, see?"

"So what?" Feeney shrugged and peeled the transparent wrapper from a

# *from Afar*

## *By* FORBES PARKHILL

Illustrated by Austin Briggs

cigar. "So I can strain my ears listening to a hand-out speech?"

The deputy chief tiptoed to the rear window and lowered the sash and raised the green window-shade.

"And so," Chief Hanwood was saying, "I call upon every loyal member of this department to do his du—"

He broke off abruptly, a puzzled look twisting his gray brows. He slapped suddenly at the breast of his brass-buttoned uniform coat, as if a wasp had stung him.

Then he jerked his hand away, as if it too had been stung. There was a tiny black spot on the back of his hand that, from a distance, looked like a wasp, though it wasn't. Blood was leaking from the palm of his hand. He stared at it, mystified.

There was a little tinkle of breaking glass as a three-cornered chunk dropped from the windowpane at his left. The Chief reached behind him gropingly for the swivel-chair. His mouth opened, but he didn't say anything. He sat down heavily.

He failed to strike the swivel-chair squarely. It rolled backward from beneath him, and overturned. He dropped heavily to the floor on his side. One leg kicked out spasmodically, and struck the iron cuspidor under the table. He sighed once, and died. . . .

For an instant the assemblage was stunned into silence. Feeney, of the *Alarm,* was the first to snap out of it. He shoved the lieutenant in charge of the traffic squad out of his way, and lunged for the phone on the Chief's table.

And then pandemonium broke loose.

"The Old Man's had a stroke!" shrieked a precinct captain.

"Stroke? He's been murdered!" rasped Barlow of the homicide squad. "Don't you see them bullet-holes in the windowpane?"

Deputy Chief Curceo stepped forward briskly—calm, efficient and unflustered. Police-department heads, these were, and yet not immune to panic in the face of such an amazing and unexpected murder—their own Chief shot down before their eyes! Some darted forward toward the fallen man. Others scrambled to places of safety, out of the line of fire from the windows. As Feeney snatched up the Chief's phone, the other police reporters turned and broke for the anteroom to flash the news to their respective newspapers. The red-headed reporter dialed his number with feverish haste.

Deputy Chief Curceo barked: "Unger! Get the police surgeon—quick!" He dropped to one knee by Hanwood's body. "Dead!" he announced. "Listen—the rest of you get back from those windows, so nobody else gets croaked!"

FEENEY got his connection. With the unlighted cigar in one corner of his mouth, he snapped:

"Clear the decks for an extra, Jim! Biggest local yarn in years—Chief Hanwood mysteriously murdered in presence of department heads as he declares war on crime! . . . What? No, I'm sober! Quit beefing and grab this! Happened not forty seconds ago. Sure—I saw with my own eyes! . . . You sap, I'm phoning from the Chief's own desk—I can touch his body with my foot!

"What? . . . Grab an earful of this, you dope! Hanwood shot three times through heart as he addresses depart-

ment heads. By mystery gunman lurking outside building. Deputy Chief Curceo takes charge of investigation! Expects arrest any minute! . . . Huh? No, he didn't say so, but they always do!

"He's kneeling by the body. He's ordering others away from windows. He's announcing that Hanwood's dead. He's sighting through bullet-holes in window-pane. . . . Why? To find out where the bullets came from, bright boy! . . . He's saying that they seemed to have come from the Garwood Building, a block away on Graves Street! He's yelling out for everyone to hop out and surround building. He's going to call all radio cars—and he wants this phone to flash the dispatchers! . . . He's kicking me off the wire! Shoot it, kid! G'-by!"

DEPUTY CHIEF CURCEO jerked the instrument from Feeney's hand.

"Gimme the dispatcher—quick!" he barked. "—Dispatcher? . . . Curceo. Chief's just been murdered by gunman in Garwood Building. Concentrate all patrol cars in metropolitan district at Garwood Building—have 'em watch for man with rifle, or other suspicious characters, see? Have outlying cars watch all suspicious cars leaving city. Got it? . . . Check!"

He slammed down the receiver and yelled:

"Barlow? Where's Barlow of the hommy squad? . . . Barlow, you're in charge of the search! Listen, Barlow—go through that building with a fine-toothed comb! Hold everybody that hasn't a perfect 'out,' see? If the killer tries to make a break, and you're sure it's the killer, shoot first and ask questions afterward! . . . I'm going to get the dashety-blanked so-and-so that killed the Chief, if it's the last thing I ever do!"

As Barlow jammed on his hat and lumbered out the door, he almost collided with the police surgeon, coming on the run. Behind the Doctor came two excited clerks from the Bertillon department, a desk-man from the auto theft division, a coatless driver from the ambulance-room, an assistant jailer, Chief Hanwood's chauffeur, and a matron from the women's quarters of the city jail.

Already a police siren was shrieking in the street outside like a tortured banshee. Deputy Chief Curceo jerked a thumb at the body of Hanwood.

"Dead, aint he, Doc?"

The police surgeon knelt and rolled the body onto its back. He thumbed back one of the half-closed eyelids, and grasped Hanwood's wrist lightly between thumb and forefinger of his other hand.

"He's dead," he announced without looking up. He began unbuttoning Hanwood's uniform blouse.

"Three bullet-wounds within a small area below and to left of xiphisternum," he muttered professionally. "Lesion—"

"Talk sense!" snapped Curceo.

"Chief was shot three times through the heart, and one bullet pierced his hand. Probably never knew what hit him."

Feeney dashed across the office to the rear window. He could see a stream of uniformed officers speeding across the wet and glistening street, while traffic came to a standstill.

A shrieking radio-patrol car skidded around a corner, slithered across in front of a street-car, crumpled the fender of a ponderous limousine, and slid into the curb. A patrolman, gun in hand, leaped from the car before it came to a stop, and headed for the entrance to the building. The driver spilled out an instant later, and followed him.

All this Feeney could see from his window. He could see the reporters for the other sheets streaming in the wake of the officers. He wanted to be with them, nearer the scene of action. But reason told him to stay where he was, where he could see everything that happened, and where he had a telephone at his elbow.

HE darted back and snatched the phone from the dead Chief's table.

"Okay, Chief?" he asked of Curceo. The deputy chief grunted as he himself dashed to the window. Feeney picked up the phone and started back to the window. The wire wasn't quite long enough to reach. But, by holding the instrument at arm's length, he could snatch a glimpse of the scene of action, and then relay it in.

"Quick, Sadie—the rewrite hound!" he snapped when he was connected with the *Alarm* switchboard. "Hi, you sap! Tie into this! Gunman slayer of Chief Hanwood believed trapped in office-building, due to quick action and presence of mind of Deputy Chief Curceo! Battle between crook and coppers impends! Wait'll I grab another look.

"Police cordon tightens! . . . Huh? Motive? Campaign of terror launched

There was a little tinkle of breaking glass—and Chief Hanwood dropped heavily to the floor.

by forces of underworld. Wait a sec'—Chief wants to tell me something. . . . Here y'are, fathead! Deputy Chief of Police Curceo scoffs at 'underworld campaign of terror' theory—and knocks swell angle of yarn cockeyed! Expresses belief murder was perpetrated for revenge by individual criminal who had been sent up through efforts of Chief Hanwood. . . . Yeah, you can quote him!

"Huh? . . . Sure, I can see what's happening! Radio-patrol cars closing in—coppers swarming to office-building from headquarters building. . . . No, no shooting yet! Detective Barlow of homicide squad posting men at every entrance—traffic demoralized in streets outside—coppers halting everybody coming out of building. . . . Nope, no pinches! D'you think I'd hold out a collar on you, you dumbskull?

"Barlow sending in squads to search building, floor by floor! Three rifle-bullets pierced Hanwood's heart. Death instantaneous, police surgeon says. . . . 'Wait a minute?' Whatsamatter—writer's cramp? . . . Three bullet-holes in windowpane, so close together your hand could cover 'em all. Little triangle of glass dropped out from between 'em.

"And there's an auto-load of *Trib* reporters and a cameraman piling out of a car! . . . Ask Eddie if he thinks I can phone stories to dumb rewrite men from three places at once and take pictures, too. Does he expect me to cover this against a dozen men on every opposition sheet? . . . Here comes the *Alarm* gang, at last! . . . Tear into that yarn now, you chiseler, and see if you can't put a little punch into it!"

He slammed down the receiver, turned, dashed through the anteroom, into the gloomy hall, down the steps and into the drizzly street. Now he had a crew of reporters from the *Alarm* to help him, and two photographers, and he felt he was on top of the world. Hadn't he beaten the other rags to the flash on the biggest story of years, by forty seconds?

He barked orders at the *Alarm* men as they piled out of the car. One photographer he sent to the Chief's office, to shoot the scenes of the scene of the murder—*"X Marks Spot"* stuff. One veteran news-hound was directed to "cover the station." With the rest, Feeney hurried toward the Garwood Building! He thrilled with elation as he heard the newsboys yelling *"Alarm—extra!"*

"I'm phoning from the Chief's own desk —I can touch his body with my foot!"

## CHAPTER II

SNAPPER adjusted the bandages that swathed the lower part of his face, drew forth a cigarette, and snapped a match alight with his thumbnail. He was in an unfurnished office on the sixth floor of the Doctors' Building, devoted to the offices of physicians and dentists.

Snapper's eyes were almost colorless. His face was shrunken, pasty and seamy; he was almost bald, but the bandages made it difficult to get a good look at his features. He was small, wiry and quick of movement, but not in the least nervous.

He glanced at his wrist-watch, and shrugged impatiently. He placed his rifle across the empty packing-case, and strolled to the open window. He peered through the drizzle of rain, past the Garwood Building, to the grimy old granite police headquarters three hundred and fifty yards away.

Snapper was a crack marksman. A range of three hundred and fifty yards meant nothing to him, even in a misty drizzle. Hadn't he planted eight of those nasty little copper-jacketed bullets in a ten-inch circle at five hundred yards, without a telescopic sight?

He made a clucking noise with his tongue. It was just about time for the signal!

Alongside the Doctors' Building a towering new structure was being erected. The sound of the compressed-air riveting-hammers sounded very much like the bursts from a machine-gun. There was no silencer on Snapper's high-velocity rifle. Those riveting-machines made a silencer unnecessary.

Snapper retired from the window and picked up the rifle. It was a weapon of .250 caliber, shooting a copper-jacketed bullet with a velocity of three thousand feet a second. He steadied it on the top of the empty packing-case, well back from the window.

"There's the signal!" he remarked aloud suddenly. He drew a bead on the blue-uniformed figure visible in the window of the office of chief of police. He was too far away to recognize the figure through the drizzle. But the prearranged signal told him it was Chief Hanwood, and that the time had come for him to earn his spot money.

He waited an instant, until the next burst of the riveting-hammer. Then he squeezed the trigger, ejected the shell, squeezed again, waited for the next burst of the riveting-hammer, and fired his third shot.

*"Tsk, tsk, tsk!* Old hand's just as steady as it ever was!" he told himself with a faint smile. He picked up his cigarette from the edge of the packing-case, took a drag, and laid it down again. With his handkerchief he wiped the weapon free of fingerprints. Holding it in the kerchief, he removed the previously loosened strip on the inside of the window-frame and stood the gun inside, in the space where the sash-weight ordinarily hung suspended. He replaced the strip, and lowered and locked the window.

He pocketed the three bottle-necked shells, slipped into a black raincoat, drew a snap-brim hat over his bandaged head, and stepped into the corridor, his cigarette between his thin lips.

He walked down one flight of stairs, and then took the first descending elevator. It carried seven or eight passengers and its operator, but none gave the bandaged man a second glance.

He emerged from the building at a brisk walk, turning up the collar of his raincoat against the drizzle. He walked to the corner of Walnut Street and turned into Graves, toward the police station. Behind him, in the distance, he could hear the wail of a police-car siren. He tossed his cigarette into the street

as a traffic light forced him to wait at the next corner.

The wailing of the siren grew louder. A path was opening in the traffic ahead. Snapper smiled faintly as the shrieking patrol car rocketed past him. He saw it skid around the corner, slither across in front of a street-car, crumple the fender of a ponderous limousine, and slide into the curb.

"Things are working out okay," he said to himself. "They got a quicker start than I figured they would!"

He could hear other sirens, converging upon the spot. A stream of uniformed policemen and plain-clothes-men was surging around the corner into Graves Street, a block ahead.

Snapper slowed his pace and reached into his pocket for a cigarette. There was but one left in the packet. He tapped it on the back of his hand and placed it between his lips. He thrust the empty packet back into his pocket and worked the three empty cartridge-shells into it. At the corner he dropped it into a trash-disposal can. A running policeman bumped into him, and almost sideswiped him into the gutter.

A big fellow in a derby was directing the police operations. He barked orders at the various officers as they arrived. He was placing guards at every entrance, every fire-escape. A squad of picked men was being collected at the main entrance of the Garwood.

Snapper edged up to the plain-clothesman.

"What's the matter, Officer?" he asked.

DETECTIVE BARLOW was too busy to be bothered by idle questioners. He gave the bandaged man an irritable glance, just as Snapper was flicking a match alight with his thumbnail. An excited bystander volunteered to answer Snapper's question.

"Somebody kidnaped the Chief of Police!" he exclaimed. "They're holding him in this building!"

"*Tsk, tsk!* This kidnaping business is getting to be something awful!" observed Snapper as he lighted his cigarette. "Somebody ought to do something about it."

A uniformed patrolman waved him on.

"Get back, you guys," he growled. "If they start to shooting, you nosey birds are sure to stop a slug or two. You always do!"

Snapper joined the panicky retreat. But instead of remaining with the excited and curious crowd massing behind the corner of the adjoining building, he drifted on toward the almost-deserted police building.

In the basement of the station he strolled into a washroom. When he emerged, the bandages that had masked his face were missing. He was carrying his raincoat over his arm. To a casual observer, these simple changes made him appear another man.

He pressed the elevator button. But both operators had deserted their cars to rush to upstairs windows to see the expected battle at the Garwood Building. So Snapper, fumbling in his pocket for another cigarette, climbed the stairs to the main floor.

THE only person visible here was the cigar-stand girl, who had left her counter to run to the main entrance of the building. Virtually every officer in the headquarters building had joined the rush to the Garwood Building; the clerical force had stampeded to the upper floors, to get a better view of what was happening.

Snapper made for the cigar-counter. The girl saw him, and sped across the lobby toward him. Her eyes were sparkling, and excitement had rouged her cheeks with an attractive flush.

"Package of Specials, cutie," ordered Snapper, leaning on the counter and pushing back his hat. "What's all the excitement about, anyway?"

"Some gangsters or somebody cut loose on the Chief's office with a machine-gun, or something!" she explained in breathless excitement. "Killed the Chief and two or three others, they say! They've got eight or nine of 'em barricaded in the Garwood Building!"

"*Tsk, tsk!* This gangster business is getting to be something awful!" observed Snapper as he flicked a match alight with his thumbnail. "Somebody ought to do something about it."

He paid for his cigarettes with a twenty, from a roll of two and one-half grand. He was to collect as much more, now that Hanwood was murdered.

"Anything else you wanted?" asked the girl, striving to hide her impatience. She wanted to get back to the door.

"I wanted to report a stolen bicycle for my kid, but it looks like all the best detectives've taken a vacation, account of this shooting. It's a wonder they wouldn't leave somebody around to give a taxpayer a little service."

Feeney, the red-headed *Alarm* reporter, bounded up the steps and swept across the lobby like a whirlwind.

"Hi, Jerry!" he flung at the girl, panting, as he snatched the receiver of the cigar-stand pay-phone from the hook.

SHE gave him a dazzling smile. She no longer was impatient to get to the door.

"That's Feeney, of the *Alarm*—best police reporter in Blankville! He's phoning a flash to his office. Listen, and you'll get the latest dope on the murder!" she murmured to Snapper.

"*Tsk, tsk!* Those newspaper boys sure work fast, don't they, cutie?"

Feeney was rolling his cigar between his lips. The pause while he was waiting for his connection gave him his first opportunity to light it. He snapped his fingers at the girl. "Match!" he ordered.

Instantly Snapper whipped a match from his pocket and flicked it alight with his thumbnail. He held it to Feeney's cigar. The reporter grunted his thanks, and barked into the transmitter of the wall phone:

"Hi! Jim? . . . Feeney. No, no—they haven't got him yet! They've pretty well searched the building without finding a trace of him. *'Slayer Eludes Police'* stuff. Ducked out 'fore they got there, looks like—clean get-away! Swell mystery angle for lead second extra—*'Assassin Vanishes!'* . . . Huh? Is it *my* fault they didn't nab him? . . . Ah, go take a running jump in the lake! You're screwy!"

He slammed the receiver back on the hook.

"Date's off, Jerry!" he flung over his shoulder at the girl as he turned and dashed for the door. "Sorry!"

"That's what happens when you've got a date with a police reporter," the girl explained to Snapper a bit wistfully.

Just then a bulky uniformed figure came bounding down the stairs three steps at a time.

"Where are those elevator operators—dead?" he boomed at nobody in particular. "Where's the Bertillon crew? Has everybody blown his top around here?" He stormed around a corner and disappeared.

"Who's *that* guy?" asked Snapper. "He talks like he was somebody!"

"That's Deputy Chief Curceo," the girl explained. "I guess he'll be the regular Chief, now that Hanwood is dead."

*"Tsk, tsk!"* Snapper shrugged. "Looks like everybody's too busy to give a taxpayer a little service around here—all except you, cutie. I better wait till tomorrow to report that bicycle theft. Guess I'll go over to Sarconi's and shoot some pool."

The girl hurried back to the door, so she didn't see her erstwhile customer follow the deputy chief around the corner and into an office.

"Everything okay?" he asked laconically of the deputy.

Curceo whirled on him angrily, his black brows contorted.

"Listen, Snapper—are you nerts, or something—coming around here *now?*"

"No place safer than a police-station," observed Snapper. "How about the jack?"

Deputy Chief Curceo counted out a roll of two and one-half thousand, and passed it over.

"Listen, Snapper—you turned the trick okay, see? But I'll feel a helluva lot easier when you're out o' town. Better blow the burg, Snapper. See?"

"I was kinda getting to like Blankville," remarked Snapper with a fleeting smile, as he turned to leave the room.

## CHAPTER III

THE city of Blankville was in an uproar as extra after extra poured from the presses of the various newspapers.

At six o'clock Deputy Chief Curceo called a press conference in Hanwood's office.

"Listen," he began, standing in the very spot where the Chief had stood when he was slain, "you newspaper boys can help us a lot. We want, and you want, to nail the gun that knocked Hanwood off. He was the best chief this town ever had, and I guess you boys that have covered police know it better'n anyone. While he was chief, Blankville had the lowest crime percentage of any city in the U. S."

He paused inquiringly as Feeney of the *Alarm* got to his feet, walked over to the bullet-pierced window and drew the shade.

"It made me nervous to think what might happen to you if you could be seen from outside," he explained. "Go ahead, Chief. We got the lowest crime percentage. So what?"

"So this isn't a case of revenge by organized crime, like some of you boys

been playing it in your extras, see? 'Cause there isn't any organized crime in Blankville! When we put the collar on this killer, we'll find it's some crook that Hanwood sent over the hill—some crook that's sworn to get even, see? They all say that when they get out of the Big House they're coming back, and get the cop that pinched 'em, or the Chief, or the prosecuting attorney, or the Judge. But only one in a million ever tries it, and this was the one."

"But why," asked Feeney, licking the broken wrapper of his cigar and pasting it flat again, "didn't he lay for the Chief when he could catch him alone at midnight, after the chauffeur had delivered him at home, and he was unlocking his door? Nobody but a crazy man would shoot him right here in the police-station, in front of half the police force!"

"You may be right, at that, John," admitted Curceo. "We may find that it was done by a crazy man, yet. Crazy like a fox, to get out o' that building so quick, before we could get it surrounded—and carrying a rifle, too!"

"Maybe he wasn't in the Garwood Building at all," suggested Feeney. "Maybe he was across the street, on the roof of that two-story rooming-house. He'd have been close enough there, to use a pistol."

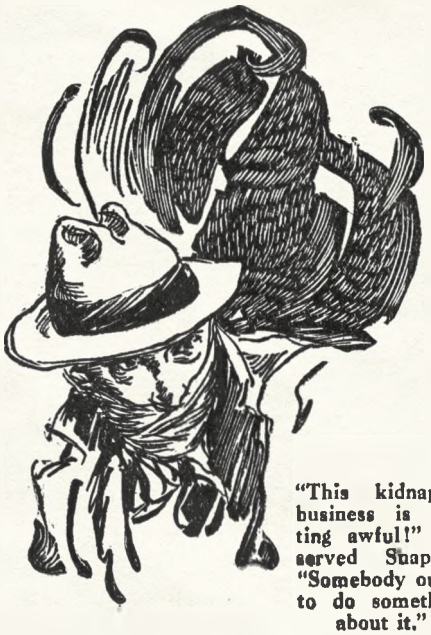
"But he didn't use a pistol, John," explained the deputy chief. "The coroner's physician recovered the shattered fragments of the bullets at the autopsy. They're from a .250-3000 high-power, see? Here—take another look at the bullet-holes in the windowpane. Look at all those millions of little cobwebby cracks around each one! Nothing but a bullet from a high-power can make a hole that looks like that!"

Feeney squinted through the bullet-holes, and shrugged.

"So what?" he asked.

"So nothing," frowned Curceo. "I'm just telling you. I've had the boys out rounding up every ex-con in Blankville. Bull pen's full of 'em. I aim to work 'em over, my own self. If the killer isn't among 'em—well, we'll pick him up by morning, sure—if he hasn't blown the town, see?"

The meeting broke up, and the reporters started for the press room to phone the substance of Curceo's statement to their respective offices. Feeney found Jerry the cigar-stand girl still at her counter, though it was an hour after her regular quitting-time.



"This kidnaping business is getting awful!" observed Snapper. "Somebody ought to do something about it."

"Don't you know the NRA hangs little girls for scabbing on the job overtime?" he demanded. "I got a mind to write to Roosevelt about you, Jerry!"

"I just *had* to stay until they caught the murderer!" the girl exclaimed, her eyes sparkling with excitement. "Oh, John—are they going to catch him?"

"It's a toss-up, honey. If it was an amateur—what I mean, some guy that served a hitch because of Hanwood, and swore to get revenge—he may get away with it. If it was a professional—a member of some organized mobsters—they'll put the collar on him in a few hours."

JERRY'S brows twisted into a puzzled frown.

"I—I don't understand, John. I'd think it would be the other way around! Wouldn't the professional—"

"Not in this burg, Jerry. Blankville is a 'protected' town. That means that organized criminals have been perfectly safe here, so long as they operated somewhere else."

Jerry pursed her lips, frowned again. "I'm afraid I don't quite—"

"It's this way. A gang of bank stick-ups knocks off a bank in a neighboring State and comes back here to hide out. The city officials there identify the crooks, trace 'em here to Blankville, and wire the local police to nab 'em. Our department wires back that they are unable to locate anyone answering that de-

His only chance was to grapple with the murderer and keep his automatic turned aside until help came.

scription, or that they've just blown town, or some other sort of stall. In other words, any sort of organized bunch of criminals is safe from arrest here, so long as they operate somewhere else."

The girl nodded. "But what if they *do* hold up a Blankville bank?"

Feeney chewed his cigar and grinned. "Then it's just too bad! All the other organized crooks will help the police to grab 'em, because they've violated the agreement that protects both criminals and police. The crooks know a good thing when they see it—they never violate the code. The only crime we have is petty stuff, the work of amateurs. So the administration can go to the voters at election-time, and say: 'We've kept our fair city free of the crime wave that's sweeping the rest of the country!'"

Jerry nodded. "That looks like a swell idea, John."

"For Blankville, yeah. But how about the other cities? It encourages crime there. It makes it impossible for those other places to combat crime. Our police are in collusion with criminals, aiding and protecting organized crime! A good share of all the bank-robbery loot in the country is disposed of through fences here in Blankville, who operate undisturbed by the police. Yeah—it's a swell idea, a swell idea!"

"But, John, why doesn't somebody do something about it?"

"Nobody here in Blankville is going to do anything about it, because everybody's satisfied. The town is free of crime. The voters think it's because the police department's so good. The newspapers have no reason to squawk. As for the cities outside Blankville—they can't prove anything. All they know is, that once a fugitive reaches here, he's safe from the law."

"But what of it? I mean, John, if this is a 'protected' town, has that any-

thing to do with the murder of Hanwood?"

"Not that I can see, Jerry. The underworld will do everything it can to help collar the killer, if it was one of their own number who violated the code. If it was just a private grudge killing, they'll figure it's none of their business, and they'll keep hands off. The fact that the killer hasn't been caught yet makes it look as if Curceo's theory is right."

"What are you going to do now, John? Wait until—"

"Wait? Did you ever see me when I was willing to sit and wait for something to happen, sweetie? Me, I step out and *make* it happen! I got an idea, something exclusive, that the other boys muffed. I'll cut you in on it, if you'll promise to keep it under your Mae West millinery."

"Oh, John! I'd be thrilled to death!"

"Well, it's like this. The bullet— Wait a second! There's Barlow, of the homicide squad, coming from Curceo's office looking like a spanked pup! Excuse me, Jerry, I got to see him, and—"

"Well, I like that! exclaimed the girl indignantly. "John Feeney, you're not going to get away from me until you tell me what you promised!"

But the red-headed reporter had deserted her, to dash across the lobby and buttonhole the detective in charge of the homicide squad. Jerry bit her lip, and then sped after him. She was in time to hear Barlow confess:

"I just don't know which way to turn, John! This case has got me stumped!"

"Because you got off to a wrong start, Barlow! You've been going on the assumption that the shot was fired from the Garwood Building. But I lined up the bullet-holes in the windowpane from where Hanwood stood, and there's a lot of question about it. If he stood here, like this, it was a cinch he was shot from the Garwood. But if he was six inches farther over this way, like *this*, the shot must have come from the Doctors' Building. I guess Curceo was a little excited at first, and just jumped at the conclusion the killer must have been in the Garwood Building."

THE detective tilted his derby forward, and scowled. "The Doctors' Building is pretty far away. It would take a mighty good shot to—"

"Sure it would! But it's not impossible. With a high-power, like Hanwood was shot with, the bullets could have come from a mile away!"

Barlow nodded slowly. "I can't laugh that off, John. It's worth looking into. C'mon—me and you are going over to the Doctors' Building!"

"And you're not going alone!" Jerry put in boldly. "John Feeney told me he'd cut me in on this, and you're not going to leave me behind just because I'm a girl!"

Barlow grinned amiably. "Okay, Miss Jerry. All we're going to do is to check up with the manager of the building. C'mon, if you feel like it. You won't be in any danger. I'll have one of the boys phone the manager, so we'll be sure to get him."

WITHIN five minutes they had contacted the manager in his office.

"I can vouch for every tenant on that side of the building," he assured them in response to Barlow's question. "There are two vacant offices, but no one can get in them without a key from this office."

"We'll take a look at them, if you don't mind," said the detective. One was on the second floor, but was clearly "out," because a roof-billboard stood between its windows and the police station. The office on the sixth floor seemed more promising.

"This is to be occupied by a manufacturing dentist after the first of the month," the manager explained.

"A guy would have to be a crack shot to nail a man in the police-station window from here," observed the detective. "But it *could* be done!" He turned to the manager. "Anybody on this floor report hearing shots?"

"Our walls are practically soundproof. Besides, the noise of the riveting-hammers they've been using on the new building next door might have drowned out the sound."

"A perfect set-up!" cried Barlow eagerly as he searched the office. "Who was it rented the place?"

"A firm known as Wetherell & Burke. I dealt with Burke—a slender, wiry fellow, almost bald, with colorless eyes and a pasty, seamy face. He made a cash deposit, and I gave him the keys."

"Oh-oh!" exclaimed the detective, elated. "Trail's getting hot! He gave a fake name, of course. Can you tell us anything more about him?"

"We-ell," said the manager, "he had a trick of lighting his matches with his

thumbnail. And he was always going like this—*'Tsk, tsk, tsk!'"*

## CHAPTER IV

FOR a moment Barlow and Feeney and the girl looked at one another in silence. Then the detective said:

"I remember some guy that lighted a match that way, and made that sort of a sound with his tongue! One of the nosey bystanders that was asking questions while we searched the Garwood. I was too busy to get a good look at him, but I remember his face was all bandaged."

"And so do I!" broke in the girl excitedly. "I mean, that's the way he lighted a match, and the way he talked! Only his face wasn't bandaged. He looked just like the man the manager describes—colorless eyes, pasty, seamy face, and slender, wiry build."

"Where did you see him? And when?" barked the detective.

"Why, right at the cigar-counter in the lobby of the police station, just after the shooting! Why, *you* saw him, John! Don't you remember? When you were phoning your office from my wall-phone, you asked for a match, and he flicked one alight with his thumbnail and held it to your cigar!"

"Do I remember!" groaned the reporter. "*Do* I re*mem*ber! The murderer of Hanwood—and all I had to do was to reach out my hand and grab him!"

"You got nothing on me, John," Barlow admitted sheepishly.

"But this is getting all muddled and crazy!" exclaimed the astounded Feeney. "It just don't make sense! Why should the murderer hurry from the scene of the shooting, to question the detective in charge of the man-hunt? Why should he hurry to the police-station itself? Why should he talk to a reporter who was telephoning in the latest bulletin on the man-hunt story?"

"Because," observed Jerry, "he was smart—mighty smart. He knew that the very last place anyone would look for the murderer was at the police-station!"

Barlow said: "The bandage was a mask—and it wasn't the first time one's been used that way, either. Nobody seeing him coming out of this office, or this building, would give him a second glance, or suspect anything was wrong. They'd simply think he was a patient coming from some doctor's office. . . . Sometime after he talked to me, and before he talked to you two, he got rid of the bandages. Well, we got a swell description of him, anyway!"

"So what?" demanded Feeney.

"So our battle's half won! I'll flash the word to Curceo, and have it broadcast over the radio. It'll be impossible for him to get away!"

"Yeah—that's a swell tip-off, in case he's hooked up with the professional mobsters, Barlow! If you're wise, man, you'll—"

"But what else is there to do, John? We don't even know his name. We don't know where to look for him! If we had the slightest idea of where he went—"

"He said," Jerry interrupted eagerly, "that he was going over to Sarconi's to shoot some pool."

"It's a chance!" exclaimed Barlow. "C'mon—we're heading for Sarconi's!"

"Jerry," panted the red-haired reporter as they hurried down to the police car, "you better run along home now. You know, there *might* be some trouble—if we locate our man."

"Where would you two have been if you'd left me at the cigar-stand back at headquarters?" she demanded indignantly. "You'd never have gotten the lead you're working on now!"

"Don't be crazy, Jerry," Barlow said to her. "We just don't want you to get hurt, if there happens to be gunplay, that's all. Be a good girl, and scram!"

"If you want to get rid of me now, you'll have to toss me out of the car!" said the girl belligerently. And she had her way. A minute later they were threading their way through traffic toward the pool-hall named by Snapper.

"I wish we'd've found the rifle," complained the head of the homicide squad as they whizzed through the drizzle. "We really haven't got a shred of actual proof to present in court. If we had the gun, it wouldn't be hard to prove the bullets came from it, and to prove it was owned by whoever killed Hanwood."

"He didn't pull the old violin-case stuff," observed Feeney. "But he's nobody's fool. He got rid of the rifle, somewhere."

LEAVING Jerry in the police car at the curb in front of Sarconi's, they entered the pool-hall together. Barlow braced the proprietor, while Feeney circulated unobtrusively among players and

hangers-on, pretending he was searching for a man to whom he had promised a job. Comparing notes ten minutes later, they found they had gained the information they had been seeking.

THEIR quarry, they learned, was known as "Snapper," and had traveled the previous summer with a circus as an exhibition marksman. He had been in Blankville only since the show had closed. He had been in no trouble in Blankville, and so far as could be learned, had no grievance against Chief Hanwood or the police department.

However, he had served a brief term in a penitentiary in a Western State some years before, after being found guilty of manslaughter in connection with the killing of a cow-puncher in a long-range rifle duel. He never drank. His keen eye and steady hand made him an expert pool-player, and he earned a rather meager living in the months when the circus was in winter quarters, by trimming suckers who were overconfident of their ability at pool.

"Best of all," Feeney told the detective enthusiastically, "I've got his address! He lives in a rooming-house on River Street!"

"Swell!" grinned Barlow. "This'll be the best pinch I ever made—unless he's blown the town, and we miss him! We've built up a pretty good case against him—everything but motive."

"Which means he's probably a hired killer, working for some one else," hazarded Feeney. "C'mon! We'll go over and see if he's home—and if he is, we'll grab him!"

"Not without some help, I won't!" objected Barlow. "Don't forget he's a crack shot, John. I want a squad of picked men behind me, with riot-guns and tear-gas bombs. I'll phone in to Chief Curceo, and get him to send me a gun squad. He'll want this name and description to broadcast by radio, anyway."

But when, five minutes later, Barlow emerged from the telephone-booth, he was erupting a stream of blistering profanity.

"Curceo's got excited over this case, and he's lost his head!" he reported indignantly. "He's called me off this angle—that's what he's done!"

"He's—*what*?" gasped the astounded Feeney.

"He said I was on a wild-goose chase. Said a thousand better tips had been phoned in since the killing. Said he'd investigate it, of course, when he got round to it; but there were dozens of better leads waiting to be run down. He ordered me to drop everything for the time being, and hop over to the West Side to pick up an ex-con, a two-time loser who's supposed to have threatened to 'get' Hanwood!"

"Good grief! Did you tell him—"

"He wouldn't listen to me, I tell you! Said he was so busy he didn't have time to listen."

Feeney shrugged resignedly. "So what?" he demanded spiritlessly.

"So I'm going to obey orders, of course!" answered Barlow, with asperity. "Do you think I want him to file charges against me before the civil service board?"

Feeney and Jerry stood on the curb in the drizzle and watched Barlow drive away in the police car. The reporter's fists were jammed deep in his topcoat pockets, and he rolled his cigar between his lips. The girl looked at him doubtfully, and asked:

"Now what?"

The reporter waved an arm at a taxi.

"I'll show you what!" he announced grimly as he handed the girl inside, and gave the driver Snapper's address on River Street. "*I* don't need a police department to make *my* collars for me!"

Jerry gasped and seized Feeney's arm.

"John! You—you aren't going to do anything rash, are you? Remember, this killer is a crack shot!"

"So what?" growled Feeney. "You let another bleat out of you, woman, and I'll have the driver take you home and dump you on your doorstep! If you want to stay with me, you'll have to zipper your lip!"

"All right, John," she agreed meekly.

ACTUALLY, Feeney had no intention of doing anything rash. But why admit it to the girl? Why be a chump, when he could let her think he planned to step boldly up to the gunman, smack his mouth, and take his gun away from him?

He hoped merely to locate Snapper, if possible, and then call the flattie on the beat to put the finger on him. Feeney wasn't one of those amateur police reporters who packs a gun.

He directed the taxi-driver to halt in front of the corner beer parlor, nearest Snapper's rooming-house.

"You stay here in the taxi," he told

the girl, "while I go inside and see what I can find out about this Snapper lad. If you're a good girl, I may bring you back a pretzel."

It was too early in the evening for the place to be crowded, even on Saturday. Two or three men were lounging at the bar, and several other persons were seated at tables.

"One scuttle," Feeney told the barmaid. And then: "I'm looking for a friend of a friend of mine, sister—a kind of skinny, baldified guy, name of Snapper. He lives somewhere hereabouts, but I don't know exactly where. Can you—"

The odd change in the barmaid's expression caused Feeney to break off suddenly as she shoved a foaming glass stein toward him. He was conscious of a sudden movement on the part of the man alongside him. His eyes flashed to the mirror behind the bar. He gasped as he beheld the reflected image of the very man he was seeking—Snapper, his right hand flashing toward his pocket!

Feeney knew the killer had recognized him. He realized his question had betrayed to Snapper the knowledge that the latter was known as the murderer of Hanwood. He was certain Snapper was reaching for his gun.

Feeney was raising the stein to his lips as this flashed upon him. He swept it, instead, over his shoulder, so the contents splashed in Snapper's face. Simultaneously, with a convulsive jerk, he leaped aside.

Snapper's gun blazed. But the beer had blinded him momentarily. The bullet splintered into the bar. The barmaid shrieked. Other patrons scrambled for doors and windows.

"Police!" Feeney yelled at the top of his voice. "Somebody call the cops!" Simultaneously he flung the stein itself straight into Snapper's face.

The killer's pistol barked again. The report was almost deafening in the confined space of the beer joint. Snapper's head jerked backward under the impact of the heavy glass stein. The bullet plowed into the ceiling.

FEENEY'S first impulse was to flee. But he dared not. He knew Snapper could drop him before he could reach a door. His only chance now was to grapple with the murderer and keep his automatic turned aside until the cops came.

He charged at the crouching Snapper. The gunman was still half-blinded by the beer, half-stunned by the impact of the stein. His teeth were bared in a snarl as he whipped the automatic about until it was pointing straight at the charging Feeney!

## CHAPTER V

THE reporter snatched at the weapon as he flung himself forward. The fingers of his left hand closed upon the hot barrel. He felt it jerk and jump within his grasp. He heard two more sharp reports. He did not know it at the time, but both bullets had ripped through the sleeves of his shirt, coat and topcoat.

His right hand closed on Snapper's gun wrist. The gunman was sputtering curses. Feeney held the automatic turned aside, content now to wait until the police arrived.

But Snapper had no intention of waiting. He jerked back spasmodically, dragging the clinging Feeney two yards across the floor. The red-haired reporter was astounded at the dynamic energy in the wiry body of the killer. Snapper was twisting and writhing and jerking in a desperate effort to free himself.

His left hand shot out toward a half-filled bottle on the bar. Feeney jerked him away just as his fingers were about to close upon it. The bottle would have proven a deadly weapon.

From the doorway came a woman's scream. Feeney recognized Jerry's voice, but he dared not turn his head. Every faculty was concentrated on keeping Snapper's gun turned aside, and in holding the grip on his wrist, so he could not escape.

And so the patrolman on the beat, charging through the door a moment later, found them awkwardly and viciously jerking and tugging at each other, but both still on their feet and unharmed.

"Hi, Oscar!" panted Feeney with a sobbing breath of relief as he beheld the officer. "Grab this bozo, quick! He's the guy that murdered Chief Hanwood!"

Snapper released his grip on the pistol as the patrolman jammed a revolver into his back. He raised his hands in token of surrender.

"You're nerts!" he panted, sneering. "What you trying to hang onto me, anyway? He's drunk, Officer! And him such a fine young man—*tsk, tsk, tsk!*"

"Call the dooley wagon, Oscar!" snapped Feeney. "I'll be responsible! I'll file formal charges against him!"

Jerry was forced to remain outside while the excited and jubilant Feeney went into Chief Curceo's office to explain why he had caused the arrest of Snapper, who was being held in a cell downstairs.

"Listen, John," Curceo told the reporter when the latter finished his story. "I'm not passing judgment in advance, see? But your case against this bird looks mighty weak. You haven't got any motive, any witnesses, anything, hardly, except that he goes, *'Tsk, tsk, tsk!'* And you can't hang a man because he does that!"

"Talk to him, won't you, Chief?" asked Feeney eagerly. "You've got a way of getting the truth out of 'em."

"Sure, I'll talk to him," agreed Curceo, glancing at the clock. "But I can't waste all night on him—unless, of course, he spills something good. I got fourteen other suspects in this case to question, and all but one or two of 'em are better bets than this'n, see? . . . . I'll talk to him, alone."

When Snapper was led into the Chief's office and left alone with Curceo, he demanded suspiciously:

"What's the big idea, Curceo? You trying to cross me, or something? If you are, I swear I'll spill everything, and take you to the chair with me!"

Curceo raised a placating hand. "Listen, Snapper. I'm taking care of you, see? This is all the fault of that nosey reporter. He hasn't got anything on you. Don't get excited; I'll see that you're sprung okay."

"You better," growled Snapper. "And damn' quick!"

"Listen, Snapper." The deputy chief looked worried. "I can't just turn you loose now, without any reason. The *Alarm* would raise such a howl that they'd run me out of office. I'll hold you for investigation for a couple of days, and then turn you loose when there isn't any evidence against you, see? Or else I'll see that you're turned loose on a phony bond."

Snapper helped himself to a cigarette from the humidor on Curceo's desk.

"*Tsk, tsk, tsk!* Aint you the generous guy! . . . Look here, you sap! I get out o' this can by midnight, or I spill the works! That's final!" He was glaring at Curceo. He flicked a match alight with his thumbnail, and cupped his hands about it and lighted the cigarette without removing his eyes from those of the Chief.

JERRY

Curceo was shaken by this ultimatum, and showed it.

"Listen, Snapper! You got to be reasonable. It isn't my fault you got picked up! You leave it to me, and I'll spring you, see?"

"And you'll do it before midnight!" said Snapper gratingly. "Or else—"

Curceo stroked his blue jowls and thought. "Listen!" he said finally. "Tell you what I'll do. I'll call the reporters in, and give you a good working-over, see? Regular third-degree stuff. To every question, you just answer, 'See my lawyer.' Then I'll send you back to your cell. And about midnight, I'll send down a blanket release-order for six or seven of the suspects, and you'll be among 'em. How's that?"

"Be sure it works!" growled Snapper warningly.

Deputy Chief Curceo pressed a button, and his secretary entered. "Tell the reporters that I'm going to start giving the works to all these suspects, and they're welcome to sit in, if they want."

A FEW moments later, in the presence of police reporters and several detectives, Curceo was grilling Snapper with fierce intensity. He started by barking questions at him. He shook his fist in his face. He yelled at him. Time after time, he accused him of murdering Hanwood. He threatened him, browbeat him, shook him by both shoulders. He stopped short only of physical mistreatment.

And all he got out of Snapper was, "Talk to my mouthpiece," or smiling silence.

"Take him away, and bring in the next one!" Curceo snapped curtly. And when Snapper had been taken back to his cell, the deputy chief turned to Feeney and said:

"You see? Can't get a word out of him! There's certainly not evidence enough to warrant me asking the district attorney to file a formal murder charge against him, John. I hate to bust up your pet theory, but so far I can't see that it's anything much more than sheer theory!"

FEENEY himself was half convinced he had pulled a bloomer in causing the arrest of Snapper. Certainly the evidence against the man was far from sufficient to bring about a conviction before an impartial jury.

"There are two things I've got to dig up before I can ever hope to make the case stick," he told Jerry a few moments later, as they leaned over the cigar case in the lobby. "The first is motive. Snapper hasn't a shadow of a motive for the Hanwood murder, so far as I can see. The second is the testimony of some one who saw him coming out of the Doctors' Building after the shooting. That'll give us a pretty good case against him. After that, if we can find the rifle and prove it was his, and—"

"Seems to me most of the case still remains to be proved, John," interrupted Jerry.

"That's what the managing editor seems to think!" sighed Feeney. "He's handling the Snapper angle of the yarn with tongs—scared of a damage-suit for false arrest if I can't make the case stick. And a suit like that would cost me my job, of course. The sheet's not playing the arrest of Snapper. It's just burying his name among those of the others who are being detained for questioning."

Jerry was almost in tears as she asked: "What can you do about it, John?"

Feeney ground the ashes from his cigar against the edge of the showcase.

"First thing I'm going to do is to phone the office and have 'em check on as many of the tenants in the Doctors' Building as they can locate at this time of night!"

"And then?"

"And then I'm going to check on the Bertillon records, and see if I can dig up some past history on this Snapper guy—something that might show a motive for killing Hanwood. If Hanwood had sent him up sometime—that'd be all I'd want!"

"But—John!"

"Uh-huh?"

"You haven't had a bite to eat, John."

Feeney laughed shortly. "But, sweetie, you don't understand. I'm a police reporter. I'm nursing the biggest yarn that's broken in this burg for ten years! I haven't got any time to eat—not until after the city edition has been—"

Jerry's eyes flashed.

"Now, you look here, John Feeney! You can't do that—you've got to *eat!* I'll go get some sandwiches and coffee."

"Okay, Jerry. You're a swell kid! . . . By the way, you haven't had anything to eat yourself, have you?"

Feeney hurried to the press room and phoned his boss. The latter agreed to put a couple of men at work checking on the various physicians in the Doctors' Building, and their employes. He told the reporter:

"We're strong for this angle of the case, if you can make it stick, John. But it's dynamite, if you can't! If this is really the gunman who killed Hanwood, we'll smear it all over the page, and the *Alarm* will claim all the credit for making the pinch and solving the case. But as long as there's the slightest doubt, he's just another suspect."

"Uh-huh," responded Feeney between bites of a sandwich. He winked at Jerry, who was sitting on his desk, swinging her feet and sipping coffee. "In other words, after I've got him tried and convicted and sent to the chair, you'll be willing to admit there's a bare possibility I was right, huh?"

WITH a cup of coffee in one hand, a sandwich in the other, and Jerry trotting at his heels, he hurried to the Bertillon room and enlisted the aid of the sergeant in charge. Together they searched the department records. They could find no trace of a criminal record against Snapper in Blankville. Apparently he had never been in the city until within the last few months.

"Which blows up all hope of proving a revenge motive—unless he might have been arrested under another name. Even then, if he'd been convicted of a felony, his prints would trip him up." Feeney shook his red head hopelessly.

"We've got the record of his prison hitch on the manslaughter charge, years ago," said the sergeant. "And here's a pick-up order from the West Coast for the Federal authorities. Postoffice inspectors are looking for him on a charge of passing forged money-orders."

"So what?" asked Feeney hopelessly. "That doesn't get me anywhere! I—I

guess I better admit I'm licked! I guess, after all—"

"John Feeney," spoke up Jerry spiritedly, "you ought to be ashamed of yourself! That charge is something they can hold him on, while you check up the case against him, isn't it? *Well,* then!"

"Okay," Feeney agreed listlessly. "I'll call up the post-office Inspector in charge and have him slap a hold-order on Snapper. I can't see where it'll do any good, but—"

As it turned out, the reporter's phone-call to the Federal authorities proved to be the turning-point of the whole case.

## CHAPTER VI

DEPUTY CHIEF CURCEO pressed the buzzer button for his secretary.

"Bring me half a dozen blank release-orders," he directed. "There are a bunch of these suspects that have established 'outs' and ought to be turned loose."

"Yes, sir," acknowledged the secretary. "The United States post-office Inspector is waiting to see you, sir."

"Show him in," growled Curceo, scowling. But he was smiling pleasantly as he extended his hand to greet the Federal officer. The Inspector told how he had been shocked by the murder of Hanwood, and offered the services of the department in helping to apprehend the killer.

"I hate to bother you at a time like this, when you're so busy, Chief," he went on. "But I'd like to have a word with this suspect called Snapper, if you don't mind. If you don't want him in the Hanwood case, we want him held for us on an old Federal charge. Here's the formal hold-order."

"Sure, Inspector! Anything you want." Curceo's genial smile hid his intense perturbation at the Inspector's announcement. It meant he could not carry out his part of the agreement to release Snapper, for Snapper now was a Federal prisoner, and beyond his jurisdiction.

"And, by the way," went on the Inspector, with a knowing wink, "let me congratulate you, Chief, on your change in policy."

"What d'you mean?" asked Curceo doubtfully.

"Why, in regard to running a 'protected' town. You know as well as I that Hanwood never would have turned this crook Snapper over to us, if he'd picked him up in a police dragnet. As long as he behaved himself in Blankville, Hanwood would have seen that he wasn't molested."

Curceo scowled. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Uh-huh." The Inspector winked again. "I know, Chief. Nobody connected with the Blankville police department is supposed to know that this is a protected town."

"Nobody gets any protection as long as *I'm* running things," growled Curceo. "You want to talk to this prisoner alone?" He pressed the buzzer, and handed his secretary an order for Snapper to be brought to the office. "He's a tough baby to get anything out of, see? Maybe I can help you, Inspector."

"Thanks, Chief. If you aren't too busy."

There was a questioning look in Snapper's colorless eyes as he was brought back into Curceo's office. The deputy chief lowered an eyelid and shook his head almost imperceptibly. The post-office Inspector questioned him at length concerning the Federal charge against him, but Snapper clammed it. The Federal officer learned nothing, and presently departed.

When Snapper and Curceo were alone, the killer suspiciously demanded an explanation.

"Listen, Snapper," snapped Curceo in a lowered voice, "you sure got yourself into a mess! Why didn't you tell me about this old Federal case against you?"

"This is a protected town, aint it?" demanded Snapper. "I had a right to think you wouldn't turn me over to the U. S. men. There's something funny about all this, Curceo! If I learn you're trying to cross me—*tsk, tsk, tsk!* It'll be just too bad for you!"

CURCEO began to pace the floor. "I'm not trying to cross you, sap! I'm running a protected town, and I'll keep on running a protected town, see? But can I help it if this smart reporter digs up your record on you and squawks to a post-office Inspector? Now there's no way that I can let you loose, with that U. S. hold-order on you!"

"No? Well, you'll find a way!" Snapper helped himself to Curceo's cigarettes and snapped a match alight with his thumbnail.

"Listen, Snapper! If you'll just wait a few days, I'll get somebody to post a phony bond in the Federal case, and—"

"And give that carrot-topped newshound time to dig up more evidence against me in the murder case? *Tsk, tsk!* You *are* bright! . . . . My proposition still stands! You get me out of here by midnight, or I spill everything!"

"Listen, Snapper! You got to listen to reason! I can't—"

"Okay. You go to the chair with me!"

Deputy Chief Curceo was pacing the floor nervously, grinding his palms together. Slowly the frown that had contracted his heavy brows relaxed.

"Listen, Snapper—I got a plan! In exactly thirty minutes I'll send this bunch of release-orders. A minute later I'll call the jailer to the phone. You take this key, and when the jailer's busy on the phone and the deputies are busy getting ready to turn these other boys loose, unlock your cell door leading into the run-around.

"The same key unlocks the solid-panel door at the rear of the run-around. Nobody will see you back there, because that door's never used, see? It opens into the dark corridor at the rear of the identification bureau on the first floor. The window at the end of the corridor is unbarred. You can drop from it to the sidewalk.

"Meanwhile, I'll see that my own car is left parked at the curb. Here's the ignition key. I'll make sure the chauffeur's in here. You hop in the car—and then it's up to you to make your get-away!"

Snapper pondered. "Sounds okay. But what if something goes wrong? What if one of the jailers tries to stop me? What if somebody tries to stop the car?"

CURCEO drew a flat automatic from his desk and passed it to the killer.

"Don't use it unless you have to, see?" he warned.

"I'll use my judgment," rasped Snapper. "And one more thing, Curceo. I'll be heading south. You can have your radio-patrol cars follow a bum steer in the opposite direction, can't you?"

"Listen—didn't I steer them to the wrong building this afternoon?"

Snapper pocketed the pistol.

"Okay," he agreed. "I thought you were trying to cross me, but I guess you're on the level. If everything goes all right, this is the last you'll ever hear of me, Curceo. If it doesn't— Well, remember, I'll spill everything and take you to the chair with me!"

"Everything's going all right," Curceo assured him nervously. "There's no possible way it can get gummed up. I'll take care of everything, Snapper. You know me!"

**"You win," Feeney admitted. "C'mon, Jerry—we got to do as he says."**

Feeney braced the post-office Inspector as he emerged from the Chief's office.

"You wouldn't dare publish what I think about this Hanwood murder," the Inspector told him in response to his eager question. "If I thought the *Alarm* would publish it, I wouldn't dare mention it, for fear of losing my job. I think the whole affair is an outgrowth of the policy of running a 'protected' city."

"So what?" asked Feeney, chewing at his cigar.

"Hanwood either broke his agreement with the underworld, or else he threatened to. That's my theory. So the boys who are trying to get along at the head of our crime organizations got rid of him—maybe for revenge, maybe just as a business proposition. Perhaps they thought Curceo, or whoever was slated to succeed Hanwood, would be more amenable to reason."

"How about Snapper? Where does he come in, Inspector?"

"I'm not so sure that he comes in at all. If he is a hired killer, working for one of these gangs, you wouldn't have caught him so easy. On the other hand, if he *were* employed by one of these mobs, they wouldn't let him stay in jail long. If they couldn't spring him through a crooked lawyer—and that's almost impossible, because murder isn't a bailable crime in this State—they'd do it some other way."

"Just walk along with me; I'll take you for a little ride."

"What d'you mean?" asked Feeney.

The Inspector shrugged. "Here comes Snapper now, being led back to jail from the Chief's office. A gang bold enough to murder a chief of police in his own office would be bold enough to take him away from his guards, right here in the police-station!"

Jerry came running up to Feeney breathlessly.

"Your phone in the press-room's ringing like a three-alarm fire!" she cried.

He mumbled an apology to the Inspector and made a dash for the phone. The city editor was on the line, with the information that one of the boys had located a tenant in the Doctors' Building who recalled seeing a man with his face bandaged—a man answering the description of Snapper—leaving the elevators in the lobby just after the time of the Hanwood shooting.

"Yea-bo!" cried Feeney in delight. "We're beginning to sew up the case against this bird! Now, if we only had the gun and a reasonable motive—"

But the city editor had cut him off. Feeney was bubbling with excitement.

"I got to tell Chief Curceo about this!" he cried, starting back toward the Chief's office. "He'll sure be glad to learn about it!"

But the Chief's secretary informed him Curceo was in an important conference, and could not be disturbed for fifteen minutes.

Actually, Deputy Chief Curceo was pacing back and forth, trying to arrive at a plan by which he might save himself from the consequences of a "squawk" by Snapper.

"Yeah," he told himself at length, "the plan I figured out when I gave Snapper those keys is the best one, after all. He doesn't know the one I told him is the ignition key is the key to my locker! But when he tries to use it—"

He halted in front of a glass wall cabinet for firearms, and removed a short-barreled riot-gun.

"After all," he said with a twisted, sinister grin, "Snapper isn't the only one who can use a rifle!"

He carried the gun to the window—the very window through which the bullets had come to end Hanwood's life. His car was parked at the curb, not sixty feet away.

"I'm no crack shot, like Snapper, but it's impossible to miss at this range," he told himself, with a twisted grin. "I'll never be safe as long as he's alive—this is the only way for me to play safe. But I'd never thought of it, if he hadn't shown me how, himself!"

He glanced at the clock. He leaned the gun against the wall, near the window, lighted a cigarette, and resumed his pacing. Presently he rang for his secretary, and handed him the release-orders to be delivered to the jailer. He waited some five minutes, and then picked up the phone and called for the jailer's office.

SNAPPER breathed a sigh of relief as he saw the various deputies coming after the group of prisoners who were ordered released.

"I sort of suspicioned that Curceo had something up his sleeve," he told himself. "But this shows he's really on the level!"

He turned the key in the lock, and the cell door opened. On tiptoe he made his way round the run-around until he came to the unused solid-panel door. It opened easily. He gripped the automatic in his coat pocket and stepped into the dark corridor in the rear of the identification bureau.

The corridor was deserted. Snapper stepped softly toward the window. It was unbarred. He looked outside. He spotted Curceo's car, standing at the curb. It was only an eight-foot drop to the sidewalk. But there were at least a dozen pedestrians in sight, including two uniformed patrolmen just emerging from the police-station.

"*Tsk, tsk, tsk!* If they saw me dropping from the window, I wouldn't have a chance!" he exclaimed. "But if I just strolled from the door—"

He tiptoed back to the main corridor, dropping the key down a ventilator shaft. Then, the hand in his coat pocket gripping the pistol, he stepped forth boldly. A hurrying clerk passed without giving him a second glance. Around the corner to the right was the entrance to the building—and freedom!

## CHAPTER VII

HE rounded the corner and almost bumped into Feeney and Jerry, leaning side by side on the cigar-counter. The girl spotted him instantly. Snapper lounged up alongside Feeney and suddenly jammed the automatic into the reporter's ribs.

"I mean business!" he snapped in a lowered voice. "A squawk out of either of you, and I pull the trigger! Just keep quiet, and walk along with me, easy and natural, out into the street, and I'll take you for a little ride!"

Jerry went white and stifled a scream. Feeney gasped. But he was helpless; if Snapper were the Hanwood killer, as Feeney believed, certainly he was a desperate man and would not hesitate at another murder—or two—if it would help gain his liberty.

"You win!" he admitted. "C'mon, Jerry—we got to do as he says!"

Together the three of them descended the steps and passed out into the drizzle. Snapper, the pistol held in his pocket now, steered them toward Curceo's car.

"You two open the door and get in," he ordered, stepping back a pace.

Then there was the flash and roar of a riot-gun above and behind them. Snapper stumbled forward as if some one's fist had unexpectedly smashed him between the shoulders. As he went down to one knee, he whipped the automatic from his pocket.

"Get back!" cried Feeney. He jerked Jerry across the sidewalk until both were flattened against the wall of the police-station.

Snapper twisted about and struggled to his feet. At first he could not determine whence the shot had come.

But almost instantly the riot-gun boomed again. A streak of orange flame lanced the drizzly darkness.

Again Snapper staggered; but like a flash his automatic spat fire.

A bedlam of shouting suddenly broke loose. A uniformed patrolman emerged from the police-station entrance, tugging at his gun.

Snapper turned and darted into the street. Now the patrolman got his revolver into action. He fired once. A scream arose as his bullet missed Snapper and shattered the windows of a car parked across the street. The officer withheld his fire, for fear of winging a bystander.

For the first time since he had been a police reporter, Feeney wished he carried a gun. He started after the fleeing Snapper recklessly; but Jerry clung to his arm and held him back.

Once across the street, Snapper turned, crouching behind a parked car, and sent one bullet whistling into the Chief's window. From where Feeney was, it appeared as if the window were empty.

Then Snapper dashed into an alley, and was gone.

For the second time within a few hours, policemen were streaming from the police-station, whipping out their revolvers. Most of them knew nothing of what had happened, but merely were responding to the sound of gunfire in the street.

Feeney ran into the street, pointing.

"It's the killer of Hanwood!" he shouted in a frenzy of excitement. "He just broke out of jail! Down that alley—quick!"

The policemen streamed toward the mouth of the alley. Then one of them cried out and stumbled. No one had heard the shot or seen the fleeing killer. But the bullet had come whining out of the darkness to find its mark with deadly accuracy.

Instantly the front of the charging policemen broke. "Around the block!" yelled some one. Leaderless, they broke into two groups, one charging around each side of the block in an attempt to trap the fugitive.

ALREADY the mounting scream of an approaching police-car siren could be heard. Feeney snatched Jerry by the wrist and dragged her toward the police-station entrance.

"I got to flash the office!" he was yelling. "You keep inside, where the bullets aren't flying!"

A moment later he was barking into the *Alarm's* extension phone on his desk:

"Flash! Hanwood killer suspect breaks jail—battles cops—wounded by bullets from Chief's office—police closing in on him—capture or death under police guns expected any moment! Yeah—Snapper—the one I nabbed! This proves I was right—huh? Shoot it, kid! I'll phone you again, quick as I can!"

He dashed outside, eager to take part in the chase and to be in at the capture or killing. In the corridor he met Deputy Chief Curceo, running from his office, the riot-gun still in his hand.

"Are *you* the one that shot him, Chief?" the reporter gasped.

CURCEO nodded as he hurried toward the door.

"I was standing there at the window when I saw him come out with you and the girl, John. The last time I talked to him he let something slip that convinced me he was the killer of Hanwood, see? When I saw he'd escaped, I *knew* it! He was covering you with the gun, wasn't he? . . . . Well, I let him have it, that's all! I'm cussing myself because I didn't kill him at the first shot!"

"You nailed him with both bullets, Chief!" cried Feeney excitedly. "He staggered, both times you fired! I didn't see where he was hit, but he must be wounded pretty bad!"

Curceo was cursing.

"Don't take any chances with him!" he shouted at a pair of plain-clothesmen as they dashed past. "Kill him on sight! Don't try to arrest him—kill him!"

Curceo called to his chauffeur and hopped into his car. Uninvited, Feeney jumped in too. But the deputy chief made no objection. The car, its siren shrieking, roared around the corner; then around a second corner, and to the spot where policemen already were congregating at the mouth of the alley.

"He's disappeared!" one of the officers called to the Chief.

"Probably dropped dead from his wounds!" snapped Curceo. "Search the alley—you'll probably find his body!"

The beams of a dozen flashlights pierced the blackness of the alley as the cordon of policemen advanced. But they found no trace of Snapper—in the alley, nor during the intensive search conducted of the adjoining blocks during the ensuing thirty minutes.

Deputy Chief Curceo, visibly disappointed, returned to direct the search from the police-station.

"He's probably stolen a car, see, and is trying to get out of town," Curceo explained to a cluster of reporters. "But he hasn't got a chance! Every radio-patrol car is watching for him! He'll never get out of Blankville alive! I think he's badly wounded. If he is, we're liable to find him dead, any minute and any place!"

"What did he say that convinced you he's Hanwood's murderer?" asked Feeney eagerly.

Curceo stalled. "I can't make that public until after we've got him, dead or alive, boys."

They were trooping into the Chief's office. Photographers were clamoring for pictures of Curceo, posed at the window with the riot-gun, just as he had been when he had shot the escaping killer.

"Get back, everybody," growled the photographers as they crouched, ready to set off the flash bulbs. "Now, Chief, if you'll just level the gun, like you were when you spotted him—"

Curceo raised the rifle—and dropped dead. . . .

This time the window was raised, so the pane did not reveal the copper-jacketed high-power bullet that came winging through the window.

Curceo's knees simply buckled under him. He sat down suddenly, and rolled over on his side. There was a look of surprise on his heavy face.

Reporters, photographers, and watching officers suddenly rushed forward, astounded by the swift and silent murder from afar.

"Shot—through the heart!" cried some one.

"Snapper!" exclaimed Feeney excitedly. "The murderer of Hanwood! He's killed the man that shot him!"

FOR an instant, silence born of utter amazement gripped the astonished witnesses of the second long-distance murder.

Then suddenly inspiration flashed upon Feeney.

"I know where he is! There's only one place he *could* be! He must have got the rifle he used in the Hanwood murder. And it must have been hidden somewhere in the same room—to which he still has the key. C'mon, all you coppers—to the sixth floor of the Doctors' Building! Grab your riot-guns—you may have to battle it out with him at long distance!"

With both Chief and deputy chief

murdered, leadership devolved upon the shoulders of the night captain. He spotted Detective Barlow of the homicide squad, just returning from his call, and placed him in charge of operations at the office building.

"Don't kill him if you can possibly take him alive!" he shouted after the group as they stampeded from the building, calling to the others who had been engaged in the search of the immediate district. Feeney and the other reporters sped along the slippery sidewalks, disdaining the police cars which, with officers packed within and clinging to the outside, sirened their way screamingly through the traffic. Jerry, excited and panting, hurried as fast as she could in Feeney's wake. He had forgotten her for the moment, but she didn't mind.

AT the entrance to the building they found the lone night elevator operator, his teeth chattering with terror.

"This m-man with blood on his coat s-stumbled into my elevator car, and jammed a pistol in my s-s-tomick!" he croaked. "He m-made me take him to the sixth floor, and get out with him. He m-made me go inside with him, and said he'd kill me if I made any noise! He got a rifle that was hid in the office, and he opened the window and waited, and waited, and waited—and I was scared 'most to death!

"He kept cursing and p-praying, all at the same time. P-praying that he'd live long enough to sh-shoot somebody he said had d-d-double-crossed him! And then he raised the rifle, and fired, and—"

"Get to the point, man!" snapped Barlow irritably. "Which direction did he go? Where—"

"He's still up there in the office—b-bleeding to d-death!" chattered the elevator operator. "He kept me prisoner until he s-saw you coming. Then he sent me down to t-tell you he was ready to s-surrender, because he'd cheat the chair by dying, anyway! H-he said you'd have to hurry if you wanted to hear his s-story, 'cause he's g-going fast!"

"It's a trick!" cried Detective Barlow. "I want a dozen of you men with riot-guns, ready to blast him out if he opens up on us!"

But it wasn't a trick. They found the door of the sixth-floor office open. Snapper had slid his rifle and pistol into the hall, in token of surrender. He was kneeling in the doorway, clinging weakly to one jamb with both hands. His seamed face was waxen white, and the whole front of his clothing was drenched with blood.

"*Tsk, tsk, tsk!* You sure took your time in getting here!" he whispered weakly. "Five minutes more, and you'd have been too late to hear—what you want to hear!"

"You killed Hanwood and Curceo?" Barlow shot at him fiercely.

"Curceo paid me to kill Hanwood," Snapper confessed in a whisper. "Then he shot me, to keep me from talking. But I fooled him! I lived long enough to kill him—and tell my story!"

"We know all that!" broke in Feeney excitedly. "We know everything except this: *Why* did Curceo hire you to murder Hanwood?"

Snapper laughed weakly, and choked.

"When Blankville first became a 'protected' city," he muttered feebly, "the Mayor and other officials secretly approved the plan, because they thought it a semi-legitimate way to keep the city free of crime. But Chief Hanwood found a way to make it pay him a profit!

"He was collecting a 'cut' from every crook who hid out here in Blankville—a flat ten per cent of the take. Every fence had to cough up the same percentage.

"Curceo wanted to cut in on the graft. Hanwood refused. Curceo knew he was in line for the job when Hanwood retired. But he couldn't wait. He hired me to get rid of Hanwood."

His voice had trailed off to a whisper. His eyes were glazing.

"THIS story," said Feeney to Jerry a short time afterward, when he had telephoned his report to the office, "is so all-fired big that all the papers have *got* to use it, even if it means admitting Blankville has been a 'protected' city! It'll knock the 'protection' system sky-high—not only in Blankville, but everywhere! It'll stamp out a practice that has aided tremendously in the growth of organized crime in the last ten years!"

The girl looked at him admiringly. "And you've helped in a big thing," she said. "Even the President and Congress have had to take up this crime situation, and—"

"All in the day's work," protested the newspaper man. "Suppose we go grab us a few dances and see the floor-show at the Heidelberg."

Illustrated by
Margery Stocking

# *A Bishop Goes Burglar*

***All in a noble cause, the Bishop undertakes a burglary, and bungles it—but saves the day with a hearty and accurate uppercut. . . . A sprightly tale by the author of "Fists Across the Sea"—***

## *By* CHARLES LAYNG

THE casual observer might have assumed that there could be no connection whatever between Rudy the Wop and the Bishop of Dunchester. But there come times in the lives of casual observers, as with their soulmates the innocent bystanders, when their assumptions are demonstrably incorrect. This was such a time.

Not only was there a connection between Rudy the Wop and the Bishop of Dunchester, but they were, at the very moment this story may be said to open, quite *intimes*. Yes, that's the word for it, *intimes;* no other can quite describe Rudy the Wop clad in his eight-hundred-dollar brocaded dressing-gown, and the Bishop of Dunchester in his eight-dollar unbrocaded cassock. In addition to these and sundry other garments, they both wore furtive airs.

"Are we alone?" asked Rudy the Wop, with bated breath.

"We are," the Bishop of Dunchester assured him with a guilty manner.

And they were alone. Except for the butler, five serving-maids, the cook and the family ghost, no other soul breathed the patrician air of Pelmere Castle. The lord of the manor had long since betaken himself and his saloon car to the railway station of Market Hustings to receive his week-end guests—it being Tuesday, and this being England.

Surreptitiously then, Rudy the Wop dived under one side of the four-poster and the Bishop of Dunchester dived under the other side, several yards away. They emerged presently, flushed but triumphant, Rudy bearing a percolator, and the Bishop an electric toaster.

At this moment, psychological or not as the case may be, we must for the nonce leave Rudy the Wop and the Bishop of Dunchester, with their percolator and their toaster, in Rudy's bedroom—a cozy chamber of the general dimensions of the train-shed at Paddington Station—and retrace our steps a bit to recount the circumstances that brought Rudy and the Bishop together in the first place. . . .

They met on the ship. Rudy, what with repeal an inexorable and accom-

plished fact in this vale of beers, was beginning to find business unprofitable. There were, besides, certain gentlemen about to board Santa Fe trains at the station of Leavenworth, Kansas, after longish stays in that metropolis, whom Rudy did not care to meet. Not, you will understand at once, that Rudy objected to meeting ex-convicts socially—he was never the prude, Rudy wasn't. Democratic, that was Rudy the Wop. Having, however, no ambitions along the lines of becoming a human sieve, it occurred to Rudy that the streets of Paris (France) might just possibly possess more allure per square foot of asphalt than his more accustomed haunts of the streets of Cicero (Illinois). Being a man accustomed to the making of quick decisions, he acted upon the idea at once; and by one of those coincidences without which we writers would have to fold up our tents and silently steal, the boat he selected was the identical one which was transporting the Bishop of Dunchester home from his labors at the meeting of the Anglo-American Anti-Crime Society.

LIKE a homing pigeon to its loft, Rudy gravitated toward the Bishop. Before becoming a success, Rudy the Wop had been a card-sharp; and with the first heave of A-deck, just east of quarantine, the old urge returned. Not, you will understand, that Rudy had professional ideas; no—he wished to remain merely a talented amateur.

"With what pack do you hunt?" the good Bishop asked him when Rudy introduced himself as a gentleman farmer from Illinois.

"Oh, any old pack," Rudy replied airily, and truthfully too; for what he couldn't do with cards, nobody could.

With a bishop as a partner, how could anyone be anything but honest? So figured J. Esmander Calhoun and Randolph S. Boogs, manufacturers, from East St. Louis and Granite City, respectively. As a result of this slightly mistaken theory, the Pelmere Foundling Home was enriched by some five thousand dollars—the Bishop's and Rudy's share of the winnings. Time was when charity, however worthy, might have whistled for the winnings of Rudy the Wop, but a few grand were chicken-feed to him now. As a further and more significant result, from our standpoint, Rudy and the Bishop became firm friends. After such a princely gift, the Bishop could do nothing else than invite Rudy to his brother's

**Constable Arbuthnot recognized him**

castle to meet Lady Blints, chairman of the Pelmere Foundling Home, and would brook no refusal, particularly when he discovered that Rudy the Wop had scoured London in a successful search for the machinery incident to an American breakfast. . . .

Thus, at last, and high time it is too, we return to Pelmere Castle, to Rudy, to the Bishop, to the percolator and to the toaster.

"If," said the Bishop sadly, when these devices had been duly hooked up and were simmering, "there is one thing worse than our toast, it is our coffee."

"And bloaters," said Rudy feelingly, from the depths of an almost ruined digestion.

"And bloaters," agreed the Bishop.

Then, as the odor of coffee, as distinguished from the old-shoe aura that drifts gently over the British breakfast-table, began to fill the room even to the vaulted ceilings, the reverend gentleman beamed ecstatically.

"It was a glorious idea of mine, inviting you down here," he said feelingly. "I don't suppose it's cricket, deserting my good brother Reggie's breakfast-table this way, but I do love American coffee. But we mustn't let Reggie catch us at it."

"Hell, no," Rudy agreed, having discovered that the good bishop was not over-critical of a certain salty tang in conversation.

As if awaiting this signal, in popped a head that might readily have been mistaken for that of a Rambouillet sheep, but was actually the head of the Bishop's brother Reggie, Lord Pelmere. A long and gangling body presently followed the head.

"What's this? What's this?" the unexpected apparition gave tongue.

"But I thought you'd gone to meet the train, Reggie," the Bishop deftly changed the subject.

as the Bishop of Dunchester; and bishops don't barge about breaking into houses.

"So I did, so I did, so I did!" His Lordship was not akin to his illustrious fellow-countryman from the banks of the Avon in the matter of the avoidance of repetitions. "But it was the wrong train. Came from Edinburgh. London train later, much later. Don't know anybody in Edinburgh. Nobody came. Here I am."

The toaster ejected a piece of toast with a loud pop. Lord Pelmere jumped. Then, adjusting his monocle, he peered at the machine intently, just removing a rather more prominent than otherwise nose from the fairway as a second piece of toast popped enthusiastically upward.

"What's this bally thing?" he asked.

"A toaster," Rudy admitted shamefacedly.

For some minutes silence reigned over that portion of Pelmere Castle, broken only by the ever-recurrent pops of toast. The lord of the manor, despite the cannonading, never wavered from his intent study of the device and its functions.

"What's it for?" Lord Pelmere was constrained to ask at last.

"It toasts bread," his brother explained.

"Oh."

Again came a silence such as is reputed to hold churchyards in its grip at the witching hour of twelve, a silence guilty on the part of the breakfast-eaters, and wondering on the part of their host.

"Silly contraption, isn't it?" His Lordship was plaintive.

"Why?" demanded his brother the Bishop.

"One can do the same damned thing over the fire with a fork."

With these words the lord of Pelmere Castle stalked from the room.

"There," quoth the Bishop, with unaccustomed fervor, "goes the nitwittedest man in England. Of all the calico-craniumed, dim—but, tut-tut, that isn't displaying the Christian spirit, is it?"

"Still," said Rudy the realist, "he is calico-craniumed."

"Quite," said the Bishop, "and he's got my nephew into a nice mess. You see, Ian and Peggie Wayton are to be married soon."

"And Sheep-face won't let 'em?"

"Sheep-face? Oh, yes, yes, quite—I must remember that. No, Reggie approves of this match heartily; but you see, Ian got himself entangled with another girl a few years ago. He wrote her letters."

"Bad, bad," Rudy commented sagely.

"My brother had to buy them back. Now, you'd think that anyone would have destroyed them at once, but not Reggie. Trust him to boggle a thing if it's at all boggleable. He kept them in his desk, with some sort of idea of using them as a curb on young Ian. Even that would have been all right had he not crowned his masterpiece of folly by hiring one of the most notorious blackmailers in England as his secretary, on forged references."

"WHAT'S his name?" asked Rudy, his professional interest stirred.

"The swine calls himself Montague. He nobbled the letters, and now he threatens to break up the romance if Reggie doesn't pay him a sum that is absolutely out of the question."

"Why don't this punk tell his girl all about it?"

"If you're referring to Ian—he can't. You see, even for a modern girl, some of the letters were—well—er—"

"Pretty hot?"

"Oh, torrid. Yes, yes, indubitably torrid."

"So what?"

The Bishop hesitated.

"Well, I happened to see you shooting pistols on the range yesterday. You were excellent, breaking a hundred targets in a hundred shots."

**His tranquil calm was disturbed by the rear end of a large clergyman hurtling through his window.**

"Shucks," said Rudy with becoming modesty, "that's all the targets there were, or I'd of busted a hundred more."

"Observing that, it occurred to me that possibly you might not object to interviewing this fiend Montague for me. I warn you that it will be dangerous. I really shouldn't ask you, but Ian's happiness means a lot to me."

"Want me to rub Montague out?" Rudy's eyes assumed an anticipatory glitter.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Shall I bump him off?"

"A good bump might bring him to his senses," the Bishop agreed.

"When do I start?"

"You could catch the two-forty-five to London and see him tonight."

"O. K. Have you got a drag with any bulls and mouthpieces?"

"I don't believe I understand."

Rudy was patient. Long and bitter experience had shown him that Englishmen, as a rule, lamentably fail to understand English.

"Do you know any policemen or lawyers?" he elucidated.

"Oh, quite. Sir Ralph Moseley, chief of Scotland Yard, is quite a friend of mine; and while I can't claim acquaintance with lawyers, I do know several solicitors, barristers and judges quite well. But what—"

"Sure you can trust them?"

"Oh, absolutely. They're all honorable—"

"Let's go, then."

"Us?"

"Sure. Gotta have you along for a front, in case I get in a jam."

The Bishop hesitated. After all, though, his nephew Ian was very dear to him. Slowly, he drank another cup of coffee, considering.

"I'll go," he said at last.

LONDON, like most large cities, has a way of being visited periodically by that dark intruder Night. Also, like most large cities, night in London means an increased vigilance on the part of the police constables.

Now, Police Constable Arbuthnot was as conscientious in patrolling his beat as the next man. If there had ever been a report made of the housebreaking that occurred at No. 14-bis, Jarvey Street, on the night of June thirteenth, he would have explained indignantly that nothing of the sort could have happened, since he was in the vicinity all the time and saw nothing. Of course, he would have testified, there had been the bishop who sidled into the mews. Slightly irregular, that was, but Police Constable Arbuthnot recognized him from his pictures in the papers as the Bishop of Dunchester; and bishops don't barge about the place breaking into houses, do they?

As a matter of fact, given a certain set of circumstances, they do. At least, this one did, although not without remonstrance.

It was only after a thorough study of the situation that Rudy the Wop led the Bishop of Dunchester into the mews.

"But why don't we present ourselves at the front door?" protested the clergyman.

"And have his gang blot us out before we get started? Not much."

The Bishop was silent for a moment.

"See?" asked Rudy the Wop.

For a moment, the Bishop understood this ejaculation as referring to his clerical demesne, but eventually he gave it its correct meaning. He was moved to protest a bit more, but there had been a certain workmanlike and competent air about his companion from the start of the affair that impressed him; so into the mews he went. . . .

Actually, S. Mitchell Montague had no gang, but he did have Bertie Twigg, who, in size and ferocity, seemed a very acceptable substitute. With such a guardian of his door, S. Mitchell Montague was beset with no terrors, however dangerous he knew his chosen profession to be. At

eleven o'clock on the night of June thirteenth he was seated in his library smoking a peaceful cigarette, playing solitaire, and thinking, no doubt, of how he would force Lord Pelmere to pay through his capacious nose. Suddenly his tranquil calm and dreams of a rosy future were both rudely disturbed by the sight of the rear end of a large clergyman hurtling through his open library window, to be followed closely by the rest of the Bishop, and another more sinister figure. The Bishop, unused to shinning up fire-escapes, had removed, by the simple process of falling through the window, the element of surprise from their little visit to S. Mitchell Montague; and so it was that they found themselves confronted with a revolver when they picked themselves up.

Rudy the Wop laughed.

The Bishop, on the contrary, frowned.

"It seems no laughing matter," he said.

"Ho, ho," said Rudy the Wop. "After they pop at me with machine-guns for fifteen years, this guy tries to scare me with a pea-shooter!"

S. Mitchell Montague's flexible nose quivered.

"Don't move," he gritted.

"Flip the ace of spades into the air," Rudy commanded.

Obediently the Bishop of Dunchester picked the required card from the table and spun it into the air. With a single fluid sweep, a gun leaped, seemingly of its own accord, from the armpit of Rudy the Wop into the right hand of Rudy the Wop. There was a sharp hiss as the silencer did its duty; and then the ace of spades, with a neat hole drilled through its center, fluttered gracefully down before the startled eyes of S. Mitchell Montague.

"Now then—put 'em up!"

S. Mitchell Montague discovered that he no longer had the drop. Moreover, the voice of Rudy the Wop did not sound like that of a man who was kind to his mother (although he actually was), and the hands of S. Mitchell Montague sought higher altitudes.

"Gimme the papers outa that safe."

MEEKLY, and with a vision of that punctured ace of spades speeding his movements, S. Mitchell Montague complied.

"Hand them here."

Rapidly, Rudy the Wop flipped over the neatly filed bundles until he came to the one he wanted.

**The snappy uppercut that met the unshaven chin of Bertie Twigg was a model of accuracy and efficiency.**

"Here it is," he called to the Bishop of Dunchester; but the Bishop of Dunchester didn't hear him.

He was busily engaged in regarding the enormous plug-ugly who had quietly entered the door, in response to S. Mitchell Montague's frantic foot-pressure on the buzzer under the table. Bertie Twigg was not one of your mental giants, but he sized up the situation in a glance. Ignoring the Bishop—who, be it known, had won his blue at Oxford (heavyweight boxing, 1898, crew, 1899)—Bertie set himself for a leap at the oblivious back of Rudy the Wop.

"Let me see, now," mused the Bishop of Dunchester, "how did that one go?"

Evidently he remembered, for his sudden leap in the direction of Bertie Twigg was a model of footwork in one so portly; and the snappy uppercut, produced from somewhere out of the dim past, that met the unshaven chin of Bertie Twigg with a dull *plock*, was a model of accuracy and efficiency.

Rudy the Wop spared a hasty glance behind him.

"Nice work," he approved. "Now let's burn these papers."

P. C. Arbuthnot, returning in the course of his steady patrolling to the vicinity of No. 14-bis, Jarvey Street, saw the Bishop of Dunchester emerge from the mews. He commented on the matter later to his wife, Mrs. P. C. Arbuthnot.

"Walkin' with 'is 'ead hup and shoulders squared like a bloomin' grenadier, he woz. Wonder wot it woz myde 'im so blinkin' proud of 'isself?"

*A POIGNANT drama of shipwreck, and of life and love and death in an old lighthouse.*

# None So

WIND and sea waged furious assaults on the headland, but within those thick walls the turmoil of the storm only accentuated the coziness. The room was a serene pool of brightness in the wild night. Shaded lights spread a soft glow; chintz curtains hung steady, and logs crackled. Dr. Bartholomew, ruddy as a farmer, stood with his back to the blaze and wagged a grizzled head at his host.

"Seems an ideal place for a dramatist to work in. What better than a converted lighthouse on an isolated island?"

"Just what *I* thought," Hilton Murray admitted moodily. "But I seem to miss the traffic noises and city lights. After a couple of weeks I'm further from an idea than ever. Fine job for a man—to be a spider spinning futile webs out of his own interior!"

"Liver," diagnosed the local physician. "Now you—"

The door flew open, letting in a flaunting banner of rain and the full roar of the gale. An excited farm boy in streaming oilskins waved his arms at them.

"A wreck! Come quick, Doctor! Sending some up here, but the bad hurt are down in the village. Quick!"

He fled, and the Doctor, pulling on coat and hat, followed, ordering curtly: "Better stay here, Murray!" The playwright nodded morose agreement. This meant disturbance, further delay. A pity—perhaps that very night the illusive idea would have come. He did not want to be selfish, but—

At that moment a man blundered in, so wet that he might have been swept straight out of the sea. His hair was plastered down like a skullcap, and the water running from his steward's uniform made a shiny puddle. He was a small man, but so aggrieved that it was as if he had brought into the snug room the anger of the night.

"You've been shipwrecked!" said Murray, hating himself for the banality.

"You don't say? Bright, aren't you?" The man crouched before the fire. "Can't you offer a man a drink?"

Murray, apologizing, hastened to comply. The glass was snatched, drained, thrust back. "Give me another."

"What ship is it?"

"The *Manzanilla,* homeward bound from the East. Some have behaved like heroes, and some'll have to pay for it. That Captain's a murderer."

He glowered and shivered. . . .

Murray, disliking the snarling victim, took him to a bedroom to change, and descended the spiral staircase, which trembled like the ladder of a ship at sea. Awaiting him he found three newcomers who might have been a sculptured group to symbolize calamity. They stood huddled together, numb and wet, faces blank. With an unhappy twinge Murray noticed the square-built man wore a captain's uniform. If the girl had not been shipwrecked, she would have had the grave and still beauty of a Madonna. As it was, her beauty only hurt. Worst of all, the pair supported a young man who wore a mask of blood.

The sight of blood always nauseated Murray; but hoping he concealed his

# Blind—

## *By* DALE COLLINS

**Illustrated by R. F. James**

emotions, he made them welcome, and called Mrs. Pugh from the kitchen. The housekeeper—a rosy-cheeked little woman, round like an apple—took charge. Aided by the steward, Murray helped to carry the injured man into the small bedroom on the ground floor. He tried not to see the blood. Once the pale lips moved. "Mada! Mada!" they called.

The Captain and the girl stood drooping wearily. Suddenly he raised his head and said: "To you, I've become the murderer of your son, Mary."

"I didn't say it!"

"Your eyes do. I can't blame you. But an uncharted rock or a derelict in such weather— Act of God!"

"Don't talk to me of a God who'd take my John away," she said with painful quietness. "My son John's drowned, you know." She sank into a chair, heedless of her wet clothes.

His hands reached out to her, but drew back when she shivered. He nodded to himself, looking old and tired. "No, you can't forgive me, and neither will a single soul who's lost a loved one, no matter what their reason may say. I was the master; I lost my ship. No wonder you can't bear me near you." He turned away, and went on dragging feet to the door. "If! If! If!" he mourned aloud, and the storm raged in the room while he passed out into the dark.

The girl slipped down into the chair; there Mrs. Pugh found her, and gathered her into motherly arms.

"My son John—he's drowned out there."

"God pity us!" said Mrs. Pugh, and rocked her.

"I used to rock him like that. Just four years old. My little John!"

"I know, dear, I know. My own boy, he was lost at sea with the fishing fleet. Cry, poor heart. The sea's cruel to mothers—God pity us!"

They clung together; they wept together. . . .

"Mrs. Mary Villiers," the steward Slight explained, his manner servile yet familiar. "A widow. She's lost her kid."

"So young herself," mourned Murray. "So lovely."

"Nice bit of goods, sir. The Old Man was making the running with her. He could pick them, for all his faults."

"Callous enough, aren't you?"

"What me, sir? There'd have been droves more food for the fish if it hadn't been for Harold Slight. Remembering that, sir, you won't grudge me another taste?"

"Help yourself, man, but don't get tight."

"Not a very nice way of putting it," Slight pointed out, taking half a tumbler of spirits. "Seeing all I been through, and—"

The man they had put to bed stumbled in, the bandage a turban about his head. Young and handsome, he contrived to look as if he wore a makeshift fancy dress.

"I've never been here before!" he puzzled.

"You're all right, but you must get back to bed."

**"You mustn't kill him," said Mrs. Pugh. "That would only mean more trouble."**

Slight stepped forward. "Evening, Mr. Allardyce."

Allardyce peered. "You—you were a steward, I remember. . . . Yes, on the *Manzanilla*. We were playing bridge. There was a crash. Thought it was a bigger wave. A lot of shouting. Things fell over. They said the ship was going. The boats. Mada and he got away. I waited. Yes." He envisaged pictures of darkness and horror. "What happened to the first boat?" he asked then. "Mada was in it."

"Capsized in the surf, sir," Slight said cheerfully. "Every man Jack lost."

"Hold your tongue!" Murray thrust Slight aside. "Perhaps there's a mistake. Down in the village—"

"Where is this village? I must find Mada."

Mrs. Pugh, at the kitchen door, held up her hands. "Mercy, that poor gentleman's in no state—" Short legs moving with surprising agility, she barred the way. "Your pardon, sir, but you'll go back to bed like a good boy, and Mr. Murray here will find her for you."

Murray swore in silence that he'd do nothing of the kind, but in the end he buttoned himself into his raincoat and started for the village. . . .

Captain Dawson had wandered back again—a man who had passed through purgatory into a kind of coma. Assured that Mrs. Villiers would not be up, he had subsided by the fire. When Mrs. Pugh had left them, Slight took a cigarette, and braced by whisky, addressed the master of the *Manzanilla* on a note of deep concern.

"Very nasty business, sir! How many drowned, sir?" The Captain brooded, lost. "How many did you say, sir?" Slight persisted.

"Nearly a hundred missing," came the dull reply.

"Ah, sir, there'll be many hearts as'll ache when this gets around! Wives that have lost their husbands, brothers their sisters, mothers their sons, sweethearts—terrible!" The other's gesture of misery encouraged him. "You must feel, sir, you've the blood of the innocent on your hands. That Mrs. Villiers' little boy, for instance."

Captain Dawson looked up sternly and was surprised by those bright, fierce eyes. "How dare you talk to me like that, steward?" He lost the rebuke in his own thoughts. "Even a steward thinks he can kick a master who's lost his ship!" he muttered bitterly.

Slight pounced on that. "The beauty of it is he can! Listen, you! Listen, curse you!"

Captain Dawson blinked amazedly.

"What did you say, Slight?"

Slight tucked thumbs into armpits—struck an attitude. "I was your personal steward, wasn't I? How'd it look at the inquiry if I give evidence I'd served you with a couple of dozen brandies on the q. t. today?"

A kind of vacuum was set up by that question. Captain Dawson sat stunned, sickened. "You filthy liar!" he said, but still as if he did not believe his own ears. "Blackmail—and on a lie!"

"Call it blackmail. I call it squaring things up a bit. You'll have plenty, even if they put you on the beach. You can fork out some for this shipwrecked sailor—quite a bit. I've got you sitting, Captain Dawson."

"You—" The Captain sprang up, only to drop back again. "What can a man do against a thing like you?"

"Nothing!" said Slight, and stepped jauntily across to help himself to a drink in celebration; but Mrs. Pugh, entering briskly, took the decanter from under his very nose.

"What's the big idea? I can have all I want! I'm the hero of the wreck. Who stopped the rush for the boats? Who started the hymns? Why, Harold Slight!"

"I take leave to doubt it," snapped Mrs. Pugh.

"I need a drink after going through what I have."

"You've gone through quite enough not to need any more."

"Who are you to be giving orders?"

"I am Mrs. Emily Pugh—Mr. Hilton Murray's housekeeper." Prim but victorious, Mrs. Pugh withdrew.

THE door giving onto the headland opened to admit Murray.

"Had a nice walk, sir?" Slight inquired pertly.

"All for nothing! The only girl I could trace called Mada had just left a cottage and come up here by the other track with young Jimmy, the farm boy. Can't be the right one, anyway, because her name's Longden and her husband's missing."

"That's the little lady just the same, sir. We had quite a touching lovers' meeting here between her and young Mr. Allardyce, and they're inside now, kissing and hugging, I'd like to bet."

Mrs. Pugh bustled in to call her guests to supper.

The Captain rose, squaring his shoulders. He turned his back on the kitchen the others entered, and crossed the bright room, taking a revolver from his pocket. He flung open the door. The rain had stopped, but the wind still raved across the headland, and clouds like vast bats scurried across the stars.

Captain Dawson stepped out, leaving the front door to bang to and fro.

MARY VILLIERS, sent by Mrs. Pugh, was alarmed by the empty room, the swinging door. Gathering the borrowed dressing-gown about her, she ran out into the night. The wind leaped at her; a darker shadow moved in the darkness. Catching the Captain's arm, with the strength of desperation she drew him back into the comforting shelter of the thick walls. Then she slammed the door and leaned against it, panting, wide-eyed. Captain Dawson stood blinking in a dazed fashion, the revolver still in his hand.

"Oh, Jim, you must have been mad!"

He looked up from the gun. "Just horribly sane, Mary. More murder—not so successful this time. You'd have been too late, save that failure becomes a habit. Look!" He pulled th trigger, but nothing happened. "Sea-water!"

"Give that horrid thing to me."

"Certainly! It's useless. The cliffs will serve."

She took the gun, and he allowed himself to be led back to the chair by the fire, docile as a child.

"I didn't think you were a coward."

"Must be, or I'd have faced the jump without a bullet."

"It's cowardice to talk like that. You've got to face the music. There's nothing to fear."

"There's nothing to go on for. I'm ruined, and I'll be haunted by this tragedy, all my days."

"We've all tragedies in our lives," she reminded him.

"That's one of my reasons."

"But we carry on. What you were going to do would have made everything so much harder for us. It would have pointed to a guilty conscience—not an act of God!"

He nodded thoughtfully. "I suppose so." He stood up, shamed and penitent. "It's all so grim. Even you call me John's murderer, in your heart. Suppose the court found me guilty of—"

"Jim," she cried earnestly, "if they did, I at least—"

Slight stepped in, wiping his mouth. His sharp eyes mocked them. Mary hurriedly hid the revolver in the folds of the gown.

"Hullo! Hullo! Here's a nice little tatey-tate," Slight jeered.

"And now come in to supper, Captain," said Mary.

She passed into the kitchen, but Slight closed the door after her and barred the way. "Detaining you just for a moment, dear Captain," he said. "Don't go trying no funny tricks with revolvers. I want you alive, not dead. But this'll be another tasty bit of evidence—how the Captain was going to suicide, but was stopped by the lady passenger he'd been making love to."

Captain Dawson's fist shot out, caught the steward's chin, and sent him sprawling. He was about to follow up the attack when he discovered Mrs. Pugh nodding approval in the doorway.

"I quite agree, sir," said Mrs. Pugh dryly. "But you mustn't kill him; that would only mean more trouble. I know how you feel, sir. Them that deal with the sea, I say 'God pity them!' But come along and try that stew of mine."

She urged him into the kitchen, and turned to frown on Slight.

"By God, I'll break him now!" vowed Slight, scrambling to his feet.

"If I were you, young man," said Mrs. Pugh, "I'd not be so free with the Lord's name. Maybe He's got His eye on you. We folk in these parts see things."

"Must have good eyesight to see things round here! Well, what'd'yer see about me, old Mother Hubbard?"

Mrs. Pugh looked musingly at Slight—and past him.

"Right at your shoulder," said she, "I see death."

He could not check the start, the frightened glance behind; but recovering, he sneered, "Death—*ahr!*"

"At your shoulder," said Mrs. Pugh.

DR. BARTHOLOMEW passed into the kitchen, followed by the big red quartermaster in sweater and dungaree trousers.

The two he had summoned from the bedroom stood staring at a third man—a man who had risen from the dead. One was young Allardyce, his head still bandaged. The girl with him was an ash blonde, slim and youthful, with the great blue eyes of a doll. The man at whom they stared, whose name they spoke in amaze, was heavy, middle-aged, grave.

"Sorry!" he apologized ironically.

"Sorry, Robert?"

"For not being dead. My elimination would have been providential."

"That isn't true," said Mada Longden, while the boy at her side stood dumb.

"Love's not so blind as the poets make out, Mada. I loved my wife when she was only fond of me, and I love her now when even fondness has evaporated."

"WE didn't wish you dead—we didn't!" Mada protested.

"If I'd mattered more, you might have. I was—nearly. I was stunned and went down, but I saw them hauling you out. I came to the surface and the current swept me away. I shouted; no one heard. A crate of drowned fowls came along. I clung to it. Not a jolly voyage, but it ended at last in a little bay. I walked till I dropped. A farmer picked me up in his cart. Here I am."

"Let me get you a drink. You're done." Allardyce spoke mechanically, and his hands were unsteady as he brought the glass to Mada's husband.

"Thanks!" Longden drank deeply, and then said into their strained silence: "Queer situation! The perfect triangle, dramatically broken, dramatically restored. You took a chance, Allardyce, in letting me have your place in that boat."

"Impulse. Don't want any laurel-wreaths."

"You believed in your star, didn't you? You thought, 'Let Fate decide between us; and I'm so sure of the verdict that I'll let this decrepit husband have the best of the running.'"

"Robert," the girl interposed, "you're cruel, cynical. Don't stand there talking about the splendid thing Neil did, as if you were a dispassionate judge. He was in the boat, Robert. He risked his life."

"I admit it. The point that amused me was that the gods were rewarding you with such slapstick humor. Even on the crate I had to smile at you two ashore smugly saying, 'We gave him his chance—Fate has removed him.'"

"Robert, we were saying nothing of the kind."

"Are you quite sure, Mada?"

Her eyes fell before his steady glance.

The younger man stepped forward. "Whether we said it or not, that was my feeling. I love Mada, and she loves me."

"I knew in Singapore," said Longden calmly, "that you loved her, and that she thought she loved you."

"It's no use, Robert—I do love Neil."

"You thought you loved me once," he said wryly.

"Look here, Longden," the young man burst out, "since we're being so calm and sensible—what do you intend to do about it? You're taking it as if we'd confessed a mutual liking for—for Turkish cigarettes."

"I think we're doing much better than if we were normal."

"Oh, Robert, I wish you'd drop that icy pose. I admit you've every right to hate us, but Neil risked his life—"

"To state a test case, and judgment's gone against him. I intend to stand by that, Mada. Perhaps the dog in the manger loved his manger. I've always been rather sorry for him. You see—"

The kitchen door opened, and they were transformed into three limp survivors of a shipwreck. . . .

The firelight flickered unsteadily on the curved white walls; the wind still shrieked in from the sea; the roar of the waves rose louder. In all the little cells of the lighthouse exhausted people slept, forgetting for a while. But in that main room there was one who did not sleep. Presently he rose, and crossing noiselessly on stockinged feet, stood over the snoring steward.

"Slight!" His voice was low but insistent, like the boom of the sea.

"What?" Slight rose with a start. "Hell, O'Casey, can't you leave a man in peace?"

"No," said O'Casey on the same note.

The looming shadow of the quartermaster sent a wave of alarm through Slight. "We got no quarrel!"

"No quarrel at all at all—but I've me job to do."

"Job? You're dreaming!"

O'Casey spoke very deliberately. "I saw you, Slight. It wasn't her slipping just as she was getting into the boat that cost her swate life. 'Twas you, you swine! You slashed her fingers with the knife that had been such a help in getting you through the crowd."

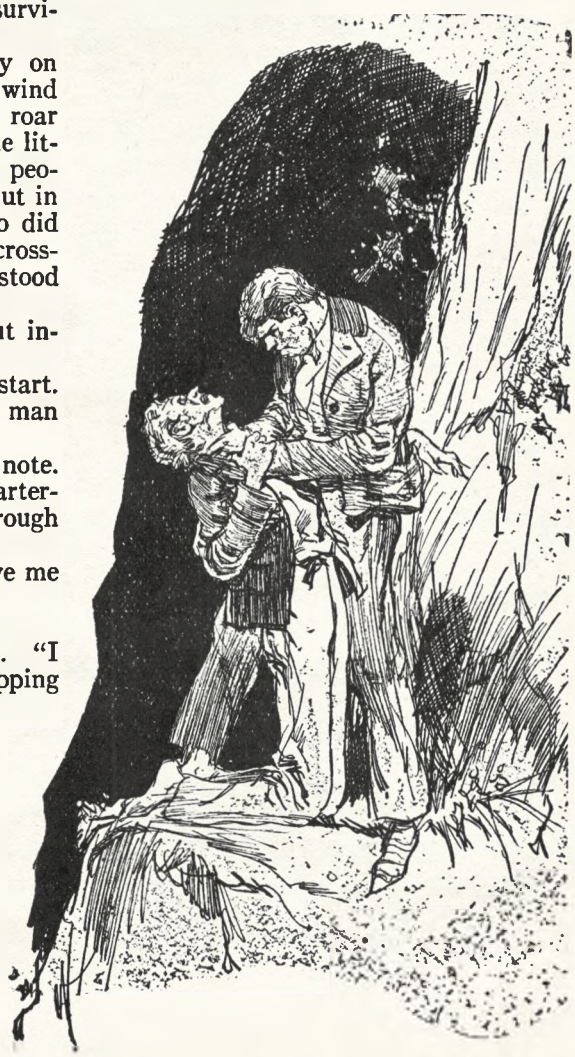
"Its a lie," wept Slight, cowering. "I don't even know who you mean."

"I mane the stewardess, Nell Murphy. It was you or her for that boat. I saw. I couldn't get near you, but I saw. And her with a passenger's kiddy in the crook of her arm."

"I never, I tell you! And anyway, what business was she of yours?"

"We were to be married this time home."

"I never knew! Honest, I never knew." Slight held up hands locked as if in prayer. "Listen, O'Casey, you can come in on a good thing, fifty-fifty. I'm going to get a packet out of the Captain on a bluff. It's the chance of a lifetime, so help me!"



**O'Casey's hands closed on the steward's throat. . . . "Now it's your turn, Slight! You'll have walked in your slape—being troubled by drames—and gone over the cliffs!"**

"The Ould Man's in luck then, for it's yourself won't be here in the morning." His great hands closed on Slight's throat. "The saving of your dirty skin cost her life and the kid's, and as many more as you could stab or pull down. Now it's your turn. No, you won't be here, Slight, for you'll have walked in your slape—being troubled by drames—and gone over the cliffs!"

In that grip the steward was powerless. O'Casey lifted him as easily as a cat lifts a mouse. With his elbow he lifted the latch and passed out, steadily, surely, like a machine. Returning in a matter of seconds, he brushed empty hands together and stretched out again. The dying firelight played on the face of one who could sleep soundly, his task accomplished.

O'CASEY, Longden and the farm boy carried the body they had recovered from the craggy rock far below, through the little wind-tattered garden and placed it in the waiting wagon. By that third morning the storm had blown itself out. The clouds had been swept away, leaving an emptiness of blue. The sea heaved lazily, and a tang of salt lingered in the crisp air. The lighthouse and the cottages of the village by the cove below gleamed very white. No trace of the *Manzanilla* was to be seen.

Longden mopped his brow. He looked very wan.

O'Casey gave him a sympathetic glance.

"Should have let me manage him alone, sorr."

"Oh, would you have carried him in your arms?" asked the boy, thrilled.

"Faith, why not?"

"My nerves aren't as strong as yours, O'Casey," Longden confessed. "The sight of him—like that—has shaken me up."

"Alive, sorr, Slight wasn't much of a man, but he's as good a corpse as another," said O'Casey piously. "The sea missed him once, but not twice. He's gone before the Great Judge now, sorr, and dacent buried let him be. May some one do the like for us poor sinners when our time comes."

Longden agreed absently, and gave the sailor the price of a drink.

"Very welcome, sorr, and dacent too. I'll be giving him something of a wake. All right, me bucko, full ahead!"

The whip flicked, and O'Casey lounged comfortably on the wagon, enjoying the sunshine, beside that which had been the murderer of Nell Murphy.

Longden strolled off along the cliffs, musing: "There, but for the grace of God and a crate of fowls, goes Robert Longden."

"There's something you, at least, must know, Mary," said Dawson.

THEY sat on the weather-whitened bench, gazing out across the sea—so gentle now—while Captain Dawson told Mary Villiers of Slight's threats, refusing to profit in her case by the accident of his death. When he had done, she turned to the tired haunted man, all sympathy in her eyes.

"Poor, dear Jim!" She laid her hand on his.

"You don't even need my denials?"

She shook her head. "I gave our host a surprise—I told him I'm to be married," she said with apparent irrelevance.

"Married? You?" He gaped blankly at her.

"Yes. You're going to marry me, Jim. Why should sorrow and tragedy stand in the path of love?"

To that she clung, though the mazed sailor, humbled by disaster, fought against his heart's desire.

"What a lover!" she protested at last, her eyes shining. "Aren't you ever, ever going to kiss me?"

He took her in his arms and found strength and solace.

When Mrs. Pugh called them for a "nice cup of tea" they went into the house hand in hand. . . .

The rough bleached seat was occupied now by young Allardyce and Mada Longden. She put her finger on his lips.

"You're not to interrupt, but let me sum it all up," she said. "Robert won't set me free. I'm not worrying about myself. When a woman's in love, nothing matters. It's *you*. The white man's tropics are a suburb. If we miss those few mumbled words of the marriage service, it means ruin for your career. . . . No, no, be quiet! A married man's free compared with what you'd be. Suppose I became just the woman for whom you'd wrecked everything? That's not a sympathetic rôle. Love makes us cowards, really. If Robert still refuses to let me go, I can't believe I'm worth the sacrifice you'd have to make."

"Darling, I swear you are, a thousand times over!"

"Now, yes—but in ten years' time?"

Glum silence fell on them. Longden smiled crookedly when he saw them, like children on a penitents' bench.

"Sorry to intrude, but the boat's almost in."

Young Allardyce started up angrily. "Longden, you've got to come down to earth, and drop this lofty pose."

"The poor husband—what a brute he always is! However, you needn't punch me. Mada, my dear, you'll receive the essential hotel-bill in due course."

This sudden surrender took their breath away.

"Thank that steward fellow. In death he was a good friend to you. Until I saw his body, I hadn't quite realized, Allardyce, what you risked when you let me take your place in that boat."

"But Longden— I mean to say—" The words trailed off; he did not know what he meant to say.

"Call it a noble gesture, or making a virtue of necessity. I was old for you, Mada; I took a chance; I've lost you now, just as if you'd gone down with the ship."

"Oh, you're so funny!" She bit on her handkerchief to choke back the laughter of hysteria.

"Marriages go smash every day. Perhaps that dead steward mentioned the shortness of life and the need for making the most of it. How could either of us do that if I kept you tied to me?"

"I don't know what to make of all this," Allardyce complained, at a loss. "If you flourished a gun—cursed and raved—or threatened—all that stuff—I could understand it; but what can a fellow do when you—"

"Not playing according to the conventions, eh?"

"That's it! No! Oh, Lord, I don't know!"

"I'm not a great lover of the erotic novelist school—just an ordinary human being."

Mada stamped her foot in utter exasperation. "I don't believe you've ever loved me!"

ROBERT LONGDEN smiled wryly. "The love of average folk isn't quite so hardy as some people'd have you believe, Mada. I'm not talking about the Antonys and Cleopatras—I mean the Browns and Smiths. Love's being murdered all over the place every minute. The fools are those who won't admit it."

"And your love's been murdered in a matter of hours?"

"A matter of a year, Mada. The last few days have merely put it out of its misery."

Mada sniffed. "You must feel much better."

"I do. The sight of that steward Slight, all bruised, broken and empty, made me realize there were other things in life—even other loves."

"Oh, I hate you!" Mada stormed. "You're my husband. You shouldn't be able to discuss our love like a bridge problem!"

"Not if I were a villain or a hero," he agreed. "If I were a villain, I'd kill you both." He struck a pose. "A hero, Allardyce, would thrash you within an inch of your life, you cur, and win back his true love." He shrugged. "Because I'm just an ordinary man who's learned some sense—well, I smile, write off the bad debt, and walk away."

"Longden," said the young man, pink with embarrassment, "I don't know how to—er—put it, but I think it's mighty fine of you to be an 'ordinary man,' as you call it. I mean—"

"Oh," said Mada weakly, wiping her eyes, "go and pick him a bouquet; then let's all kiss and be friends!"

"—Hullo, Doctor!" said Longden hastily.

"The boat's in. You must be away," said Dr. Bartholomew, mopping his brow after the climb.

The three shipwrecked people agreed.

FROM the height of the headland the ferry looked like a toy.

"Well, that's over," said Murray.

"And I don't suppose you're sorry," said Dr. Bartholomew.

"Far from it! But I'd like to have seen more of Mrs. Villiers. Should have, too—but she crashed everything by announcing she's going to be married. Whoever he is, he's in luck."

"The Captain would agree with you there."

"You bet! Serve him right—old pumpkin! Good out of evil, all the same. She gave me just what I needed to complete my idea."

"So? Then there was drama in them, after all?"

"Only very indirectly. Took the trained eye to pick the one point. There were I and Captain both interested—and all the time she was about to marry another man! It's this way," the dramatist expounded, hammering out the points on that weather-bleached bench, while the gulls screamed and Dr. Bartholomew, ruddy as a farmer, nodded.

The lazy sea smiled in the sunshine.

# The Trouble

***The surprising story of an upright young man whose suppressed wicked impulses become human and real—become, in fact, his tormenting second self.***

*The Story Thus Far:*

THAT infernal professor's lecture on the secret of success—that was what started it! All the great men of history won out, he claimed, by getting in touch with their suppressed impulses; and he sold me a book for ten dollars ($10.) and told how to do it.

Well, I carried out the funny exercises and directions in that book faithfully; and—one morning I woke up in my room at Mrs. Lammick's where I lodged, and there was another party in bed with me!

He was asleep. I got up and was half dressed when he awoke. There was something familiar about his features. "I demand to know who you are," I said.

Stretching his arms and yawning, the party replied, "I'm Young Excelsior's Double, or the Mystery Man of the Second Floor Back."

"That is no answer," I said coldly.

He kicked back the covers, and I saw he was wearing one of my night-shirts. "Elroy," he said, "why not buy us pajajamas instead of flour-sacks?"

Whereupon he got up, and in spite of my protests dressed himself in my best blue serge suit. He had gradually backed toward the window, and the morning sun threw his shadow onto the carpet. But though the serge suit and hat cast the usual black silhouette, the head and the two hands cast nothing at all. Where there ought to have been a shadow, there was not even a film. "Now I understand," I exclaimed. "You are just an optical illusion, probably the result of indigestion, and I can prove it because you have not even got a shadow. Ha-ha!"

"Ha-ha yourself, Elroy," he replied in a grating voice. "Ha-ha while the ha-ha-ing is good. I'll get your shadow the same as I've already got your goat. Listen, did you ever hear of an optical illusion borrowing lunch-money? Watch me. There's a ten-dollar bill in the old wallet. Let's have it."

That was the dreadful beginning; and my Suppressed Comrade—or Suppy, as he called himself, proceeded to make my life a nightmare, in that hitherto placid town of Quantus. For example:

He astonished (and, I regret to say delighted) a church sociable by offering to sell kisses to the girls at a quarter apiece; and he actually got by with it, and turned in quite a bit of money—all this, of course, being laid at my door.

He borrowed money from my office friend Ray Buckbee and lost it at poker.

He pestered me for money and spent it on a spree at a road-house—in the course of which he pilfered a banjo from the musicians and proposed marriage (in my name, of course) to two unknown girls whom he met at that tavern!

I was already engaged, I must explain, to Miss Mullet of Elm Center; but Suppy wrecked that too. He met Miss Mullet and her mother at the railroad station—and here's his explanation of what happened:

"Miss Mullet and her mother got off the train—and just then an inspiration came. Ten feet away was an anonymous little girl who didn't seem to be having much fun. I went over and kissed her. . . . The Mullets are on their way back to Elm Center."

# *with my Double*

## *By* HORATIO WINSLOW

**Illustrated by Henry Thiede.... Decorations by Margery Stocking**

And then he committed an even more serious crime. He met Mr. Van Hulsteyn, my employer, who intrusted him (as he often intrusted me) with over a thousand dollars to deposit at the bank. But Suppy disappeared without depositing that money. And when I went in search of him, I learned he had gone to attend a cock-fight. Mr. Van Hulsteyn found the deposit had not been made, and discharged me. He gave me until Friday to restore the money or—go to prison.

Well, I found my Suppressed Comrade at that cock-fight, betting all the money he hadn't otherwise squandered. More, he won over a thousand, and just before the place was raided by the sheriff, Suppy pretended to turn over the money to me. I escaped out a window and chartered a taxicab—and then found Suppy had stuffed a roll of paper instead of money into my pocket. And the driver had me jailed because I couldn't pay him.

My friend Ray Buckbee paid my bill and fine next morning—just in time for me to reach the great Old Home Week celebration of the Young People's Advancement Society, over which I was to preside. This, I may note, was an important occasion, for several famous natives of Quantus were to attend—in particular Mr. Spinford, the Bermuda Onion King; and Mr. Davenanter, the Master Mind of Wall Street, whom my employer Mr. Van Hulsteyn hoped to interest in his business. An important occasion, I repeat—and there, presiding over it, was my diabolic Suppressed Comrade! I draw the veil over many of Suppy's outrageous performances at that gathering. But as a climax he maneuvered the pompous Mr. Davenanter into upsetting a bucket of water over his own head, and the meeting broke up in a riot. . . .

*"Where is that money?"* I demanded of Suppy as soon as I could lay hands on him.

He replied that he had spent part of it —and placed the rest of it with a stakeholder in a bet that he (or I) would next day jump off the bridge into the river seventy-five feet below! Again I avoid details. Suffice it that next day I actually did make that foolhardy jump, and in the presence of Miss Van Hulsteyn—only to find that the sum wagered was only ten dollars! Is it any wonder that I was angry when I caught sight of the wretch lolling on the river-bank and enjoying the scene? *(The story continues in detail:)*

IN spite of a wild desire to even all scores by means of physical violence, common sense urged me to hold my hand. After all, it was still possible to avoid becoming a fugitive from justice, providing that by force or strategy I could get the one thousand and eleven dollars from whatever remained of the sum total won at the chicken-fight.

Young Mr. Spinford and the others had already started for the road above. Paying no attention to their calls, I ducked under the bridge. It was hard work breaking through the scrub, and five full minutes had passed before I reached

my Suppressed Comrade, perched on a small rocky ledge screened by bushes.

He shook my hand effusively. "Congratulations, Elroy! Scramble up. Just room for two, with no publicity. You're an ace. Where'd you put the envelope? Don't let the greenbacks get soggy."

I DECIDED to say nothing, at least for the moment, about how Mr. Antonio (Spaghetti) Antonopolous had taken the twenty dollars in payment of an unsettled bill for one bottle of sparkling grape-juice, imported.

"I would like to know," I remarked in as calm a tone as possible, "why you forced me to risk life, limb and future happiness for two ten-dollar notes?"

My Suppressed Comrade moved over to make room for me on the tiny ledge. "Sit down, Elroy. It's a long story, but it has a happy ending. I begin with Exhibit A."

From his coat he produced a large leather wallet on which was written in ink, *"To Suppy, from Doc Linnahan."*

"My entire capital, Elroy; and it's yours right up to the last bill. In exchange I'll take the bridge-jumping twenty for lunch-money. That's all I want."

With these words he thrust the wallet in my coat pocket, and at the same time, removed the crumpled envelope, which had become sealed through the action of my wet garments on the mucilage.

He shook his head and smiled sadly.

"I'm not proud of what happened, Elroy. Money won at a cocking-main isn't good money. Neither is the kind I won later. But we faced the problem of paying that thousand-odd dollars to Mr. Van Hulsteyn, didn't we, Elroy, old pal? We had to do the best we could, whether we liked it or not. Last night, Elroy, since you have a right to know, I won five hundred dollars and a lot more in addition to the thousand and thirty-six smackers I carried away from the cocking-main."

I gasped, unable to believe I had heard aright. "And all your winnings are in the wallet in my pocket?"

"All, Elroy. Not the gross winnings, you understand, but the net winnings."

I felt obliged to make a clear statement of my principles. "I cannot conscientiously accept," I declared, "more than the one thousand eleven dollars necessary to repay Mr. Van Hulsteyn, plus the value of my certificate of deposit."

"Then you may give what's over and above that amount to charity, Elroy." He patted his breast pocket. "All I want is the twenty dollars in the envelope. You're not cold, are you?"

As a matter of fact, owing probably to my wet clothes, the breeze seemed to be getting colder and rawer. I would have been glad to use any pretext of going back to the room and changing my clothes, but as a matter of politeness and also because I wished to return the twenty dollars to my Suppressed Comrade before he opened the envelope, I answered: "Oh, no."

Picking up two pebbles, he rattled them in his cupped hand.

"After the cocking-main last night, and after I'd salvaged a lot of the boys with bail and this and that, Nate Cullen complained that the sheriff's raid had shattered his nervous system. Doc Linnahan and Buck Wilmot reported the same. I wasn't any too steady myself. So we detoured to Peek Inn to wangle a few nips of nerve-tonic."

"Nerve-tonic?"

"Exactly, Elroy. And were we popular! Young Spinny is now an ardent admirer of yours, to say nothing of the Tiger Girl."

"Who?" I demanded, badly startled.

"Wake up, Elroy; you've heard about Lottie Hackett, the Tiger-girl torch-singer of Quantus and Chicago. Don't you remember that when Ray first spoke of her a year ago, we wished we could come into her life as a good influence?"

"It was just a passing thought," I retorted with dignity.

MY Suppressed Comrade smiled and rattled the pebbles. "That's how we put it into action, Elroy. Passingly. In a passing, care-free manner, we sat down at the table where she was sojourning with Spinny, and made Number Three. Little Lottie has red hair and lives up to it. It was a treat to listen to her prattle in her childish way, every now and then breaking into rhyme and rhythm. She told about the big-league pitcher that she busted with his own bat, and the Chicago capitalist she pushed out of a second-story window. The Tiger Girl is all tiger, and all girl too. That reminds me of a little incident involving our party of three and a Mr. Billings—"

"Perhaps the incident will wait for another time," I interrupted as courteously as possible. It was not only the chill and cold that suggested this remark but an unpleasant observation which I had just made. The afternoon sun, still

"'Six and four—our night to roar!' We shook. . . . Up pops the devil—the fatal seven. Spatsy scooped up the three thousand and galloped into the dawn."

topping the fringe of bushes, cast shadows of my Suppressed Comrade's head and hands on the ledge. They were no longer vague and gauzy. As I maneuvered to a favorable position for studying my own silhouette, I was shocked and horrified to discover, not only that the shadows of my head and hands were darkish gray, rather than their former solid black, but that they were identical in color and density with those of my Suppressed Comrade.

No doubt ultimate disaster hovered in the near distance. This time it was not the wind which made me shiver, but a realization of my situation. If the personality of my Suppressed Comrade kept growing stronger and my own weaker, as indicated by our shadows, it was a question of time before I would become the Suppressed Comrade myself. To prevent this catastrophe, my first move was to pay back the one thousand and eleven dollars to Mr. Van Hulsteyn.

"Check, Elroy; the incident is out. Follow me closely. When I paid the high-pressure bill for our little party, I found I had left in my pants a grand total of seven hundred and seventy-two dollars and eighty-five cents."

I did a quick problem in subtraction. "You mean you had already spent two hundred and sixty-three dollars and fifteen cents?" I started to shiver and caught myself just in time. "How?"

"Oh, for this and that, Elroy." He dropped the pebbles, scooped them up, and sent them spinning against me. "I say to myself: 'Not enough. Elroy needs more. How to get it?' Doc Linnahan is still reasonably filthy with the stuff. I pull the eminent veterinary surgeon into a remote corner. 'Doc,' I bait him, 'Something tells me tonight is my night to roar. How well do you manipulate the galloping six-sided elephant-tusks?' A little additional tact, forbearance, and use of the necessary *patois*, concocted the most agreeable crap-game of the decade."

He rattled the pebbles in his hand. "Watch me, Elroy. We plunk down two X's. Doc Linnahan fades. He mutters when the dice show him a natural."

"A natural?"

"One of those technical terms every young man about town should know: four pips on one die, three on the other. We let the bet ride. Doc covers it with two double sawbucks." My Suppressed Comrade rolled the pebbles, picked them up, blew on them, and then rattled them close to his right ear. "Get the idea? Say it with me, Elroy. *'Come seven—come eleven!'* I throw. I win again.

"At two-thirty A. M. Doc Linnahan retires, leaving me his roll, his autographed wallet and his regards. Our capital has fattened into a staggering heap of small bills totaling twelve hundred and eighty-two dollars and eighty-

**A terrific explosion racked the room. "Eureka, Elroy!" my Suppressed Comrade called out as I came over the threshold.**

five cents. Five hundred and more ahead, Elroy, and the night still young. A stranger, decorated with white spats, fills the gap left by Doc Linnahan. He thinks he's a hot potato. We take picks on each other. Spatsy fades us, and we fade him, with miscellaneous results. At peep of dawn we have on tap exactly eighty-five cents in the vest pocket, ten dollars and a handkerchief in our pants, and an even fifteen hundred in our outstretched hand."

I really could not help gasping. My Suppressed Comrade nodded as, with an agreeable smile, he continued:

"Interlude. A challenge from young Spinny. He mistook the handkerchief in my pants pocket for another roll. Hence the bridge-jumping bet. When he found it was for a measly ten dollars, he felt all hot and bothered. And now—

"The dice come around to us. We toss down all the greenbacks and the yellowbacks. They make a pile on the floor like a Sunday newspaper. 'Friends,' we say, 'there's a grand and a half. Cover it all or any part.' Without a word Spatsy flips fifteen pieces of paper on top of the heap. Each one is a hundred-dollar bill."

"You mean you were each betting fifteen hundred dollars on a dice game?"

"Not on the game, Elroy. On one roll of the dice."

HE squatted down on hands and knees, and shook the pebbles in his hand.

"Picture the scene, Elroy. The birds are singing. The morning sun is painting the world in myriad colors. Fifty revelers gathered around are pop-eyed as they lamp the important money blowing loose on the floor. All of 'em for us, the local favor*yte*. Go on, Suppy! Get that spatted slicker!

"We pick up the dice, blow on 'em, talk to 'em, listen to 'em, whip 'em across the floor. As they settle, Spatsy emits a whoop of joy. Our come-out reads Big Dick. (Ten to you, Elroy.) A hard figure, but are we discouraged? No.

"We roll, and roll for our point. Every total in those cussed cubes leers up at us. Nines twice. A whole train of boxcars. Enough elevens to sink a ship. More fives, sixes, eights and small-fry than an adding machine could digest. But no ten.

"We cuddle the six-sided babies. Something tells us this throw will be the an-

swer. Nobody breathes. We rattle 'em and rub 'em and shift 'em to our left hand. We get down to business. 'Six and four—our night to roar! Pair of fives—save our lives! Make it ten—that's our yen! Big Dick—come quick!' We shoot. . . . Up pops the devil."

"The devil?"

"Seven, Elroy. The fatal seven. One judge and half a jury. We'd lost. Spatsy scooped up the three thousand dollars—every last tattered bill—and galloped out into the dawn without leaving me so much as his middle name."

FOR the first time I realized how cold I really was. My teeth began to chatter. At least five seconds passed before I was able to utter a single word.

"You mean you lost the whole fifteen hundred dollars?"

"Elroy, I cannot tell a lie. There was nothing left but the eighty-five cents; I slipped that to the hat-check girl." He grinned at me like a Cheshire cat.

In a mechanical way I produced the wallet. "Then what is in here?"

"As I told you, Elroy, my net winnings. Check 'em over by yourself. You'll find seven unpaid bills all made out to Doc, a prescription-pad, and a little tin box labeled '*Sore Paws—External Use Only.*' All yours, including the wallet."

As I itemized the wallet's contents, to find them exactly as my Suppressed Comrade had stated and with no money of any description, my throat felt as though I had swallowed a billiard-ball which had wedged against my Adam's apple. What chance had I now of repaying Mr. Van Hulsteyn? And he was not a man to relent: I, Elroy Simmons, was going to State's prison!

Smiling in the same broad way, my Suppressed Comrade drew the envelope from his pocket. "Congratulations, Elroy! If I spent some time coming to the point, I had my reasons. I wanted to see if you could take it on the chin without squawking. And can you! Not a howl. Not a yelp. Not even a snap of the eyeballs. You're a man's man, Elroy. Tragedy clawed at your heart, but the expression on your face never changed." He ripped open the flap of the envelope. "I admire you, Elroy; and in my opinion, the brightest jewel in your diadem is the fact that you can take it. When you're looking for the next job, tell your employer that. If he doesn't come through, I'll give you a job myself when I run this twenty-dollar shoestring here into important—"

He stopped.

Having shaken the envelope violently with no result, he frowningly explored its interior with his fingers, and finally split open both ends and shook it again. When he next turned to me, his appearance suggested that of a party immediately after having bitten into a bad persimmon. His suave and smooth manner was no longer in evidence.

"Where's that twenty?" he shouted in a hoarse voice. "Don't try to hold out on me, Elroy, if you know what's good for you. Produce! Produce!"

It was now my turn. In a few curt words, all of which came from between my teeth, I explained how Mr. Antonio (Spaghetti) Antonopolous had taken the twenty dollars as payment for an extra bottle of sparkling grape-juice, imported, which had not been paid for at Peek Inn the night before.

"And—and you let him get away with it!" exploded my Suppressed Comrade after his mouth had opened and shut several times without result.

"What could I do?"

Clamping his teeth down on what was left of the envelope, he tore it across twice and hurled the scraps into the nearest clump of bushes.

"What could I do?" he mimicked in the same strained voice. "He watches my whole capital—twenty dollars—disappearing down a rat-hole, and he says, 'What could I do!'"

Clenching both fists, he raised them in the air as he screamed:

"Omit that twenty dollars! Omit the man who made that twenty dollars! Omit the man who wouldn't get up at night and tear his shirt to strike an omit light to omit the omit man who made that omit twenty dollars!"

A CONVULSIVE shiver followed this outburst. Then he seemed to gain control of himself. Dropping again to a sitting position, he circled his knees with his arms and stared grimly at me.

"You can cut along, Elroy," he said. "I'm through with you. Henceforth and hereafter I'm on my own. No more favors. No more splits of money. No more helping you pay old Van Shylock. Go on home. This ledge isn't big enough for me and a nit-wit who can't even keep the money he wins."

I had made my decision before. "Very well," I commented gratingly. "The

truth is going to come out sooner or later, and unless I break a leg, it will be sooner."

He raised his head. "What do you mean, Elroy?"

"After I have changed my wet clothes and had a bite to eat," I told him, "I am going straight to Greenway Court."

HE frowned, then laughed unpleasantly. "Are you calling on Mrs. Van H. or little Roddie, Junior? Papa left for Chicago on the two-fifteen. As for Julie—" He clapped a hand over his mouth.

"Do you mean to say you have an engagement with Miss Van Hulsteyn?"

"I was wrong to mention the lady's name. As a gentleman, Elroy, forget and forgive."

I stepped to the middle of the ledge. "I have a right to ask the question, and I insist on an answer. You say you have a date this evening?"

"It's none of your business, Elroy, but I have. What's more, my dates wou'd come a lot easier if you wouldn't gum up things between times. I don't know what you said up there on the bridge, but chances are you queered my standing. Never mind: I'll start from scratch. She's worth the trouble."

"I forbid you to have anything to do with her," I shouted.

"Words, old Life of the Party, blunt-nosed words. Are you ready to sharpen them with actions?" He looked up inquiringly. "The lady in question falls within the category of what we connoisseurs term a kiss-dodger. She's the first I've ever met; it becomes a battle of the giants. But tip off all your friends to bet on me to the limit, even if they have to give longish odds."

"If necessary," I said, fighting to remain calm, "I will warn her against you."

My Suppressed Comrade tried to shake my hand. "I call that a friendly act, Elroy," he remarked with undisguised pleasure. "Call her up and tell her she must have nothing to do with me. Really, old Inspiration, I had no idea you knew so much about women."

I paid no attention to this jeer. The time had come for me to take matters into my own hands. As a parting shot I said: "Have you ever suspected that your attentions may be unwelcome?"

"Not at the Venetian River Fête tonight, Elroy. I know. Reason: the lady, whose name isn't being mentioned, made the date herself. She's promised, as we drift tranquilly downstream to Pavilion Island, to give me a sure tip on how to win the prize contest."

I was about to step off the ledge when these last words brought me up short.

"Prize contest?"

An obvious sneer curled his upper lip. "I suppose you haven't quit reading the magazines, have you, Elroy? And even if you have you certainly must remember how Mrs. Smythe, housewife of Vincennes, Indiana, won five thousand dollars by coining a name for a new baking-powder; and how John J. Hoojah, farmer of Sun Prairie, Wisconsin, copped seven thousand five hundred for a shaving-cream slogan; how Olaf Peterson, barber of Tallahassee, Florida, bagged twenty thousand, with an extra fifteen hundred for promptness, when he rearranged the letters S-H-I-N-G-T-O-N-A-W to spell the name of a well-known president of the United States."

"I have not heard of any prize contest here in Quantus," I said with a deliberate yawn.

"The news breaks tomorrow. So far it's known only to a few of us early birds."

"Is it in connection with Old Home Week?"

"I'll say it is. Young Spinford's putting up the prize money. A little foolish, yes, but you know Spinny. He'd have bet his father's last onion on that bridge-jumping stuff. A single grand means nothing to him."

"One thousand dollars?"

"Right, Elroy. Nine hundred and ninety-nine and one more."

"What sort of a prize contest is it, and why should the lady know how it can be won?"

"I've talked too much already, Elroy. I'd rather be torn to pieces by wild automobiles than betray a confidence that is sacred. Why are you butting into my business, anyhow? You're only one of the boob public. The lady's tip doesn't concern you."

I DECIDED to draw him out. "You probably have no date at all," I said.

He fell into my trap. "Is that so! Well, it'll surprise you to know that at seven tonight I'll be under yonder clump of alders, ready to start rowing down the river with Miss Never-Mind-Who."

The ruse had been successful. I tried again. "You have no money to pay for a boat. I suppose you are planning to drift down to Pavilion Island on a raft."

It was my fault, but the Tiger Girl acted as if they were to blame. Scooping up a handful of water, she splashed it all over Mr. Van Hulsteyn's starched shirt.

Plainly my taunts made him forget himself. "Oh, yeah?" he remarked in a grating voice. "Well, our raft happens to be the pride of the City Boat Livery. A fourteen-footer with polished hull and gunwales draped in bunting. Overhead, a string of red and blue Japanese lanterns. At the stern, garlands of flowers forming a perfect canopy. And as you're so interested, Elroy—under that enchanting canopy, waiting to tell me all, will be the lady in question."

As I stood there, still somewhat dazed by this latest bit of news, my Suppressed Comrade stretched his arms widely.

"Beat it, Elroy. Station S-U-P-P-Y signing off. This ledge isn't wide enough for twin beds. I've lost plenty sleep lately, and I want to freshen up to be at my best tonight. Scram!"

For a split second I hesitated, and then without a word stepped off into the bushes as he flung himself full length on the ledge, covered his face and head with his coat, and immediately began snoring like a pig. . . .

As I hurried back toward my room at Mrs. Lammick's, my duty was clear and unescapable: At all costs it was up to me to protect Julie from my unprincipled Suppressed Comrade. In addition, if there was money to be won in prize contests, especially such a sum as one thousand dollars, nobody stood in more desperate need of a helping hand than myself. No matter what the risk, I made up my mind that the party keeping the date in the decorated lantern-hung boat would be none other than myself.

The clock on the First Consolidated Church showed ten minutes of seven when I left the room to take the nearest route to the river. I had made as elaborate a toilet as possible.

As I reached the river road, I wondered if there would be three of us at the date, or only two, and with a sudden misgiving, asked myself if Julie would be there at all. Remembering her attitude on the bridge that afternoon, it did not seem altogether likely, in spite of Doc Linnahan's philosophy.

The first problem solved itself as I had hoped and half expected it would. Peering down the bank from above, I saw my Suppressed Comrade still outstretched and motionless on the ledge. At the sight my chest expanded, and I turned my eyes toward the river, where already scores of gayly illuminated pleasure craft were darting about.

I fairly raced down the little footpath to the clump of alders below the bridge. Through the leaves I could see the soft glow of colored lanterns. I had reached the bank and was within a few feet of the moored boat, when I practically stopped breathing.

Under the rose-hung canopy at the stern, her head resting on a pile of silken pillows, reclined the most beautiful girl I had ever seen in my life.

Her hair shone silkily where the soft lights fell on it. Long curling lashes drooped over her closed eyes. Her parted red lips made you think of a baby that smiles in its dreams. Her arms, round and white, were clasped behind her head. It was plain that she had dropped off to sleep; I could see her slow breathing.

Though he had not exactly prevaricated, my Suppressed Comrade had certainly given me to understand that the lady in the boat would be Julie. She was not Julie, and she did not have the appearance of being the same kind of girl. Nevertheless, I stepped gently into the boat, cast off and shoved out into the stream.

## CHAPTER XVI

THE river was dotted with other craft, some of them cruising against the current but most of them proceeding lazily like us in the direction of Pavilion Island. In the gathering dusk the colored lights added a touch of beauty to the scene which had not been apparent during the day, though it was not yet dark enough to hide the faces of those within twenty feet or so. We had just passed King Point when, owing to an unexpected cross-current, the boat veered suddenly and the lady awoke.

Slowly she drew her hands from behind her head and stretched them out in my direction. I was the same as a man walking in his sleep. I dropped the oars, and at the risk of upsetting the boat, moved in the direction of my unknown passenger. I will not go so far as to say that I had never previously embraced a member of the opposite sex, but it is no exaggeration to state that on no previous occasion had anything like what happened next come into my life. . . .

A considerable interval must have elapsed before, drawing back to look me full in the eye, she said in a husky voice:

"For the love of Gus G. Gazoozleum, listen to the hicks on the point! Didn't they never see a lady and gent in a clinch?"

It was not alone the shock of these words that sent cold waves up and down my spinal column. Though at the Y. P. A. S. meeting I had only seen the back of her head, there was no mistaking that blazing red hair. The lady I was conducting to Pavilion Island could be none other than Lottie Hackett, now Carlotta, the Tiger-girl torch-singer!

Before I could say a word, the Tiger Girl leaned forward and began to stroke my hair. As she ruffled and smoothed it again, at the same time contributing various miscellaneous caresses, I could barely keep from shuddering.

From the bank a shifting spotlight centered directly on us. The different boatloads which passed emitted comments and sarcastic remarks such as, "It's a marathon! . . . He's fainted! . . . Some Cleopatra!"

The Tiger Girl paid no attention. "Petty, I love you because you were right in what you said to me last night." And she broke into a plaintive melody:

*I'll go moaning alone*
*If you don't come back to me;*
*You left a knife in my heart*
*When you wanted to be free—*

Under other circumstances I might have enjoyed her soft though slightly husky voice; but in my present situation the notes had the effect on me of so many red-hot rivets. But I acted the same as if appreciative. The quicker I could learn the method of getting the one thousand dollars, the quicker I could get away.

Very deliberately she took her arms from around my neck, thus allowing me to resume the oars.

"That thousand," I observed as nonchalantly as possible, "will come in mighty handy."

"I'll say, Petty! It's enough to see Chi right. And believe me, the girl friend can show you Chi. We'll be in the papers. I know Eddie McGuffin, one of the Chi newspaper boys. He put me on the first page when I had the run-in with Waffles Hooley, that New York hockey-player."

"Yes," I said, trying to bring the conversation back to what I wanted to know, "the prize may be just a thousand, but it will come at the right time."

She closed her eyes. "Waffles was always saying, 'Anything you want, Lottie, is right with me.' He made me sick, always acting so humble. But the newspapers were ga-ga when they said I hit him twice with his own hockey club. I only hit him once."

"Once must have been enough," I observed, hoping to humor her.

"And was it, Petty! And was it! I might have got into serious trouble if Eddie McGuffin, that Chi newspaper boy, hadn't put me on the front page. He gimme the name of 'Tiger Girl.'"

While trying to concentrate on my next move, I had let the boat drift near the bank. To my horror, I observed we were passing Ray Buckbee, seated beside one of the younger set of Quantus.

"Hello, Lottie!" he yelled. "*Kindly advise by return mail how you like the boy friend.*"

Without the least embarrassment the Tiger Girl responded:

"So this is Quantus! Ask me another, Ray; but get out into the moonlight with that Eskimo baby before you catch cold."

Pulling myself together, I remarked: "I guess it will be easy enough to get that thousand."

"Easy, Petty! You won't hardly have to turn a hand over. He's *kaputt* already. A glass jaw. With anybody like you, it'll be *bam! bam!*—nine, ten—he's out! The old one-two, Petty. The old one-two."

As far as I was concerned, these remarks were largely incomprehensible.

"I can tell that thousand dollars just where to go and just what to do," I suggested in the hope that this would draw out a clearer explanation of how I was to get the money.

HER eyes sparkled. "That's why I love you, Petty. You dominate everything. And you were right about me. Inside, I always wanted to be dominated; and you done it, Petty, you done it."

There was a prickling about my scalp as though the hair on the sides and top was getting ready to stand on end. For the first time I realized the way in which my Suppressed Comrade had attracted the Tiger Girl. While studying English literature in high school, I had read about the poet Byron, and how he always dominated every woman he met. And I remembered that at the time I had thoughtlessly wanted to be a character along the same general lines. Now I realized my Suppressed Comrade had been carrying these wishes into effect.

For a moment I sat there motionless while the water dripped down the oars onto the legs of my trousers.

"You dominate me, Petty. It's wonderful. Nobody ever did that before. That was the trouble between me and Monk Magoon, the singing bootlegger. He was forever knuckling down to me. 'Whatever you like, Baby,' he always said. 'Is good enough for me.' I made the front page again. But I didn't mean to carve him. I just wanted to mark him, that was all!"

I MUST have started rowing again, for my next memory is of crashing into a gayly decorated boat containing Mr. Van Hulsteyn and Mr. Thacker, the cashier of the First National Bank. It was my fault, but the Tiger Girl acted as though they were to blame.

Scooping up a handful of water, she splashed it all over Mr. Van Hulsteyn's starched shirt. "Boopus, have a little drink—get it from the sink—it helps to make you think."

As rapidly as possibly I pulled away from the scene of the collision and the roar of rage let out by my late employer.

"That's how I feel, Petty, when I see a hick dressed up like a head-waiter. I do my stuff, and I make it rough. Oh, Petty, when we get to Chi together!"

"It is going to be a cinch to grab that grand," I observed, deliberately using the slang of my Suppressed Comrade.

"A cinch, Petty. You dominate. Nobody but you ever dominated me. That's why I love you, Petty. You'll slap him down and then collect. Petty, you got no idea how hard I worked trying to get rid of him. That big palook' didn't even try to dominate me. No, Petty, he didn't even try. I had to smoke him out, and Eddie McGuffin put me on the first page again."

She clasped her hands and looked up at me as though I were Napoleon Bonaparte or some one similar. "It sure got me, the way you talked to him at Peek Inn last night. Lucky for us, Petty, they kept you from slapping him down then and there. If you had, Spinny wouldn't have offered you that grand for finishing him tomorrow morning."

The explanation was now comparatively clear. I was expected to defeat in personal combat some unknown character who was infatuated with the Tiger Girl, and thereby gain the prize of one thousand dollars offered by young Mr. Spinford.

"One good sock, and down he goes for the count."

It was at this moment that a canoe, coming rapidly out of the twilight, bumped us midway between bow and stern.

The shock seemed to set off a charge of dynamite in my interior. Without any thought as to consequences, I sprang up, and yanking out the nearest oar, hit the man in the canoe over the head. He tried to duck, but the oar caught him just the same. As the canoe went over and floated down the stream with the party clinging to the keel, I heard language employed which had not come to my ears since my Uncle Henry, the late husband of my Aunt Paula, put his hand into the gopher-trap.

But it was not these remarks which took the strength out of my knees and dropped me trembling back onto the seat.

Standing up, the Tiger Girl screeched in an exultant voice: "Dust yourself, rummy, dust yourself! Tomorrow morning in the ring, when Petty slaps you down, you'll stay down."

"Wh-what?" I gulped.

"Didn't you recognize him, Petty?"

I had certainly recognized him. He was the Chicago thug in the undersized dress suit who had bullied and pushed me about at the chicken-fight. Before I could explain that never under any circumstances would I engage in a personal encounter with any such party, she continued:

"The big hunk o' nothing, Petty! He claims I'm his little vi'let with wrong ideas. In the morning you'll push him over and out o' my life. K. O. Caveman oughta be your monicker. . . . Come on, Petty, dominate me some more."

## CHAPTER XVII

GASPING and choking, I woke up in my bed at Mrs. Lammick's. It was broad daylight. The clock on the washstand pointed to half-past seven.

One thing persisted from my dream, and that was the oppressive odor. It penetrated into the farthest pockets of my lungs. Still coughing, I looked across the room where, just below the ceiling, rolled a thick cloud of yellow smoke.

"Fire!" I yelled, leaping from the covers.

"Don't be silly, Elroy. This is no fire—merely a scientific experiment." It was the voice of my Suppressed Comrade, who stood beside the table looking at the fumes and shaking his head in a puzzled way. He was fully dressed, a fact which at this early hour certainly meant that he had spent the night out. "Did you have a good time with Lottie? Did she tell you all?"

WITHOUT replying to these questions or explaining how at eleven-thirty the evening before I had escaped from the Tiger-girl torch-singer, I regarded him in a stern manner.

"I demand to know what you are doing with all those little bottles and boxes on the table and bureau. What is responsible for this smell and smoke?"

Laying his cigarette on the table, my Suppressed Comrade picked up a measuring-glass in one hand and a small paper pamphlet in the other.

"I wish I knew myself, Elroy; I do indeed. It says here, without any equivocation or side-stepping, that if you take a piece the size of your thumbnail from Box No. 3 and drop it into a glass containing equal parts of Vial No. 8 and distilled water, there will be a jolly burst of flame. My dope is that these directions were mixed. But the day is young yet, Elroy; we'll try it again."

I stepped forward sternly. "I forbid you to try it again, and before I forget myself enough to proceed immediately to physical violence, I advise you to explain this outrage and one or two others."

Laying down the pamphlet and measuring-glass, my Suppressed Comrade looked at me, shook his head, and resumed his cigarette.

"You certainly haven't forgotten, Elroy, when we were just a boy, so to speak."

"Forgotten what?"

"Christmas, Elroy, Christmas. Every other lad in the block getting a set of chemistry experiments. We never did. Nobody ever understood us, Elroy." He dropped back into the chair by the window, rubbed out his cigarette, and wiped his eyes.

"What are you sniffling about?" I asked indignantly.

"The unhappy past, Elroy. We wanted sets of chemistry experiments for Christmas. What did we get? Neckties. Mittens. Books about honest bootblacks in the big city who got to be millionaires. But never a chemistry set. The tragedy of childhood. The suppressed hanker."

What he had said was the absolute truth, though I had not thought about it for years. In studying matters connected with the re-charging of dry batteries, I had tackled chemistry to some extent, but it was a very different kind

of chemistry from that contained in the sets sold for Christmas presents.

"Don't you remember, Elroy, how we used to watch Willis Goulding play with the American Youth's Chemistry Experiment Set No. 5? How we hankered and hankered? Well, last night while I was paying a social call, the family showed me the gifts for little brother's approaching birthday. Think of the thrill, Elroy, when I noticed among the presents American Youth's Chemistry Experiment Set Number 5. The old hanker galloped back; and when I left, and Julie was looking the other way, I slipped it—"

I bounded forward. "Do you mean to say you had the audacity to call on Miss Van Hulsteyn last evening?"

"Why the astonishment, Elroy? Yesterday on the ledge I told you—let slip with malice aforethought, the legal sharks would phrase it—that I had a date with Julie. Unfortunately I also had one with Lottie for the Venetian Fête. I couldn't keep both. So, in my usual generous, big-hearted manner, I decided to split the social gayeties fifty-fifty with you. 'Elroy will be more interested in the money date,' I argued with myself. 'He can't seem to think of anything but money. And I was sure you'd find your chat with Lottie very, very profitable. And now we'll try Experiment No. 18; it promises like a politician."

I STEPPED between my Suppressed Comrade and the stolen chemical outfit.

"I demand to know," I said hoarsely, "what you mean by calling on Miss Van Hulsteyn, and I further demand a full and complete explanation of your treacherous double dealings yesterday, by which you involved me first with the Tiger-girl torch-singer, and second in a personal combat with a party who has the air and appearance of a thug. I also demand to know," I added, as I noticed them for the first time, "what has happened to the curtains in this room?"

He squinted at the remains of the articles in question. "That was Experiment Number 22, and judging by the description, it ought to have been a blinger. What was my surprise—"

I interrupted him by slamming the door, locking it, and placing the key in my pocket.

"The time has come," I stated, "for final settlement between us. So far I

have refrained from physical violence, but I warn you I will refrain no longer."

"FAIR enough," said my Suppressed Comrade, turning again to the table, "Now, Elroy, suppose we try Experiment No. 13, entitled 'Harmless Exhibition of Indoor Fireworks. Take seven drops from Vial Number 9—'"

"I am waiting for a complete explanation," I broke in crisply. "I also demand to know what you did with that tidy on the washstand. And I would like to know if at Peek Inn the other evening you actually arranged to engage in personal combat with some low character."

"I can hide nothing from you, Elroy," said my Suppressed Comrade, seating himself again in the chair by the window and placing his feet on the washstand. "Night before last, when the big bum slapped a right hook into young Spinny's eye, the boy millionaire was good and sore—that is, after the birdies stopped singing. I stood for him. I backed his wholly excusable action in taking the Tiger Girl away from this unprincipled ruffian. I said a lot of things to the bully that burned, scorched and seared; but only, Elroy, after a dozen of Mr. Antonio (Spaghetti) Antonopolous' huskiest waiters were holding him in their combined grips. The way I went on, Elroy, was a treat for sore ears. That is why young Spinny—a weak sister, a very weak sister—offered me a gorgeous grand if I'd knock his two-fisted friend into next year's calendar. I accepted, but only on your account, Elroy. 'Think of Elroy,' I said. 'Do something for Elroy.'"

"I would like to believe it," I observed coldly.

"The diners stood up on their chairs, Elroy, and cheered you to the echo. 'Today, after I put him down for ten seconds, all you have to do is collect the thousand and pay old Van Heebie Jeebies. Am I doing the right thing by you, Elroy? Yes or no?"

"You mean you are actually going to fight this thug?"

"I must, Elroy, to win that thousand for you." He leaned closer in a confidential way. "But it's fixed so I can't lose. An ace in the hole. The fight's in the bag, framed, fought, won in advance. If I spilled the inside info, you'd beg me with tears in your eyes to take my place and become the conqueror through one swinging blow like this—"

His doubled fist knocked a saucer off the bureau, spilling its contents on the rag rug.

"What was in that saucer?" I asked.

"Number 12, Elroy—Number 12. The inspiration message on the original vial reads, 'Handle with care.' My notion is that it contained acid. You'll observe it's eating a hole in the rug. If you only had a notebook, you could jot down that phenomenon for future reference. Well, that means we'll have to pass up Experiment Number 27. But there's a lot left. Take Experiment Number 13—"

"Kindly stop this chattering about chemical experiments," I said, fairly beside myself. "I have no time for such foolery. I am facing prison bars."

WITH a bland smile my Suppressed Comrade spilled a little powder from Box Number 3 in the palm of his hand and blew it in the air. "Like that, Elroy, all your troubles are about to disappear! Now to get back to Experiment Number 13. 'A Harmless Exhibition of Indoor Fireworks.'

"It says to mix seven drops of Vial Number 9 with two fingers of Vial Number 6 and then make it jell with a pinch from Box Number 2. I'm going to improve on that, Elroy." As he talked, he lifted from the floor a soup tureen, which he had evidently taken from Mrs. Lammick's kitchen, and poured into it varying amounts from the boxes and vials on the table.

"Look out for that potassium," I said.

"Watch me closely, Elroy. Both sleeves rolled up. No mustache. I spike this combination with a little shot of Vial Number 12 and sweeten to taste from Box Number 1. Here the ordinary scientist would call it a day. I go on. Taking the potassium, I drop it—"

A terrific explosion rocked the room. Pieces of Mrs. Lammick's soup-tureen flew in all directions. The lower window-pane, half of which so far had remained unbroken, smashed outward while the door rattled and shook on its hinges. Heavy billows of yellow smoke rolled to the ceiling.

## CHAPTER XVIII

I WAS physically without a scratch, but I must have been shaken mentally, for the next thing I remember is unlocking the door preparatory to a hasty exit from the room. I had reached the head of the stairs before I regained enough self-control to stop and come back.

My Suppressed Comrade was seated on the floor between the bureau and the overturned rocker. He seemed unhurt, though his face was smeared with black soot till it looked like a negro's. As he wiped it off before the mirror he was smiling.

"Eureka, Elroy!" he called out as I came over the threshold. "You remember when Edison discovered Lake Michigan, he said, 'Eureka!' In other words, *Poppus woloppus*—an old Latin proverb meaning, 'Uncle Wilbur now has the complete dope.'"

"What are you talking about?" I inquired.

Without stirring from his place, he continued to look at me with his smile growing broader and merrier.

"All the long night through, Elroy, I've been pacing the streets on your behalf, trying to concoct some plan for the shindig this morning that would be absolutely fool-proof. Till five minutes ago it wouldn't come. I added the potassium—bang! And there it was, hatched and cackling for attention. From now on, Elroy, if either of us do any worrying about the match, it will be energy squandered."

I said nothing, and carefully avoided clasping the right hand extended in my direction.

"I have been misjudging you, Elroy. I want to say, and I wish there were witnesses present, that you are game."

I closed my lips tightly together, watching him as he brushed off his clothes before the glass.

"If you think I'm going to engage in personal combat with a thug," I said decisively, "you are considerably mistaken."

"What put that idea into your head, Elroy? I'm handling the rough stuff myself. All I ask of you is to help. Now watch me, Elroy." Opening the top bureau drawer, he took out of a little pasteboard box the very expensive stickpin which my Aunt Paula had given me, and arranged it in his tie. "What do you make of this, Elroy?"

"I don't make anything of it," I replied truthfully. "What is the idea?"

He tapped the little cameo head with his finger. "This pin, Elroy, is part of a big brain-throb which came to me when I added the potassium with results as noted. But there's more coming, Elroy. Big Brain-throb Number Two. Keep your eyes open."

JERKING a black tie from the mirror support, he took the nail scissors; and having ripped it open and discarded the flannel strip inside, he cut two holes and wrapped what was left around his blackened face like a mask.

"There, Elroy, doesn't that suggest something?"

"No," I replied frankly, "I can't say it does."

"No bluffing you, Elroy. When you don't know a thing, you admit it. Game! The Masked Boxer. Get it?"

"No," I said bluntly.

"Think, Elroy. Mystery. Grim, ghastly mystery. What's going on behind that mask? The other fellow doesn't know. When he sees two human eyes peeping out of these two inhuman eye-holes, he's half licked already."

His enthusiasm was catching.

"I am for anything that will enable me to pay back Mr. Van Hulsteyn," I said as calmly as possible.

"Said and almost done, Elroy. No more complicated than collecting Spinny's grand. Everybody satisfied except the fellow we're going to lick. Now then, Elroy, here's where you come in."

I retreated a step.

"I have no intention of coming in at all," I said in a reserved voice.

"You're too game, Elroy, not to be ready to help me get a fair shake. Now just listen. Here's all I want you to do. There's been too much talk about this scrap. We're afraid the police have got word of it. The thing will be pulled right down here in Mrs. Lammick's garden. Hence your job. As soon as I knock out the big stiff, we change places in the house here. You run out and get the grand from Spinny. You'll be the manager; you'll collect. See?"

"In that case," I objected, "why do I have to leave the house at all? I can stay right here, and when you come in, after it's over, I can take your place as you suggest."

He wagged his head some more. "Always logical, Elroy, always logical. But there's something else to do first. The police may have heard about this. Now that fence below keeps us from seeing the John Laws until they're right on top of the garden. You're to stand at this open window. If the police come from either way, you yell: 'Cheese it—the cops!' Have you got it, Elroy? Try—"

"Do you mean to tell me," I cut in, "that you have arranged for a formal prize-fight in Mrs. Lammick's back yard, with a ring and seconds and a referee and everything?"

"The exact dope, Elroy. Didn't Lottie explain all? Then you'll laugh when I tell you the real point of the joke. It's a wow, Elroy."

"What is a wow?"

"To you, Elroy, the Chicago thug is just a thug. You'll split your sides when you know who he really is."

"Who is he?"

"You remember a few years ago, Elroy, when we used to read the sports pages?"

"What are you getting at?"

"You'll understand, Elroy, in a minute. In those days there was one gentleman whose career interested us because of a singular name. He had an idea he was going to be champion heavyweight pugilist of the world, until he took a number of hot punches on the button. His name—his ring monicker—was Bad News Billings. Now, Elroy, get ready to laugh.

"This low character, as you call him, Elroy, whom I remember seeing by your side at the cocking main the other night, and whose block I offered to knock off at Peek Inn, is none other than Bad News Billings himself."

THE silence following this horrible revelation was broken by a squeal of automobile brakes in the street below. I turned to the window. Three cars had halted by Mrs. Lammick's side gate, and from the first Doc Linnahan was climbing to the ground.

I do not know which hand I hit him with—I just remember seeing him sail backward over the gooseberry bush.

"They're here, Elroy. Everything is O. K. Remember, if the police come, you yell out that window: 'Cheese it, the cops!' I'll handle any talking that's to be done."

The front door downstairs, which my Suppressed Comrade had evidently left unlocked, opened, and there were sounds of a number of people tramping up the steps to the second floor. A moment later the doorway of my room filled with the strangest collection of characters ever assembled in Mrs. Lammick's house. Baldy Ketcham, proprietor of the Quantus Night Owl Café, and Elbows McHaggen, an old professional boxer from Pell City, were flanking Bad News Billings from either side. Immediately behind were Doc Linnahan, Nate Cullen and Buck Wilmot. Doc was making gestures, as though to indicate that he had done something or other as requested.

It was the unmistakable voice of Bad News Billings that broke the silence.

"Hey dere, Peewee. Come away from dat window. Yuh can look troo windows all de rest of your life when I finished wit' yuh. Wot's dat? Who are youse in de black bag?"

In the past, while reading novels and stories, I had often wondered how a person felt when frozen with horror. Now I knew as my Suppressed Comrade said:

"That's enough from you, Bad News. We'll talk to you after the Doc wakes

you up. If you want to know who I am, I'm Masko, the Masked Manager of Madison Square Garden, New York. I wear a mask because my family is socially prominent. Come on, Bat."

Putting his hand on my shoulder he whispered into my ear:

"That was a jam, Elroy, a mean jam. But you were game and got us out of it. First chance we get, I'll ease you the mask. Gosh, Elroy, how game you are!"

"BAD NEWS seems to think I am the one who's to do the fighting," I whispered to my Suppressed Comrade.

"That's his funeral," he grunted. "Keep up the bluff a little longer, till I have a chance to slip you the mask."

"Why not do it right now?" I asked under my breath as my Suppressed Comrade began to edge me toward the door.

"Wait. Too many beady-eyed spectators. Down in the back yard, behind the woodshed, is the place to switch. Gangway, men! Out of the way, palooka!" After we had crowded through to the hallway and were descending the stairs, he lowered his voice to say: "I take off my hat to you, Elroy. Game. Always game."

Doc Linnahan had preceded me and was waiting in the rear entry.

"Who's your friend?" he asked me.

Before I could reply, my Suppressed Comrade answered for me. "I'm in the know, Doc. I saw the row at Peek Inn, and the boy asks me to look after him." He stepped closer to mutter: "How're the drops dropping?"

From his coat pocket Doc Linnahan cautiously drew a small bottle containing a colorless fluid. He tapped it significantly and smiled.

My Suppressed Comrade nodded understandingly, and once more placing his hand on my shoulder, remarked in a loud voice: "Come on, Bat; let's get it over." As we passed the icebox, he whispered: "Don't let anybody tell 'em you're not game, Elroy. Boy, you invented the word!"

In the back yard, Baldy Ketcham and Nate Cullen were stretching Mrs. Lammick's clothes-line around the three cherry trees and the elm. This formed a rough square, with the gooseberry bush sticking up near the center.

"How about switching that mask now?" I suggested. "We can go behind the woodshed."

"In two minutes, Elroy," said my Suppressed Comrade, arranging the stickpin in his tie. "Baldy Ketcham is watching us. And remember, Elroy, when we change places, you don't have to worry a bit about what Bad News thinks he's going to do to me. Everything's fixed."

"Fixed?"

"Fixed and double-fixed. Doc may be only a vet, but he's followed the races from Canada to Cuba. When it comes to doping man or beast, Doc is there with a capital T. Don't worry."

It occurred to me I had no reason whatever to worry about anything that might happen to my Suppressed Comrade, so long as I got the thousand dollars. In fact, the more that happened to him, the better.

"Here's the idea, Elroy: Bad News has nothing but his punch. He can't fight without a liberal snort of White Mule. Doc is present ostensibly as a disinterested bystander. He's in the kitchen now. Before Bad News takes his swig, Doc will dope the bottle. All we have to do is to wait till Buck Wilmot gets the high sign that Bad News has swallowed the stuff. Then—on with the slaughter."

"When are we going to switch the mask?" I inquired.

"First chance we get, Elroy. Wait till Baldy Ketcham ducks."

It was at this moment that young Mr. Spinford arrived in a taxi. He seemed rather surprised at sight of the masked manager, who was now massaging my arms, but shook me by my free hand.

"You're a genuine hot potato, Suppy," he observed. "And you'll get the thousand, no fear; I'll put it right into your hands as soon as you bowl him over."

My Suppressed Comrade started to say something, hesitated, and finally closed his lips.

A COUPLE of soap-boxes were produced from the woodpile and placed in diagonal corners of the ring. Elbows McHaggen, my Suppressed Comrade and Buck Wilmot now gathered in the center and flipped a coin. They were still arguing over the result, as apparently the piece of money had not landed squarely on the ground, when a terrible crash came from the kitchen. At the moment I thought nothing of it.

My Suppressed Comrade glanced toward the house, shrugged his shoulders, and then, after going as near the kitchen as the vegetable garden, came back arranging in his necktie the stick-pin which had been given me by my Aunt Paula.

It was naturally impossible to see his face behind the mask, but his voice sounded as though he was worried.

"Subtracting that from this leaves something, anyhow, in rough numbers. I've won the toss and picked the lucky corner." He stared at me through half-closed eyes. "Gosh, Elroy, you look pale. I know you're game, but you mustn't take advantage of yourself. Climb under the rope and sit on this soap-box till you feel better."

While I was still protesting, he maneuvered me into the ring, loosened my shirt collar, and began patting me on the shoulder. It was while massaging my neck that he said abruptly: "Sorry, Elroy. My own careless fault. Dropped that stickpin down your back. Lean forward and I'll get it."

He thrust a hand between my shirt and athletic underwear. "Can't reach it, Elroy," he said after fumbling a moment. "You'll have to shuck your coat and vest."

The pin must have slid quite a ways down, because I found myself stripped to the waist before he finally said, "Ah!" and held it up for my inspection.

I WAS looking for my coat, which had been tossed outside the ring, when Bad News Billings, a towel over his bare shoulders, came swaggering from the kitchen. In his clothes Bad News had seemed large enough; but stripped, what with his long arms and his hairy chest, he resembled some rough party from the Stone Age. The worst thing about him, however, was the expression on his face. His lowering eyebrows and the scar on his cheek were enough to frighten anyone, while his chin stuck out as though it might be something artificial tied onto his lower jaw.

There was a leer of triumph on the face of Baldy Ketcham as he yelled out: "Well, aint we beginning? Aint we beginning?"

Bad News crossed the ring and sat down on the soap-box in the opposite corner. I felt like some one in a bad dream who knows he must escape a growing menace, but cannot move hand or foot.

"Game, Elroy. Always game!" My Suppressed Comrade pressed down on my shoulders. "Now scowl at the big palooka over there. Scowl at him."

At this moment Buck Wilmot, coming from the direction of the kitchen, passed our corner of the ring. He seemed agitated. Without hesitating or even looking our way, he muttered something out of the side of his mouth to my Suppressed Comrade.

"What is the matter now?" I asked.

"Nothing of importance. As I suspected, we'll have to change the plan of battle a bit, that's all. Trust Suppy."

"When are we going to switch the mask?"

"Elroy, I've always said you were a game little guy, haven't I?"

"That has nothing to do with the question. I demand to know when you are going to take my place."

"Trust me, Elroy, You'd better trust me. There's nothing else for you to do. You're going to fight the big bum yourself."

This announcement had a terrible effect on me. Up to this time I had felt able, in case matters came to the worst, to make a sudden and violent effort that would result in snatching the mask from my Suppressed Comrade's face, but it seemed now, with paralysis spreading over my arms and legs, as if I had taken Doc Linnahan's dope myself.

"The new plan's all worked out, Elroy." My Suppressed Comrade fingered his necktie and with great deliberation replaced the stickpin a little higher up. "If one thing fails, we've got another. You remember what I told you about Doc slipping the dope into the White Mule?"

I looked across at Bad News. "The dope doesn't seem to be taking effect."

My Suppressed Comrade kneaded my upper arms. "There's a good reason, Elroy. Dope seldom takes effect until it gets into somebody's system."

"What do you mean?"

"They saw Doc coming, Elroy. Doc wasn't quite slick enough. Bad News hit him first, and the kitchen floor hit him second. According to Buck Wilmot, he's breathing now, but that's all."

"Then what—" I began.

"Didn't I tell you, Elroy, that Papa has all sorts of things up his sleeve? If we can't win one way, we'll win another. Remember Bad News has a glass jaw."

"Well, aint we beginning?" protested Baldy Ketcham. "Aint we beginning?"

THE weakness which so far had seemed overpowering enough, now settled in every joint and muscle. I did not feel able to move, much less to engage in a desperate battle with a professional pugilist.

"I refuse to allow this to go any farther," I said, my voice trembling.

"Everything's all right, Elroy. Perfectly all right." He stroked my back the way you pet a cat. "All you have to do is to follow directions, and the battle's as good as won already. Nate Cullen's the referee; he'll give us all the breaks. When Buck Wilmot rings Mrs. Lammick's dinner-bell, we start. The palooka'll come out of his corner on the run."

Bad News spoke up in a loud voice. "I finishes you, Peewee, in ten seconds. Dat's all. You got de rest of de day to spend waking up."

"In our little plan," my Suppressed Comrade continued, ignoring the interruption, "everything is provided for."

"WHAT is the plan?" I asked with anguish that was probably apparent in my voice.

"It would only confuse you to know now, Elroy. I'll do all the worrying. When he comes at you, I'll give the signal."

"What is the signal?" I asked.

My nerves were at such a tension now that it did not seem as if I could endure the suspense a moment longer. Yet with my legs in their present paralyzed condition, I did not see how I would ever be able to leave the box on which I sat.

Baldy Ketcham interrupted again. "Well, aint we beginning? Aint we beginning?"

"You'll know at the proper time, Elroy," said my Suppressed Comrade. "Yes, we're all ready, Nate." His right hand reached up to the stickpin.

The last bit of strength seemed to seep out of my muscles as Buck Wilmot rang Mrs. Lammick's dinner-bell. I sat there helpless and without enough force left in me to bend a joint. . . . Though what happened next could not have taken more than a few split seconds, it went on like slow motion in a picture film.

Smacking his lips, the same as some wild animal that had just been tossed a hunk of fresh meat, Bad News Billings jumped from his chair. I could almost count his steps as he approached the gooseberry bush, dodged around to the left, and rushed straight at me.

My Suppressed Comrade was bearing down heavily on my shoulders. Even if I had tried, I do not think I could have moved.

Then, when it seemed as though Bad News was practically on top of me, I felt the pressure on my shoulders relax. At this identical instant, in that region of my body where the fleshy part of the upper thigh was overhanging the chair, I suddenly thrilled with the most horrible stabbing pain I had ever experienced in my life. It came from the business end of my Aunt Paula's stickpin.

Without any control of my actions whatever, I bounded into the air at the same moment that Bad News Billings closed the distance between us.

I do not know which hand I hit him with. In fact, I was not conscious of hitting him at all. I just remember seeing him rise up and sail backward over the gooseberry bush, lighting head-first with a dull thud.

As he lay there, amid excited shouts from all present, Nate Cullen began counting.

"One—two—nice work, Suppy—three—four—he's listening to the mockingbirds—five—six—let him go back to Chicago, the big bum—seven—eight—he must have hit his head against that red plush brick—nine—ten! Out!"

Walking over to me, he lifted my right arm in the air.

While I stood there half-dazed, watching Baldy Ketcham and Elbows McHaggen carry Bad News to his corner, young Mr. Spinford climbed through the ropes. "I say, you blottoed him, didn't you?" His hand dived into his pocket and pulled out a thousand-dollar note. It was the first I had ever seen.

"All yours, old Hot Potato. And jolly well earned, too."

My Suppressed Comrade reached out. "I'll take care of that," he said. "I look after our business affairs. Anyhow, the kid's an amateur; he couldn't accept money before witnesses."

"I have decided to turn professional," I stated firmly, "and so I will take the money myself."

As I made this remark I reached out, seized the thousand-dollar note, and tucked it deep into my right-hand trouser pocket.

## CHAPTER XIX

AS the two of us came back to the room upstairs it grew apparent that my Suppressed Comrade was in a high temper. He remarked in a grating voice: "What's the big idea, Boopus?

What's the big idea? Hand over that gorgeous grand."

"My friend," I replied. "I have now got all you made away with from Mr. Van Hulsteyn except for eleven dollars. I shall complete the sum and return the entire amount to him this evening. If you do not like it,"—I took up the water-pitcher and swung it carelessly,—"try to do something about it."

FROWNING, my Suppressed Comrade sat down on the table.

"I hope you'll excuse my being a little nervous, Elroy. I never meant to have you face Bad News yourself. No, Elroy, no. And I've always had your best interests at heart."

"I suppose you had my best interests at heart when you jabbed that stickpin an inch and a half into my upper leg."

"I was afraid for you, Elroy. I knew your only chance was to bound in and end the fight in a hurry, exactly as you did."

I merely rolled up my sleeves.

"I don't get you, Elroy." His forehead wrinkled in worried lines. "Listen, Elroy. Give me that money. I'll double it for you before tomorrow morning and you can have every cent but my expenses. Isn't that fair?"

"It would not be fair to you," I said sarcastically. "I have your best interests at heart."

"All right then, Elroy, we'll split the thousand fifty-fifty. I was your manager, but that's all right. Instead of taking the usual sixty per cent, we'll make it even. How's that, Elroy? How's that?"

Stickpin in hand, I turned about deliberately.

"My friend," I said, facing him, "from now on I am going to devote a good deal of time to my own best interests and to yours too. And if you take a friendly tip you will go away from Quantus at once and never come back."

"According to you, then, Elroy, we've come to the parting of the ways."

"That is the idea, my friend."

"I'd rather thought of continuing, Elroy, as your little Suppressed Comrade. Helping you meet emergencies. Showing your better and gayer nature to a joyless world. Scattering sunshine, as it were."

"In the future," I said, "I will attend to all that myself."

"Too bad, Elroy. I'm afraid you force me to proceed to extreme measures."

"Proceed as far as you like. Within the hour I am going to pay the one thousand and eleven dollars back to Mr. Van Hulsteyn, and at the same time I will warn him that a vulgar impostor in Quantus is taking advantage of me."

"And who is the impostor, Elroy? Ever since I popped in on the scene you've been growing steadily weaker and I've been growing steadily stronger."

It was plain by his voice and manner that he was doing nothing so much as whistling to keep his courage up.

"I do not believe what you are saying and it is easy to see you do not believe it yourself. That makes it unanimous. When you leave, close the door quietly from the outside."

His mouth opened so wide that the cigarette fell out.

"Elroy, won't you even say good-by?"

"Good-by and keep going."

"Elroy!"

The only recognition I gave to this last despairing cry was to turn once more to the mirror and pretend to be absorbed in my toilet till I heard the door of the room close and the none too steady footfalls of my Suppressed Comrade as he descended the stairway.

Placing the thousand-dollar note in a large envelope, I slipped the latter into my inner coat pocket. To this I added a guaranteed razor I had bought the week before. Then, whistling a merry air, I left the house and hurried across the bridge to the business district.

At a local pawnshop I was advanced ten dollars on the stickpin given me by Aunt Paula, and at Schimmelpfennig's drug store I received another dollar by stating that the razor was unsatisfactory.

WITH the large note, together with a five, a two, and four silver dollars all sealed in the same envelope, I hurried to the Van Hulsteyn residence.

"Rodman is not here, Elroy," said Mrs. Van Hulsteyn. "He left for Chicago yesterday and won't be back till that late train this evening. Is it something very important?"

I hesitated for a moment and then placed the envelope in her hand. "Yes, Mrs. Van Hulsteyn, it is very important, and because I do not wish to take any chances whatever of a mistake I am leaving this envelope with you, and I will kindly ask you to give it to Mr. Van Hulsteyn as soon as he returns."

She nodded and smiled. Evidently she knew by her sense of touch and weight what the envelope contained.

"I think I understand, Elroy. From the first Julie and I both felt it was nothing but a mistake. We always had absolute confidence in you. When Mr. Van Hulsteyn comes back tonight, I'm going to put in a good word for you. Several of them."

As I thanked her, I could feel grateful tears mounting to my eyes.

ARRIVING at my room I locked the door and threw myself on the bed.

"Suppy is gone!" I mused thankfully. "He is gone out of my life. Suppy will never bother me again."

As I said this, I stretched out in a state of complete and luxurious relaxation. And after breathing abdominally three times in a concentrative manner, my eyes closed and I fell asleep. . . . Twilight was sifting in when I was roused by the honking of an auto horn. It continued so long and so persistently that it seemed certain some one was trying to attract my attention.

Carefully advancing to the hall window, because in case it turned out to be the Tiger-girl torch-singer I did not wish to be seen, I peeped out.

In the road, parked directly opposite the gate, stood the red sports roadster with yellow wheels which I had often admired in Nate Cullen's display window. The rumble seat was closed.

As I came to the window the driver stuck out his head. It was Suppy.

"Wake up, Boopus," he yelled. "Rise and shine!" I opened the window. "What does this mean?" I demanded.

"What does it mean, Elroy? It means that for nothing down and a lot more every month I've bought this little car from old Nate Cullens, and let him worry. And you too, Elroy."

"You mean you bought that car in my name?" I yelled.

"In our name, Elroy, in our name. Just another hanker grown up and leaving home. And now, Elroy, I don't want to make you feel bad, but I'm on my way to our favor*yte* girl friend. A heavy date. Her first name begins with *J* and it's pronounced *Julie.* When you see her old man, tell him to comb the sand out of his whiskers. But don't bother now. Crawl back into bed and fade away. I'll look after our affairs better than you could yourself. Cheereerio, old Dishrag, cheereerio!"

With a final honk he started off down the road while, full of mental anguish, I jammed my legs into my trousers.

## CHAPTER XX

THANKS to a lift by an unknown party, whose car was going in the same general direction, I made the trip to the Van Hulsteyn residence on Greenway Court in much shorter time than usual. Parked at the curb, as I expected, stood the red sports roadster.

I passed a long minute debating whether or not to rush into the house and denounce my Suppressed Comrade then and there. But finally I decided it would be better and easier to explain all to Julie under different circumstances. In case I tried other tactics, it was possible that, by the use of ingenious and tricky arguments, my Suppressed Comrade might be able to persuade the Van Hulsteyns that I was the impostor and he the original Elroy Simmons. If the two of us were alone with Julie, however, I felt I could convince her of the direct contrary, no matter how much the issues had previously been confused.

Having decided this, I made sure no one was looking and then, crossing to the sports car, I opened the rumble seat and secreted myself inside. Where the top fitted down I wedged a handkerchief to keep the catch from snapping.

The space in the compartment was extremely limited and even by curling my body and doubling up my legs I was none too comfortable. But what distressed me most was a small lunch basket close to my head. The smell of ham sandwiches and roast chicken made me realize acutely that I had not eaten since the day before. After a slight hesitation, I worked my hand under the

napkin and drew out the sandwich on top. It tasted so good that I was halfway through the fourth when I heard the door of the house open.

"That will be nice of you, Elroy, to take Julie out in your new car. You can have your little picnic supper and be back by nine o'clock." It was Mrs. Van Hulsteyn's voice.

"We'll be back right on the dot," said my Suppressed Comrade in the smooth accents which I had learned by experience always meant he was putting something over.

A minute later the sports roadster was rolling out along the County Turnpike.

THE handkerchief kept a certain space between the top of the rumble seat and the car body, but the whir of the wheels drowned out the voices in the car.

In any case it is doubtful whether I would have paid much attention to them. Until I had smelled the food I had had no idea how hungry I was. I had finished the bottle of olives and was starting in on the cold roast chicken when the car stopped. From some place near by came the sound of dance music.

"Why, isn't this Peek Inn, Elroy?"

"Well, well and well, well!" said my Suppressed Comrade in tones which told me only too plainly that he had known it all along. "Peek Inn it is. Just beyond this grove. And listen to that music! Suppose we junk this picnic supper and have a bite at Peek Inn?"

Julie's reply was prompt and decisive.

"Thanks, Elroy, but not at Peek Inn. A girl in a small town has a lot of reputation to lose, and she can lose it in an awful hurry."

"Anything you say is all right with me, Julie. It couldn't be anything else. Honestly, Julie, I don't believe I really began to live till I met you."

I swallowed a mouthful so hurriedly I had great difficulty to keep from choking because this was a remark I had long planned to make when the proper occasion presented itself.

"A good line," said Julie thoughtfully; "maybe it's just a line, but I like it." I heard the rustle of paper. "Elroy, I have a surprise for you. You remember that envelope you left this morning for father?"

"Of course I remember it, Julie."

"I thought, and Mother agreed with me, that it would be much better if you gave the money to Father personally. So I brought the envelope back to you. Here it is, Elroy."

I felt as though I were about to suffer an apoplectic stroke.

"You're right, Julie. You're always right. I'll put the envelope in my pocket and wait till I can see your father. Julie, you're too darn' sweet to me. I wish I could do something for you."

The difficulty of explaining my presence was the only thing that kept me from bouncing out of hiding and denouncing my Suppressed Comrade to the fullest extent of my vocabulary.

"There's one thing you can do for me, Elroy. I'd like to know, if it's not idle curiosity, just how you happened to get into this money mix-up?"

From the car came a profound sigh that would have seemed genuine to anybody but myself, who knew the hypocrisy of the party responsible for same.

"Don't tell me if it hurts you, Elroy."

"I must, Julie. I want you to know everything about me." After a short silence my Suppressed Comrade resumed in a low, reverent voice. "Isn't the scent of the pine trees wonderful? And do you see those white flowers over there beckoning in the moonlight?" He stopped again. "Julie, can you conceive of anyone with a real love for nature stooping so low as to take money not his own?"

"It depends, Elroy. I imagine there have been cases."

My Suppressed Comrade sighed once more. "Julie, I want to tell you everything. You'll understand. A good many girls wouldn't believe me when I say there's such a thing as an inviolable friendship between man and man. But when two men are friends, Julie, the right kind of friends, one of them would do anything for the other, generously, without a thought of self-interest. I have a friend, Julie, a boyhood friend. He's sunk lower and lower. But he's still my friend. I'm protecting him. In spite of all he does I'm protecting him. Some people might say it wasn't worth while. With me, Julie, friendship means more than I can put into words. But he won't be here long and when he goes it will be for good. He'll never come back."

AT this I quivered so I practically shook the car. There was no doubt Julie was accepting this brazen effrontery at face value. Her voice showed it.

"It's splendid of you, Elroy, to carry on in this way. I really didn't under-

stand before. Whether he deserves your friendship or not, it's splendid of you."

"If you feel that way it's all I can ever ask. When I hold your hand like this, Julie, the rest of the world can go by—"

"Please don't try that again, Elroy."

"Why, Julie, it just happened. It seemed so natural."

"Maybe it did, Elroy, and maybe I belong back in 1890. But I'm off promiscuous petting. Suppose we decide about the lunch."

My Suppressed Comrade sighed again. A burst of lively dance music came from Peek Inn. "Julie," he said, "I'll tell you the whole story. This is a big night yonder: balloons, souvenirs, all that. The real reason I suggested Peek Inn was to see if this—this friend of mine might be inside. He's so weak, Julie, and I feel responsible for him."

"Take your look, Elroy. I'll be waiting for you."

My Suppressed Comrade took the key from the transmission and left the car.

"If he's there, Julie," he said in a pleading voice, "and if I could get you to speak to him, you might say something that would change his whole life. It's on his account, Julie. And we could order a couple of sandwiches."

"I'm leaving him to you," she said in a crisp voice.

There was apparently a moment of indecision and then I heard footsteps growing fainter as he walked from the car in the direction of Peek Inn.

This was my opportunity.

OPENING the rumble seat compartment, I climbed quietly out and made for the shelter of some near-by bushes. Then with great caution I worked about in the shadow till I could step out on a path which ran from Peek Inn toward the car.

"You made good time, Elroy."

"He wasn't there," I replied truthfully.

"Thank goodness, that's off your mind. It's getting late. What do you say, Elroy, if we have our little picnic right here all by ourselves?" She stepped out of the car. "Elroy, let me look at you. Somehow you have the faculty of being two different persons at the same time. A moment ago there was something strange about you. Now you're your old self again."

It was gratifying that she had noticed this, and it offered a splendid opening for what I had to say. But under the circumstances it seemed to me best to leave the place before my Suppressed Comrade came back. I opened the rumble seat, and with a sudden inspiration whistled twice.

"What's happened, Elroy?"

"Some tramp has got at our picnic supper. We'll have to go back to town."

"Oh, Elroy! Isn't it too bad—after all the pains you took? But I know the dandiest place. Ye Olde Tea Shoppe on State Street. They serve a wonderful dinner there."

"That suits me," I said, forgetting about the blonde cashier there. "Let's get started."

I WAS just going around to get in on the left side of the car when two unpleasant realizations stopped me in my tracks: To begin with, I could not go anywhere at all in the car, because the transmission was locked. But this amounted to nothing beside a much graver crisis. Julie had given my Suppressed Comrade the one thousand and eleven dollars with which Mr. Van Hulsteyn was to be repaid. Unless I got back the sum at once, there was no telling if I would ever get it back.

"What's the matter, Elroy?"

"It's hard to explain," I said, trying to find the right words. "But just now I have an important engagement. Would you mind waiting here a moment?"

"What is your engagement, Elroy?" There was indignation in her voice.

I tried to think what would be best to say. "My engagement," I answered, "is an engagement—" I had got just this far when with incredible swiftness she darted around to where I was standing.

"I'll tell you what your engagement is. At Peek Inn you saw some girl friend and you want to go back and talk to her. Well, go back. That's perfectly all right with me. I'm on my way to the trolley-line to catch a car. Good-by, Mr. Simmons; good-by for the last time."

Instinctively I tried to catch at her arm, with the result that the fingers of her right hand came across my cheek in what was plainly an intentional slap. I let go my hold and she hurried down the roadway, around the curve, and out of sight.

**How can Elroy succeed in outsmarting his diabolical double? Be sure to read the forthcoming September issue.**

# *Another*

## *By* JOE BLEDSOE

IT happened shortly after the "Strip" had been thrown open for settlement. I was working on a ranch just over the line in Kansas when "Shootin'" Foss came along and asked my boss for a job. Shootin' was one of the few really bad men who still roamed the Southwest—and he was plenty bad: a cold, relentless killer, fast and deadly with his gun. Still, he was a good worker; and my boss, being short of men at the time, took him on.

He was just the sort that a kid my age would want to pattern after. Probably in his late thirties, he was tall and lithe and wore his jet black hair combed straight back. In contrast to his hair his eyes were a cold flinty gray and had a habit of narrowing down when he talked to anyone. He always walked or stood about half up on the balls of his feet, like a cat ready for a spring. He carried a six-gun with a big black handle, constantly strapped to his waist.

But as much as I admired Shootin', I admired still more a span of buckskins he owned. He kept their coats shined to a cream-color, and their manes and tails like silk. They were proud and "high-lifed," just about the niftiest pair of steppers one could pick up anywhere in that country. They were both saddle-broke, but the day Shootin' appeared at the ranch, he was driving them to a bran new "black-top" with his saddle-trappings tied on behind.

The first time I laid eyes on those two nags I burned up inside to drive them. But Shootin' would have dropped any man in his tracks he caught putting leather on them. He quartered them in one of the back barns, and kept his new buggy in the driveway of the same building with a wagon-sheet spread over it.

I hung around that particular barn like a candidate around an election board. Even the veiled threat of Shootin's big gun wasn't enough to drive me away. Every time I watched him ride or drive those buckskins, I turned green with envy. And the way he had them trained! Not much wonder I made up my mind to pull the ribbons over that span, just once, if it cost a leg.

One day a cattle-buyer stopped at the ranch and bought a bunch of steers. On Saturday the boss asked Shootin' to help drive them to Caldwell, a distance of twelve miles. Shootin' loved to drink and gamble. He wanted to go mighty bad, and leave the buckskins munching hay in the barn. Yet he harbored a sneaking hunch that I was waiting to try something when he was out of sight. At last he sullenly agreed to allow me to feed and water them while he was gone. But his eyes were just gray slits when he said: "Remember, kid, that harness and saddle back there stays hung just the way I'm leavin' 'em!"

If it hadn't have been Saturday night! And there was a dance only six miles away. For a long time I'd wanted to take a certain girl to that dance.

The young lady's brother, Jum, came out as I wheeled up to the gate. She had already gone with another fellow.

"You're drunk or crazy!" Jum exclaimed, recognizing my outfit.

I laughed. "Shootin's gone to Caldwell with a bunch of steers!"

**REAL EX-**

# Man's Horses

***In nearly everyone's life there has been at least one experience so exciting as to deserve record in print. We offer each month prizes for the best five stories of this type submitted, and publish them in this department. (For details of this prize contest, see page 3.) First an old Westerner tells of his hair-raising experience with a real bad-man.***

"I know that. But who told you he wasn't never comin' back?"

"Don't worry," I said. "These broomtails will be in their stalls when he does come back. Get in, we're on our way."

"Wanta get me killed too?" he complained; but he climbed aboard.

I chalked the dance down as a bust. I left the hall mad because the young lady wouldn't ditch the other fellow and ride home with me. I decided something ought to be done to make the evening worth while.

One of the stories common was that Shootin' had the buckskins trained to run away when he said the word, and to stop any time he gave the command. His customary leave-taking of a town, so the story ran, was to stand up on the buggy-seat and toss the reins out over the backs of the flying buckskins while he perforated sundry store signs with bullets from his big black gun. When the town limits had been left behind, he'd signal his team to slow down, get out and gather up the reins and drive calmly on.

I put the proposition up to Jum. He held back at first, but finally agreed that such a play might liven things up. So we drove the prancing buckskins down across the tracks and turned them around; then we headed them up the street on a dead run.

The crowd was just coming down the hall steps. Right abreast of it I sprang up on the buggy seat, and with a war-whoop that would have made Chief Big Thunder's best effort sound like a whisper, tossed the reins to the four winds. At the same instant Jum added the roar of his gun to the din, and the show was on.

Whoever started that one about the buckskins slowing down after they'd run a ways was just another liar, or else we failed to find the magic word; and we tried everyone we could think of, even to cuss-words.

A mile out of town they turned a corner. "Hold on!" I shouted at Jum, and braced myself.

"To what?" I heard him wail as we turned turtle.

I managed to clear the fence, but Jum draped himself over the two top wires. While I helped disentangle him, the crash of splintering wood and furious pound of hoofs told me that something was happening to Shootin's new buggy.

We were a sorry sight as we trailed up the road. Both our hats were gone; most of Jum's shirt we'd left hanging on the fence. Besides, his right ankle was so badly sprained he had to hop.

At the first barnyard the runaways crashed the gate and brought up in a corner of the corral. When we finally did drag up, the owner of the place, minus shoes and shirt, greeted us with a leveled shotgun and a command to reach for the sky. Then, when he recognized us, he still seemed excited. "Aint that Shootin's outfit?" he demanded.

We knew there was no use denying it.

"Where's Shootin', then?" he queried.

AFTER I'd lamely explained that Shootin' had ridden one of the ranch ponies to Caldwell, and that I'd "borrowed" his team and buggy for the evening, he eased his gun down.

"Heard the news?" he asked.

We hadn't.

"Red Culver just stopped by and told me that Shootin' killed a coupla fellers down in Caldwell awhile ago over a poker game, and lit out with the sheriff right after 'im. When I saw it was his outfit tearin' up my corral out here, I figured he was somewhere about. You two young idiots don't know how near you come to gettin' your danged heads blowed off."

He laid his gun aside and helped us get the wreck upright. Finally with the aid of a borrowed wheel and several yards of bailing wire we were ready for a somewhat wabbly take-off.

The trip home was quite different from the one going down. The borrowed wheel was at least a foot too high, which caused Shootin's wrecked black-top to list badly. Every few yards the nervous buckskins would shy and snort, on the verge of another bolt. Jum groaned and rubbed his puffed ankle, while I clung to the high side of our strange contraption and tried my best to keep the skittish buckskins under control.

Jum got stubborn when I tried to let him out at his own gate. "What kind of a quitter do you think I am?" he grumbled. "And besides, I might as well be dead as the shape I'm in. It won't take Shootin' long to finish me, but I'll go out with the satisfaction of knowin' I never laid down on a partner!"

"Listen, Jum," I argued. "I've thought of a way out, but you'd only be in the way. Just leave it to me, and everything'll be rosy."

He sniffed and demanded enlightenment.

"If Shootin' does come back, which isn't likely, I'll tell 'im that while I was down in the lower pastures a horse-thief comes along and steals this whole shebang. As soon as I discovered it, I started out to run 'im down. In the mix-up he wrecks the rig, but gets away, and I bring back what's left. How's it sound?" I wound up hopefully.

"Rotten!" was his cheerful response. But after quite a long siege of wrangling, he got out and I drove on alone.

IT was daybreak when I pulled up in front of the big barn. I had made no effort to hurry. I climbed out and pushed the driveway door open. Leading the buckskins inside, I started to unhitch. I had them loose from the rig and the harness off Duster, the near horse, when he gave a little whinny of welcome. I didn't have to look up to know who was in the door! When I did look, Shootin' was standing there, balanced on the balls of his feet.

"Hoss-thief, huh!" he said with cold deadliness.

It came over me like a flash that he had purposely misconstrued the situation in order to give him a better excuse for killing me. The fleeting thought of trying out the story I had hashed over to Jum stayed my hand. But before I could say a word, I knew it was useless.

"Saddle Duster and bring him out here! And remember, hoss-thief, I'm in one hell of a hurry!" he barked.

I didn't doubt the last part of his remark. I reached for his saddle and threw it on Duster. I knew mighty well what would happen when I led the buckskin outside: Right then and there I'd kiss this old world a quick good-by.

So while I fumbled with the cinch, I decided again to start the fireworks myself. To lead Duster out, I'd have to turn him around. This would give me an excuse to approach the grain-bin, which jutted a couple of feet into the driveway. I'd duck behind it and open up on Shootin'.

The reins were already in my hand when I happened to notice Shootin's peculiar sidewise stance in the doorway. Like a flash I remembered that the Sheriff was on his trail. This gave me a brand-new idea! I led Duster right past the grain-bin and on toward his master, while in the gray light Shootin's cold eyes bored me through. Still I calculated my distance, and strode on. I saw Shootin's gun-hand commence to twitch. My knees wanted to buckle. I fought the feeling off and moved on.

With barely six feet between us, I suddenly halted and threw both hands in the air. "Don't shoot, Sheriff!" I pleaded, staring out past Shootin's head.

I thought I was all set to take advantage of the ruse if it worked. And I was, as near set as a man can be, for the last words were hardly out of my mouth when I was in the air like a panther. But I never believed that mortal man could whirl and jerk a gun as quick as he did. In the fraction of a second that his back was turned, it had dawned on him that he'd been tricked, and he lunged sideways so suddenly that my leap was only half successful. But the jolt knocked him down on all fours and spilled his gun down in the dirt. I jumped him again, and we had it just man to man. That wasn't his kind of fighting, and at last I got him face down.

When the sheriff did come ten minutes later, I was still sitting in the middle of Shootin's back with the muzzle of my gun in his ear, threatening to blow his head off if he even so much as breathed. I've never felt such a relief as when the sheriff handcuffed him and took him to jail. . . . He got killed later in a jail-break in southern Oklahoma.

# *The Voyage of the Monarch*

## IV—The Coming of War

*By* Captain George Grant

THERE are landfalls which stir up the blood with their magnificence. You feel, as you watch from the bridge, all the surging emotions of an explorer. But there was nothing magnificent about the land of Africa in the Bight of Benin. From under a smirr of rain that rested wearily on the drooping leaves of the mangrove trees, it crept from the yellow dawn like a bedraggled cat. It seemed as if the whole continent of Africa was in decay, and that it was sweeping, piece by piece, down the Forcados River to be forever lost in the darkness sinking down into the west.

From among the flotsam of a continent came a dugout, paddled by four naked men. The *Monarch* was stopped and the pilot came on board. He was black as the Earl of Hell's riding-boots. He had a broad flat face and a flat nose, with high cheek-bones and small black eyes which were mild and kindly. He wore white trousers, a frock coat, and a tall hat, but his feet were bare, and instead of a shirt and collar, he wore a dirty towel around his neck.

Captain McFarlane shook hands with him, and they went into consultation. The bar of the river carried twenty feet of water, and the *Monarch* drew twenty-and-a-half. She might strand, and again she might not. The mud was soft, and the sea had a slight lift to it. Perhaps never in a month would such favorable conditions recur. It was worth attempting, the pilot suggested in his sing-song voice. Captain McFarlane nodded:

"She's yours, pilot!"

The pilot smiled a broad happy smile. He accepted the responsibility with a lift of his tall hat and, bowing as though before a god, he walked across the bridge to halt before the wheel-house, conning the vessel with his eye against the land. "Full speed!" he ordered.

The *Monarch* seemed to leap forward the drooping mangrove trees, the water boiling against her sturdy hull in ragged pinnacles of foam. The pilot ordered: "A-port-a!" The bow swung ever so slightly. "A-steady-a!" The man-at-the-wheel obeyed with alacrity. Waves tumbled on the bar. A fine spindrift dampened the superstructure, mingling with the rain. The pilot ordered: "A-star-board-a!" The bow commenced to swing. The *Monarch* smelled bottom, swerved from her course with a sickening lurch, stirred up the mud with her propeller, and forged ahead. The pilot ordered: "A-steady-a!" He glanced toward Captain McFarlane and smiled his broad smile. The water smoothed out, and the land opened up where the Forcados River sought the sea.

Port Forcados hid among the trees on Kwarra Point. It was a sleepy sort of village, as river villages often are.

I believe I would have remained dreaming by the bulwark-rail all day had not Mr. Boxley ordered me forward to put a ladder over so that the Kroomen could come on board from their surf-boats. They were negroes, famed as sailormen and boat-builders, and it was the custom on the Coast to use them as stevedores, keeping them on board until all the cargo was discharged. Those who came to us were a wicked-looking lot, but they never caused any trouble.

With the commencement of discharging, our troubles began. The coal-dust combined with the heat to make our lives unbearable and, to add to our discomfiture, Mr. Boxley put us over the

side on stages to chip the rust from the hull under a broiling sun. Owing to the prevalence of fever no leave was granted.

We saw little or nothing of Captain McFarlane. After breakfast every morning he went on shore in the agent's boat, and every evening he returned to shut himself up in his cabin upon the bridge. One day, though, he returned much earlier than usual and a whisper came from the galley that Great Britain had declared war on Germany. The excitement was intense.

After supper that evening a large boat came alongside the accommodation ladder and a man in uniform came on board. I met him at the upper platform and inquired his business.

"I'm Lieutenant Stark of the West African regiment," he told me. "I want to see the captain."

Bubbling with importance, I squared my shoulders and escorted him to the bridge, squinting at his khaki shorts and bright-buttoned tunic, while wondering what his mission could be.

I didn't have long to wonder. No sooner had he introduced himself to Captain McFarlane than he asked: "Have you any Germans on board?"

Captain McFarlane stroked his beard reflectively. "Weel—no—" he began. He checked himself and began again: "But, aye, there is—Vollman."

"He must come on shore with me to be interned," Lieutenant Stark stated.

"Ye'll no be takin' him!" Captain McFarlane protested. "He's a canny sort o' chap. No the fightin' kind."

"The order permits no exceptions," Lieutenant Stark asserted. "He may be a spy, for all you know. There are a few German cruisers around and he might have some means of getting word to them about conditions here. I'll take him with me now. I have an armed detail in the boat."

Captain McFarlane shook his head wearily. "Weel . . . if ye will," he said, resignedly, and, turning to me, he ordered: "Fetch Vollman tae the gangway. Tell him tae tak' a' his clothes."

The sailor men crowded around me when I entered the forecastle. I told them what had transpired, and passed on the orders. Immediately a vicious clamor arose. Suddenly Vollman had become a villain of the deepest die. They surged around him, threatening violence. In the commotion Vollman escaped to the deck, but they went after him like a pack of wolves, shouting vile oaths.

Captain McFarlane stood conversing with Lieutenant Stark within the glow of the hurricane lantern at the top of the accommodation ladder when the mob approached. Immediately they thrust Vollman behind them.

"Get back where ye belong, ye stupid fools!" thundered Captain McFarlane.

MURDER was in the air. Lieutenant Stark muttered something about calling his soldiers to the deck, but Captain McFarlane waved him impatiently down the ladder. "Go!" he commanded. "I'll tame them wi' ma tongue!" He waited until the boat had disappeared into the soft darkness; then he turned to the sailor men in rage. "Ye ca' yersel's men!" he bellowed. "But ye're no! Ye're scum! Ye're as senseless as the wild beasts in the fields! Ye'd kill a man! For why?" His blazing eyes scourged the mob with the sting of a whip. No one answered him. He went on: "Ye dinna ken, because ye dinna know. Ye'd better get forrard where ye belong afore I lay ma fists on ye!"

The sailor men scuffled uncomfortably, then drifted away, cowed by his anger; but I remained in the shadow of the fiddley, watching him. Somehow his voice affected me deeply; it was so urgent, as if he were clinging desperately to an ideal that was being shattered against his will. . . .

A week swept into oblivion on waves upon waves of excitement. Because the *Monarch* was the only vessel on the Coast, she was dispatched to Lome in German Togoland, where, amid the jeers of the local negroes, the German residents were taken on board for transportation to Sierra Leone, there to be interned until the war would be over; rumor placed a German cruiser off the port awaiting an opportunity to attempt a rescue, but if she was there, she never came in; mines supposedly concealed by German spies under the Government buildings did not explode, nor were they ever found; and from far-off Europe came the depressing news that our forces were in full retreat before the enemy. Then, to put the Peter on it when the excitement had somewhat died down, the *Monarch,* now commandeered by the Admiralty, was ordered back to the Forcados River, where, off the village of Burutu, she was moored with two anchors to await the time when the German raiders would be destroyed before putting to sea.

As I look back at it now, I can feel again the misery of it all: The quinine every morning and evening; the grumbling of the sailor men as they sweated in the damp, dark holds while painting the inside of the hull; the fever, and the soaked negro boatmen who came off to take our sick to hospital; Mr. Selkirk, the old second mate, sitting in the bathtub with his feet in buckets of salt water to chase the rheumatism from his bones; Mr. Johnson, the chief steward, drunk as a lord with the rum that should have been used to dissolve the quinine; and Jamie moping around, wishing that he had never left home.

At last the day came when the sun, hungry for a sight of the land, scoffed up the clouds, and with its dazzling light trimmed the bright green leaves with gold and sent a warmth into our hearts.

Toward the end of that fresh afternoon Captain McFarlane came on board, his face wreathed in a smile.

"We're gangin' awa' tae sea again," he said, as we looked eagerly toward him. "In the mornin' we're sailin' tae Key West for orders."

To celebrate the good news Mr. Jones, the chief engineer, bought a parrot; and we, the apprentices, raced around the deck whooping with joy.

"THE skin of my belly's chafing against my back-bone," grumbled Spifkins one evening, pulling the slack of his singlet out and letting it go flop against his stomach, "and I feel so weak I couldn't pull a chicken off a perch."

The *Monarch* had been more than a week at sea and we were all seated around the mess-room table at supper which, in addition to the scones and the preserved potatoes, consisted of Harriet Lane and tea, all, except the tea, being very unappetizing. And it was all the chief steward's fault. During the greater part of the three months the vessel had lain to an anchor in the Forcados River he had been too drunk to attend to his duties. The flour had become damp, the potatoes had sprouted and turned mushy, and the remainder of the perishable provisions, stowed as they were in the lazaret, had been so despoiled by rats that only a small portion of them had been salvaged. If conditions had otherwise been normal there would have been enough to carry the vessel to Key West, but the speed had been reduced almost to half owing to a thick growth of barnacles and grass on the under-water hull, and this had necessitated an issuance of emergency rations to all hands.

I swallowed a spoonful of the preserved potatoes with a relish I did not feel, and smacking my lips, I said jovially: "You'd better learn to like it, boys. You've got to stomach it for five or six weeks more, although I did hear we might have a change tomorrow. The Chinkee cook has orders for a rat-and-cockroach pie. Great stuff when flavored with Stockholm tar! I remember once—"

A scone missed my head by the fraction of an inch, and Ernie shouted, "Shut up!" and, including the others in a swift glance, he said: "Look here, you chaps, never mind him. He'd play the bridge against us any day. He's on their side because he wants to get ahead." He leaned forward and went on confidentially: "Don't you think it's time we did a little foraging? We've been mighty good since we left Cardiff."

It was our custom once a week or so to purloin some tid-bits from the chief steward's storeroom, each of us taking a turn of sneaking in when the time was opportune. Being paid no wages as cadets, we considered what we took as part payment for the services we rendered with the sweat of our brows.

"See here!" I protested, rising to my feet. "We can't do that! You know as well as I the 'old man' is up against it."

The mess-boy, who had been leaning on the sink by the door, came forward to the table. "He's not playin' the game, not 'e," he muttered. "He's eatin' like he always done, fresh eggs an' all."

"You lie!" I shouted, and I raised my fist to strike him, but Spifkins caught my arm and pulled me down on to the settee.

"I don't!" the mess-boy shouted back. "The stooard, he baked a cake for him, today!"

"A cake!" we all exclaimed in chorus. It seemed incredible. Yet Captain McFarlane, we knew, was fond of cake.

"Yes, a cake!" the mess-boy went on, lowering his voice to a whisper. "An' it's in the saloon—in the locker to the left of the bloomin' fireplace. I watched the chief stooard hide it there this afternoon with me own eyes."

Before I could speak again Ernie was on his feet.

"We've got to get that cake, you chaps!" he stated blandly. "We'll draw lots for who shall steal it. Agreed?"

Again we nodded eagerly. Four matches were broken in varying lengths and placed in a cap, and the cap held

high by the mess-boy. I drew the longest piece.

For a second I was stunned. I had a strong desire to refuse to go, but the decision had been reached fairly, and to fail would have been to receive the scorn of the others. So I said: "All right, I'll get it when everything is quiet," and hastened from the mess-room.

I HAD the first wheel in the third mate's watch. When I was relieved at ten o'clock, the vessel was quiet—for a fine rain, drifting on the light trade wind, had sent all hands to bed. I crept fearfully forward and opening the door as stealthily as possible, I entered the alleyway which led into the saloon.

On the coir mat inside the saloon door I halted. The ports, gray against the utter blackness of the night, were like so many eyes watching me. Mustering all my courage, I felt my way toward the locker. Two steps I took; then over the carpet lying on the deck I stumbled. The clatter was like thunder, and I stood rigid with terror when I heard Captain McFarlane demand:

"Who's that?"

Numbed into silence, I turned to escape the way I had entered, but a bell rang and a match flared up in the chief steward's cabin, and I was trapped. I wanted to die; only death, I thought, could hide me from the ignominy of my position.

Captain McFarlane shouted: "Steward! Steward! Fetch a light!"

Mr. Johnson, a bathrobe pulled hastily over his pajamas, came in, carrying a lamp above his head. He brought it close to me, and peered through the light at my face, then, muttering under his breath, he turned toward where Captain McFarlane was rising from the settee behind the table.

"It's young Grant, sir," he stated.

"What!" exclaimed Captain McFarlane. He walked over to where I stood, looked down at me, and shaking his head, said hollowly: "Ye, laddie?"

I nodded, feeling unutterably low. Captain McFarlane examined me curiously for a minute or so; then walking back again across the saloon, he sat down in his chair at the head of the table.

"Come here, boy!" he ordered curtly.

I approached him timidly, unable to control the trembling of my legs.

"Sit ye doon!"

When I was seated in a chair opposite him, he asked:

"What was yer purpose here?"

I struggled desperately. I opened my lips but all I uttered was, "I—I—" and I looked at him through a blinding rush of tears.

"Aye, aye, laddie—bide a wee," he said. "But dinna forget—nae lees."

I did not answer immediately because the hint of compassion in his voice had burst the floodgates of my emotions, and I was weeping unashamed. If only he had whipped me with a rope's-end or kicked me from the saloon!

"Brace up, laddie," he said and leaning forward, he patted me gently on the arm.

I did brace up. Stifling my sobs, I stiffened my jaws and blurted out; "I came to steal the cake, sir!"

He looked at me incredulously with his head twisted to one side. "What cake?" he demanded, glancing quickly toward the chief steward.

Mr. Johnson shook his head with emphatic negation. Captain McFarlane's gaze came back to me with a piercing scrutiny.

In desperation I cried out suddenly: "I did come for the cake, sir!" Trembling like a leaf, I rose to my feet, and pointing to the locker to the left of the fireplace, I shouted: "It's in there!"

Captain McFarlane rose deliberately and stamped across the saloon. Grasping the handle, he threw the locker door open with a bang and peered inside. His face was purple with anger when he faced me again, and thundered: "Ye'd lee tae me! There's no a cake here!"

And neither was there! The locker was bare. I stared at it, amazed. Then I stammered out: "He—he—he—told me that there was."

Captain McFarlane was interested. The anger passed from his eyes. "Wha telt ye, laddie?" he asked.

Instantly I realized I had made a grave mistake. "No—no one, sir," I said.

With a snort of disgust he waved me into a chair. He faced the chief steward. "His tongue is twisted like a loon's," he snapped. "Get ye aft an' fetch a' the laddies here!" And when Mr. Johnson had gone to obey, he ordered me to light the lamp, which swung in gimbals.

When Ernie, Spifkins and Jamie entered, sleepy-eyed, he lined us up across the saloon with our backs to the empty fireplace, and walked before us with his hands clasped behind him.

Suddenly he stopped pacing, and faced us. "Grant came here tae steal a cake," he said. "Wha telt him there was ane?"

No one answered. He nodded his head slowly, and went on: "I ha'e tae tak' it then he came here tae work some mischief?" Again no one answered. Shrugging his broad shoulders, he resumed: "Weel, that settles it. He's a liar, wi' the makin's o' a rascal in him, an' there's no a place on a ship for such as he. On oor arrival, his indentures will be canceled an' he'll leave in disgrace. No because he came tae steal a cake, but because he deliberately telt a lee when tae speak the truth wad ha'e been easy. Ye can go!"

I could not believe my ears. I spluttered and choked in a futile effort to establish my innocence.

"Dinna lee again!" Captain McFarlane thundered, shaking an admonitory finger before my nose. "Get oot afore I thrash the life right oot o' ye!"

I was beaten—crushed. I hoped the ship would sink and take me with her. But suddenly Jamie pushed us all to one side and ran into the center of the saloon, with his pajama jacket flying wide open.

"Tommy did speak the truth, sir!" he screamed. "It was the mess-boy—it was all his fault. He—he—he told us there was a cake in here. We drew lots for who would steal it. But Tommy didn't want to come—he didn't want to come!"

Captain McFarlane stroked his beard reflectively. "So!" he said quietly. "An' for why did the mess-boy tell that lee?"

Jamie rushed on: "To get his own back—for things we'd done to him!"

Then I saw it all as clear as day. The mess-boy had lied about the cake, so that one of us would enter the saloon and perhaps get caught.

There was a ponderous silence in which we all looked at each other sheepishly, eager to be away. At last Captain McFarlane looked toward the chief steward, and said: "I can see it a'. Ye'll attend tae him, Mister." Then he stood up, and crossing the saloon, he put an arm around my shoulders and pressed me tightly to his side. "A cake disna matter very much; a laddie's stomach is aye hard tae fill," he said, and he continued in a husky voice that ripped my heart wide open: "It was the lee. I shouldna ha'e been here, but I was just sittin' in the dark, waitin' for word frae forrard. I'm sorry I misjudged ye, laddie. I should ha'e kent ye better."

I wanted to tell him it did not matter, but a knock came on the starboard door.

"Come awa' in," commanded Captain McFarlane.

The door opened to reveal Ting Long, the Number One Chinaman, standing on the mat, his arms clasped across his chest as though holding himself together. In the yellow light from the lamp his wrinkled face was like a piece of old parchment, and over his head a towel was tied.

"Weel?"

Ting Long bowed ever so slightly, but his eyes looked up. "Wong Tie him plenty sick. Him makee leady die. Ti Fung him catchee watch. Wong Tie no can do," he answered quietly.

"Hmmm!" muttered Captain McFarlane, nodding his head ever so slowly. The word had come for which he had been waiting. He ordered Ernie, Spifkins and Jamie back to their bunks. To me, he said: "Ye'd better come awa' forrard, laddie. I micht need ye tae run errands."

"Yes sir," I said, and stood respectfully to one side as he followed Ting Long from the saloon.

THE forecastle alleyway was forbidding as an odorous cave, but through tempered darkness a thin blade of yellow light issued from a doorway on the right. Captain McFarlane searched around and found the knob. As he opened the door the rancid, nauseating smell of opium wafted out on a pall of pale smoke from the starboard forecastle. He waved it aside and entered.

An opium-lamp, a candle set within a tin mug, was quickly extinguished, leaving the dim light of a small japanned bulkhead lantern the solitary illuminant of the rank interior. The Chinese lay on their wooden bunks, apparently asleep. Ting Long seemed to appear as if from nowhere, like a wraith floating on the opium-laden air. He bowed again ever so slightly.

"Wong Tie him makee die. You clome," he said.

He beckoned and we followed him quietly to the after end of the forecastle, where, on a lower bunk, a man lay as if in sleep, his face turned up.

"All leady him die," said Ting Long. "No savvy Captain him clome."

"Tt! Tt!" breathed Captain McFarlane. He bent over, opened the eyes, looked into them; he felt the pulse, laid a hand upon the heart. He straightened up, turned to us, and nodded. "He's dead," he said softly.

None of us spoke. We looked at each other with strangely sober eyes. I was a little afraid, for in that stuffy forecastle

a thousand voices seemed to be shouting at me, while the dim flickering light made a thousand fiendish shapes on the shadowy interior. I was glad when, with one accord, we moved out on to the deck. I breathed deeply of the moist air wafting over the sea; I gazed toward the gloomy sky as though freed from a prison; I realized, as only one who has viewed death for the first time can, that life is fleeting and as frail as a web.

"The first ane in thirty years," Captain McFarlane muttered.

Mr. Boxley wrapped up Wong Tie's body in the blankets in which it lay, and pulled it quickly from the bunk. Out into the night we staggered, carrying it between us, and, with faltering footsteps, because it was so heavy, we traversed the forward well. Staggering up the ladder to the bridge-deck we laid it on the cross-bunker hatch abaft the bridge, covering it with the Red Ensign.

"We'll bury him at eight in the mornin'," said Captain McFarlane.

STITCH! STITCH!

Pat Greenaway squinted up toward the bridge.

"You'll be after seein' many o' them goin' to hell or thereabouts," he said to me, sitting more comfortably astride the body of Wong Tie, "but there's few o' them you'll be seein' that's after takin' their fuel along. But sailor men are aye deep-thinkin' an' ready for the emergency, so to speak." I had been ordered to help him at his grim task; and as we were short of fire-bars, we had used coal inside the canvas shroud for weight.

I was in no mood to enjoy his grim humor. I told him so. He ignored the rebuke, but his soliloquy was interrupted by the appearance of Ting Long, who came shuffling from the region of the fiddley, carrying various articles in his hands. He looked a question at Pat Greenaway, who nodded and rose up with a grunt from his position on the body. I opened the canvas where it had not been sewn together. Ting Long dropped within some small pieces of wood, some rice, a few torn playing cards, and some Chinese cash.

"Him my fliend," he muttered, and he shuffled off to resume his duties.

At seven bells Captain McFarlane came from his cabin to the bridge rail and stood looking down at the hatch.

"Guid mornin'," he said quietly. "Ye'll have him ready for eight?"

"Aye, aye, sorr," Pat Greenaway answered, and, looking at me, he slowly and deliberately winked an eye. His face had assumed an expression of gravity when he turned again toward the Captain, and said: "We be after fixin' him fine for his journey, sorr. But he's been a dry corpse—a dry corpse, sorr!"

Captain McFarlane smiled faintly.

"All right, bos'n," he said.

Pat Greenaway dropped the needle and went, with alacrity, to the Captain's cabin. When he returned to the hatch a strong smell of rum came with him. But the needle flew faster, which told me plainly, that, all morning, he had been stalling for just such an opportunity.

At five minutes to eight Spifkins tolled the large bell on the forecastle-head to summon all hands. Under the sky, across which the storm-clouds were beginning to race, we gathered, strangely quiet, on the rusty iron deck, while over us smoke from the funnel cast a wavering shadow.

Mr. Boxley blew his whistle. Aft, on the poop, Ernie hoisted the Red Ensign to the peak, then lowered it slowly to half-mast. The forward bell ceased its monotonous and doleful tolling. The engine-room telegraph clanged back and forth, and almost immediately the engines stopped. The *Monarch* settled on the smooth surface of the sea, and became uncannily still.

A squall was gathering to windward and a few drops of rain fell as Captain McFarlane, carrying a prayer book, came from his cabin and left the lower bridge in company with Mr. Boxley.

*"Our Father, Who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy—"*

FALTERINGLY, with many references to the book, he led us in prayer. The Chinese firemen gazed stoically at the body on the hatch.

" . . . . . *for ever and ever. Amen."*

The squall broke and rain pattered on the deck. Captain McFarlane looked up at the lowering sky, then his gaze dropped back to the bier, and I saw the tears well up in his eyes to course down his cheeks. He hastily turned the pages of the prayer book as a great sob shook him.

"Hats off!" Pat Greenaway shouted.

Captain McFarlane read: *"Most merciful Father, Who hast been pleased to take unto Thyself—"*

The sailormen raised the hatch. The body of Wong Tie slid, feet foremost, into the waiting sea.

**This vivid narrative of a sea cadet will continue in our forthcoming September issue.**

# *Prospector's Peril*

***A curiosity about abandoned mine-shafts led this gold-seeker into serious danger.***

*By* JOHN LARKIN

JENNY and I were both cursed with an insatiable curiosity. Jenny's ran mostly to tin cans with toothsome labels, while my well-known bump is still stirred at the sight of any old abandoned prospect-shaft or mine-tunnel. Both of us ran true to form, I suppose, for Jenny was a burro, and I was a desert prospector.

Old Jenny would rummage through any stray pile of cans she came to, ending up by getting a foot caught inside a can. Then she would come limping to me with as forlorn an expression as a burro can manage, for me to operate with the can-opener.

Bless her faithful soul! She has long since gone to the seventh heaven of burros, where enormous tasty labels grow wild in large piles without vicious cans being wrapped up in them to trap unwary burros. Jenny's failing never got her into very serious trouble. But mine did. For instance:

I was following the saw-tooth edge of a high mesa in the Diablo Range, heading in a northwesterly direction, when I first sighted the old shaft, a short distance down a boulder-strewn cañon.

I had listened to my share of tales of fabulously rich mines originally discovered and worked by the Spanish dons, who only scratched the surface before Apaches or other hostile tribes drove them back to the Missions, and Mexico. Every desert rat has pipe-dreams of stumbling on one of these abandoned Golcondas, and I wasn't any exception.

I headed down the cañon for the shaft.

When I reached the shaft I looked down it. Far below, I could see a faint glimmer of water—evidently ground seepage. Farther down the cañon, I could see the remains of a crude rock house.

"Well, Jenny ol' gal, looks like we camp here for the night anyway," I announced. "We'll explore this shaft in the morning." Jenny brayed her agreement, and rolled in the sand with much satisfaction when I took off her pack.

I puttered around getting ready for the night, as it was then about three.

And then—I gave way to temptation, assuring myself and Jenny that I'd just take my little geologist's pick and knock about on the walls of the shaft just a little below the collar. I wouldn't go any farther down than that. Usually I would have taken decent precautions before descending an old workings—chopped a post and set it solidly in the ground at the surface, then anchored it properly and tied to it a light half-inch rope which I carried. The free end of the rope would have been dropped down the shaft so that in case of failure of the timbering I could climb out. But this time I intended only to go just below the collar of the shaft, so I took none of my usual precautions.

THE original workers, I found, had descended the shaft by a ladder fastened to stulls, or small timbers, wedged against the rock sides of the shaft. That timbers rot and stulls have a way of working loose with age, I knew; so I carefully tested each rung before putting my full weight on it. I began pecking away at the portion of the rock walls I could reach, as soon as my head was below the collar of the shaft. The rock was typical gold-bearing granite, and I was so interested I kept working lower and lower.

Finally, almost before I knew it, I was standing on the bottom rung of the ladder, which ended about twelve feet above the surface of the water in the bottom of the shaft. I saw a particularly luscious piece of rock on one of the sides, and hung by one hand and reached far over to peck at it with my little pick. Then it happened! The rotten rung I was standing on broke. The sudden jerk of my body was too much for my left hand, and it slipped. I clawed convulsively at the air, then landed in the water with a big splash. My feet hit first, then slid from under me and I fell lengthwise in the scummy water.

I got to my feet after much scrambling; and stood waist-deep looking forlornly at the tiny square of daylight above me, then at the ladder, my only way out, some ten or twelve feet above.

I stood for a moment looking the situation over. That didn't take long. The walls of the shaft were barren of any positive footing until I could reach the end of the ladder—far, oh, so far away.

FIRST I took off my shoes and tried a human-fly act up the most promising side. I did very well for the first six feet, curling my toes over any protruding rock like a crow on a limb and digging my fingernails desperately into any cracks of the rock I could find. Then I reached a particularly nice wide crack in the rock and dug my fingers into it. There was no place to put my feet in aiding me to climb, so I tried to arch my back like an angry cat and walk up the walk with my feet, clinging to the crevice above with my fingers.

All would have been well except for a small detail: I pulled the crack out, and the rock came with it. I made a beautiful back-dive into my private pool, the rock clutched affectionately to my bosom. We both lit with a big splash, the rock naturally on top. The air forced from my lungs when the rock and I stopped simultaneously must have made a miniature waterspout. Luckily I fought it off before it drowned me, and stood up again where I had started, minus two fingernails, one sock, and about a yard of hide. Jenny brayed derisively from near the top of the shaft.

I tried all of the sides, with about the same results. Finally I had all the loose rocks pulled down and the sides of the shaft were nice and smooth, and plenty slippery from the water I had doused them with. If the loose rocks had held out, I might have pulled down enough to climb out on, something on the reverse order of the well-known prairie dog that digs a hole and puts all the dirt behind him as he goes down. However, let's not go into that.

Of course I could have yelled for help, but the nearest town was some sixty-five miles away, and the desert between only inhabited by black, hairy tarantulas and side-winders; so I wasn't that optimistic. The granite side walls were too hard to think of picking hand- and foot-holds, even if I could have found my little pick. It looked like a watery grave on the desert for little John Larkin.

I stood wondering dismally if Rosie back in the Silver Dollar at Arrey would miss me much when I didn't turn up once in a while to buy her a drink,—with the usual percentage check for her,—and was just about to add salty tears to the pool in the bottom, when the idea came to me.

I could see part of a limb sticking out over the top of the last stull cross-piece wedged against the walls. The miner who had put in the stull had evidently been a lazy one, and chosen a place to trim off the limb where it was less thick than where it joined on the stull, and thus had left about four inches sticking up. If I only had a rope, I could lasso the limb and climb up like a monkey, providing I didn't pull the stull down on my head. The biggest drawback was that I didn't have a rope.

Eureka! I had a pocket knife—faithful old companion! I took off my denim overalls that I had purchased in Arrey. With the knife I slit the overalls into strips of suitable size and braided them into a passable rope. My shirt followed, then my underwear and socks; and I was standing in the nude with the rope coiled in my hand ready to lasso the said limb. But the sun had gone down in the meantime and I couldn't see the stull, let alone the projecting limb.

To make a long story short, I cast, and I cast, and I cast some more. Then I tried my left hand awhile to rest the right one. Then I leaned against the wall and cussed some. That must have helped, because on the next throw I grabbed something. I couldn't tell what I had caught, but hoping for the best, and almost expecting to pull the shaft in on top of me, I tightened up. It held. I started up as cautiously as possible, breathing lightly lest my home-made rope break under the added weight of a

lungful of air. After several centuries, I reached up and clutched the timber....

Next morning I had to rig up a regular rope at the top and explore the pool in the bottom until I found my shoes again. What did I do for clothing? Very simple. I cut three holes in a blanket—one for my head and the other two for my arms—and three days later went stalking down the main and only street of Arrey.

"Hi there, Sittin' Bull," Bill Sparks, the first to spy me, yelled out. "Where's yore tommyhawk?"

"I just buried it in the last damn' fool's head that asked me that question," I growled.

# *A Pig and a Panic*

## *By* T. N. TOWNSEND

I BOUGHT the confounded pig close in to the city of Los Angeles. Instead of being satisfied with one good purchase and going back to the ranch, I went on in to town to pick up some pruning-shears. And that pig and I started a panic that put the March 10th earthquake to shame.

I thought he was safe enough in his crate until I turned the corner at Sixth and Hill. And then—the crate was whirled out and hit the pavement with a crash. I heard the brakes on the car behind me squeal. There was another crash when the car smashed into the crate, and another squeal, this time from the pig, that sounded like a steam whistle with acute cramps in the boiler. I piled out of the car expecting to find minced ham. But—no sir! I had live pig to deal with, a pig whose dignity had been sadly hurt, and who was voicing in no uncertain grunts that he would stand for no further nonsense.

When he catapulted out from under the car he had a grease spot behind one ear, a piece of the crate around his neck, and the devil in his eye. I made a grab for him as he shot between my legs—and got my nose bumped on the street paving for my effort! By the time I had scrambled to my feet, he was running amuck in a pedestrian lane crowded with bewildered and startled shoppers. Even though I couldn't see him, he was as easy to locate as a snake in a hen-roost. In front of him the unsuspecting pedestrians walked on serenely; but in his wake he left a jumbled mess of arms and legs and screeching women. As I dashed after him, I saw one portly woman in a costly gown sitting in the gutter staring dully at the piece of crate wrapped around her legs.

"Grab that hog!" I yelled.

The woman in the gutter came to life and shrieked: "Mad dog!"

"Mad dog! Mad dog!" By the time ten others had taken up the call, people were scooting this way and that like ants when you blow on them. Men and women alike jumped into cars or dashed to the shelter of some store. One badly frightened old lady even tried to climb a lamp-post. And my pig, having fixed the traffic at that corner so that it was worse than a log-jam, high-tailed down the street to relieve the tedium of the policeman at the next intersection.

BY this time twenty or thirty people had rallied to my support. More newsboys had collected in that short time than I've ever seen at once before in all

of my life. I know that one long skinny lad with his papers clutched under his arm was running neck and neck with me at the head of the crowd.

In the straightaway we gained on the pig. But when it came to broken-field running through a line of pedestrians, he had us licked from the start. The people who wouldn't, or couldn't, get out of his way when he charged at them, simply had their legs knocked out from under. Not the most polite of tactics, perhaps, but plenty effective.

At last he got tired of the sameness of the streets and decided to try the inside of a bank. I was right behind him when he shot in at the open door, and I could see that he didn't like to be inside of a bank any more than they liked him in it. The slick floor was too much for him. As soon as he hit it, he stiffened his legs in a determined effort to stop; but if it hadn't been for the legs of a nice old gentleman writing a check, I don't know when he would have stopped.

The pig, sprawled out on the floor, looked at the old gentleman sitting beside him. This was the first time he had stopped to see what he had been knocking down, and he didn't seem too pleased. With a disgusted grunt he lurched to his feet, only to skid into a waste-paper basket. I thought for sure that I had him then; but the man on the floor took a swat at the pig with his cane, and this little attention encouraged the pig enough so that he was able to go around in back of the counter and play with the tellers.

By the time I got there, they had completely entered into the spirit of the game. One was sitting on the floor with an adding-machine in his lap, while two others, like matadors, were waving balance-sheets at the brute. The pig was looking around as though to decide what to attack next, when I jumped on him from behind.

As I dragged him by the hind-legs out of the bank, he thrashed about and squealed like a lost soul. Before I had gone up the street ten feet, a woman, looking for all the world like the stern goddess of the Eighteenth Amendment, came swooping down on me with a policeman in tow.

"Arrest this man, Officer!" she commanded, shaking with fury. "Treating that poor little animal that way! I'll report you, Officer, if you don't have him arrested for cruelty to animals."

Shucks, what's an earthquake?

# *Redbeard's*

*A woman who is now an American gives us this vivid story of civil war in Russia.*

## *By* TAMARA

I WAS sixteen in that fateful year when the sky over the Russian countryside blazed scarlet with the flames from the burning mansions of the nobles. It was in 1919 that some of these nobles joined the armies of the "White" generals, Denikin and Kolchak. Others, in peasant garb, were making their way to the borders of the country, and thence to freedom abroad. The greatest numbers, however, among whom were my parents and I, fled to the Ukraine, the lazy and contented South, untouched as yet with open rebellion.

But while the Reds and the Whites were struggling for the supremacy in the North, the French had given a signal for foreign intervention by occupying Siberia; the Germans, simultaneously, claimed the Ukraine for their own. Of all foreigners the Germans had been the least oppressive, yet the Ukraine was seething with hidden discontent against foreign intruders.

Large bands of partisans, the "Greens," took to the woods under the leadership of the red-bearded Batka Machno—the most cunning and ruthless partisan Russia had ever known—and from there troubled the Germans with thunderbolt attacks. They made the detested foreigners clear out of Charkov, the capital, and forced them to abandon several villages around Elisavetgrad, a town of about thirty thousand inhabitants where my parents and I had found temporary refuge.

We lived quietly in a small whitewashed house on the outskirts of town, waiting for our chance to leave for Crimea, whence we hoped to take a boat to Turkey. Nastia, our jovial tubby landlady, supplied us with bread, fowl, milk and fresh gossip.

Nastia was part of that "grapevine telegraph" which never failed to spread news around town before the infor-

# Raid

## ANDREEVA

mation seeped into official channels and started humming along the wires. And so a day before the events took place, we knew that the White Army of General Denikin was making a move toward the Ukraine, that the Germans were evacuating, and that hosts of Reds were marching toward Elisavetgrad in a victorious avalanche.

Next morning the Germans departed. "Fair riddance," the townsfolk commented; but then a new rumor was blown from door to door in awed whispers. Before either the Reds or the Whites would have time to take possession of Elisavetgrad, the town would be at the mercy of the Greens, the ruthless forest partisans hungry for blood and pillage.

Overnight the town militia was formed, and armed men were stationed at various strategic points. Until noon everything was quiet. But almost at the last stroke of twelve, the cutthroats of Machno stormed in at full gallop, whipping their shaggy ponies, brandishing their swords, shooting in the air. Some had as many as three grenades bouncing at their saddles.

Proclamations in red and black appeared on the fences and walls ordering everyone to surrender arms. "Those on whom or in whose habitation firearms are found, will be sentenced to death," they read.

Our house had been the general storehouse for the town's munitions, and now my father, Nastia and I were feverishly loading a sleigh with cartridge-boxes, rifles, and machine-guns which Father was to take out of the yard and abandon somewhere down the street. Nobody would take the responsibility for these firearms so precious a few hours ago.

Mother insisted on Father's throwing away his old army rifle, but he only growled: "Let it be; nobody is going to search us."

"All right," she said; but I saw her slip the rifle at the very bottom of the pile.

When Father returned, he had the rifle in his hand. He beckoned me outside. "You need not tell Mother anything. Just take this rifle into the bedroom and prop the door leading to the front porch with it. That's the best place for it."

Almost before I had finished propping the glass door all fuzzy with frost, Nastia burst in, wailing, "*Ai, ai,* the devils, they have killed our best goose."

"Shut up!" Father ordered—he whom I had never heard speak rudely to anyone before. "Are they coming?"

"Yes, yes, sons of devils!"

"You go play," Father told me. And turning to Mother: "And you, Anna, keep out of the way."

"I will rouge my cheeks and stay in bed. You may tell them I have typhoid fever. Surely they will not venture in, then," Mother said.

"All right, rouge your cheeks, and let's hope that they will pass us."

A clanking of spurs, a babble of voices, and a creaking of boards on the back porch were the answer to Father's hopes.

"*Otkroite dver!* Open there, ho!" came a voice with a strong Southern accent. "Presently, presently," Father answered, giving the last searching glance to the room, and flinging the door wide open.

A curly cloud of steam rose in the doorway, letting in a cold stream of air and five men armed to their teeth.

"You are welcome," Father greeted a man with a red beard who seemed to be the chief. "We just hoped to borrow some firearms from you!"

THE men guffawed, appreciating the joke. They knew that if even two empty cartridges were found around the house, it would spell death to the joker. But Redbeard frowned, saying: "We have information that you are hiding rifles in your house."

Then they went about their search. First they went into the stable. Then the barn, and the cowshed were inspected. One of them even pierced a snowdrift with his bayonet.

By the time they came in, I had placed on the table a boiling samovar, a jar of jam, tea-glasses, and some bread cut very thick. "That's the girl!" Redbeard said approvingly. "I like hot tea

after a cold chase." The partisans laughed. When they had cleaned the table and the pantry of all the jam and meat they could find, they sat with their backs to the stove, fairly purring with contentment. Three of them had finished first and went into Nastia's room, where they amused themselves by letting the feathers out of her pillows.

Redbeard caught a glimpse of my mother's face flushed with "fever" through the bedroom door. "What is the matter with her?" I heard him ask.

"Typhoid," Father confided.

"Is that so!" the chief said.

The rest of the conversation centered around horses, and the cursed Germans. Finally the chief rose, crossed himself, bowing to the picture of the Virgin in the corner, and thanked us for "bread-salt." Was he leaving?

MY heart thumped violently as the partisan's hand gripped the door-knob. Suddenly he turned back and looked searchingly through the bedroom doorway, straight at the rifle which was propping up the door from the bedroom to the front porch. "How many more rooms have you?" he asked sharply.

"Just the bedroom and the front porch," Father answered, his voice thick with emotion.

"Well, we won't trouble her." Redbeard thrust his finger toward the bedroom where my mother lay. "I know you have no firearms, but just let us have a look at that front porch there."

There was no time to lose. Slipping past Redbeard, I skipped into the bedroom, tore a blanket off my bed, drew a chair near the rifle, and throwing the blanket over the gun and the chair, formed a sort of a tent. As Redbeard entered, I noticed that I had not covered the bayonet. In the light of a coal-oil lamp in my father's hands, the end of it gleamed evilly.

For a moment it seemed that Redbeard saw, so resolutely he walked to the door. He looked straight into my eyes.

"What are you doing here? A child, and playing so late?"

Many people thought me younger than my sixteen, for I was uncommonly small. There was mockery and a glint of knowledge in Redbeard's eye.

"Don't you see, I am building a tent," I said, standing with my back to the door so as to cover the bayonet. I noticed that the lamp in Father's hand dipped and trembled.

"Well," the partisan went on with the questioning, "may I get into your tent?"

"Not while I am chief here," I said menacingly.

Redbeard laughed. "Do you have firearms in your tent?"

It was no use to fool ourselves any longer. He knew, and was simply playing with me like a cat with a mouse. I almost said, "Yes," but something held me back. "N-no," I faltered.

"What do you say you have there?" he asked Father, pointing at the porch door.

"Just some of the wife's washing."

That was true. Redbeard could not have found there anything but bodices, petticoats and dresses stiff with frost hanging on a rope stretched across the porch. Apparently not satisfied, Redbeard walked straight to where the rifle stood. Thawing a small round place on the glass above my head, he cupped his palms and peered in to the porch. All the time his chin was within an inch from the sharp end of the bayonet.

For an instant of time the picture of myself and my parents lined up against the wall overshadowed the red beard and the blurred faces of his companions. But as I looked at Redbeard—he was smiling.

"Won't you let me climb in your tent?" I heard his jocose question. And I heard my own voice answering as if from great distance: "Do, if you are small enough."

This made him laugh aloud. He pinched my cheek and thrust into my hand a crumpled twenty-five-ruble bill. "This is for the bread and jam," he said; "and tell your neighbors Batka Machno is not so bad as they think he is. But Machno is death to liars! Now we are going to the place of that louse who had told us you had a whole arsenal in your house. Come on, fellows."

The door swung open, and they all plunged into the night, leaving behind the acrid smell of leather and strong tobacco. Before the hoofs of their shaggy ponies had clattered into silence, Mother entered, wiping the rouge off her face.

"Don't you think my idea about fever was a capital one?"

"Capital," Father repeated. "Excellent." And turning to me:

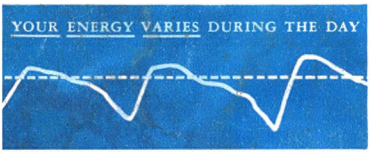
"Show Mother the money and the rifle."

"What rifle?" Mother gasped.

For we were the only two who knew.

# A FACT!

## SCIENCE ADVANCES NEW DATA THAT MAY COMPLETELY CHANGE YOUR IDEAS OF CIGARETTES!




### *Experience of Camel Smokers Confirmed*

Here's a basic discovery that throws new light on our past knowledge about cigarettes. It embodies an "energizing effect" . . . a quick restoration of the flow of natural body energy . . . a relief from fatigue and irritability. You do "get a lift with a Camel," and it is a pleasure that you can repeat as often as you like—all day long. For Camels never get on your nerves.

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**EFFECT IS NATURAL**

The effect is produced by Camels in a wholly natural and utterly delightful way.

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You can smoke just as many of these delightful Camels as you want. You can increase your flow of energy over and over again. And remember: *Camel's costlier tobaccos never get on your nerves.*


**CAMEL'S COSTLIER TOBACCOS NEVER GET ON YOUR NERVES!**


Camels are made from finer, MORE EXPENSIVE TOBACCOS—Turkish & Domestic—than any other popular brand.

KNOW THIS FEELING? Too "all in" to respond to the gaiety of the crowd? That's one of the many times to light a Camel and enjoy its rich flavor while your flow of healthful energy is restored. You will *like* Camels . . . a matchless blend of costlier tobaccos!



# "Get a LIFT with a Camel!"