BLUE BOOK

MAGAZINE

AUGUST, 1950

Twelve Short Stories, including:

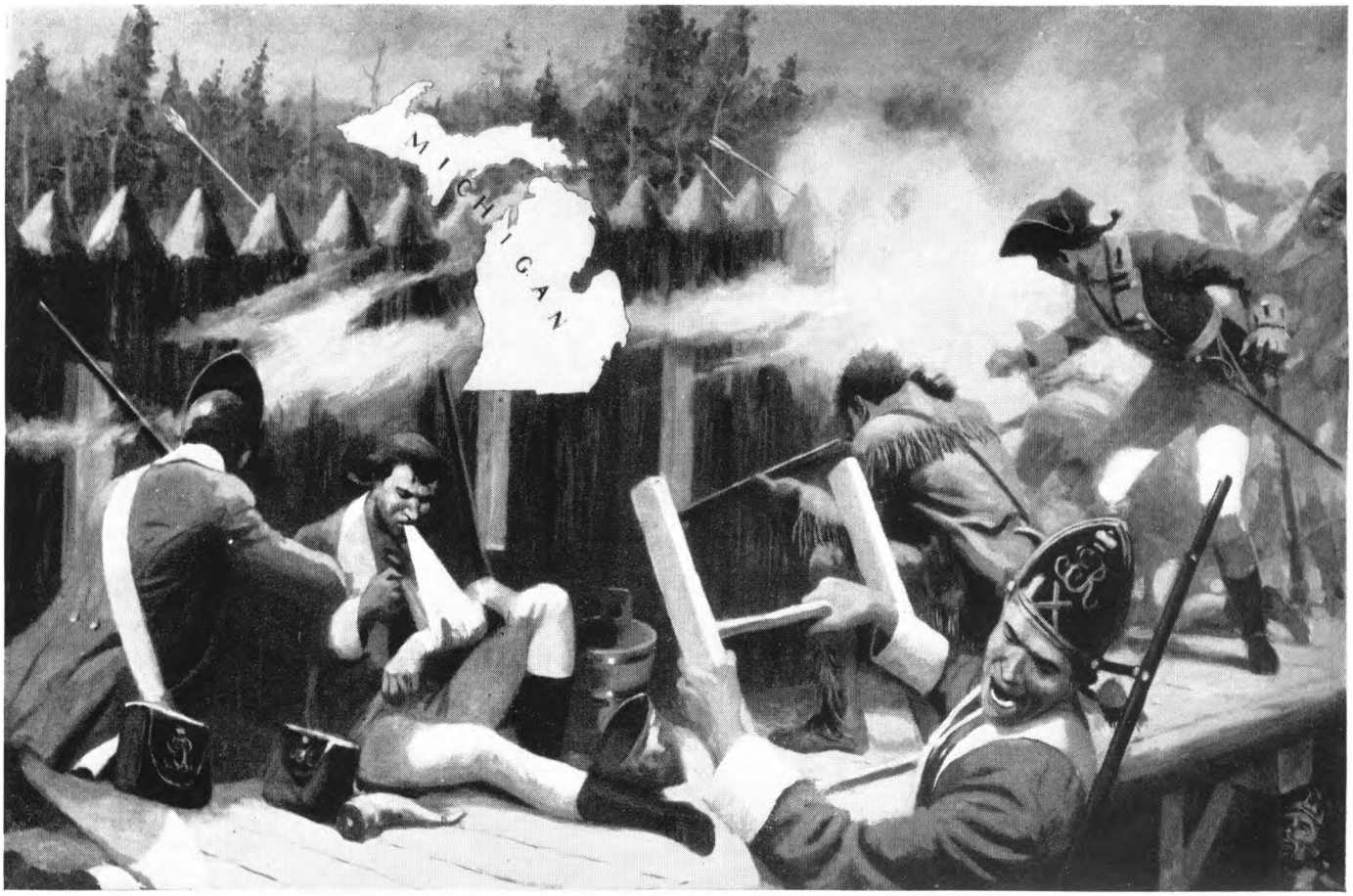
A PILOT MUST KNOW
by Arch Whitehouse

A CASE OF IDENTITY
by Owen Cameron

SNAKE RIVER JIM BUILDS A HOSPITAL
by Wilbur S. Peacock

ROUTE ZERO
by Robert Carse

NEIGHBORHOOD CHAMPION
by Joel Reeve



THESE UNITED STATES . . . . XLIII—MICHIGAN

The Wolverine State

FEW strongholds on our continent have undergone such repeated and vigorous attack as the several forts which guarded the settlement of Detroit from 1701 until 1824. In the long contest between France, England and the Indians for control of the Ohio River valley, the French put much effort into reinforcing their Fort Pontchartrain du Detroit. With the surrender of New France in 1760, the British took over, only to find that their control was bitterly resented by the Western Indians, who had not been consulted in the surrender.

An Indian plot to expel the English from the territory was discovered, and an attempt to allay native discontent proved temporarily successful. However, resentment still burned in the hearts of the Indians, and in the spring of 1763 the gathering tempest broke. Simultaneous attacks were made on British forts scattered over a thousand miles of wilderness. Of all these outposts only three held fast—Niagara, Fort Pitt and Detroit.

Because of the importance of Detroit, where Pontiac led the attack, this struggle is known as the Pontiac War. Pontiac, an Ottawa chief, cooperating with other aggrieved tribes, undertook to conquer the garrison by stratagem. On the excuse of holding a council, three hundred warriors with sawed-off guns concealed under their blankets gained admittance to the fort. But the British officer in command had been forewarned, and his resistance was so effective that the Indians were forced to retire before Pontiac had an opportunity to give the signal for the intended massacre.

In the siege of the fort that followed, two tiny armed sailing vessels in the nearby river brought supplies to a stanch band of one hundred defenders for fifteen months. Outside the fort, hundreds of warriors, led by the savage genius Pontiac, and enjoying the sympathy of the French settlers, unsuccessfully tried to sever this slender line of communication, while at the same time laying siege to the fort with a sustained and vicious fury. In 1764, General Gage in a final all-out effort to end the war, launched two armies to break the siege. Colonel Bradstreet, who entered Detroit on August 26, 1764, routed Pontiac and his allied attackers. A year later a formal peace was negotiated.

The completion of the Erie Canal in 1825 brought an end to the predominance of French population and customs by bringing Michigan within the sweep of American settlement. A heated dispute with Ohio over Michigan's southern border caused the inhabitants to unite and banish the U. S. territorial government. A State government was established, and functioned for a year and a half, unrecognized by the United States. Finally, in 1837, the southern boundary dispute was settled in favor of Ohio, but Michigan received in compensation the Upper Peninsula.

TODAY, within an eighty-five-mile radius of Detroit, nine out of ten American automobiles are manufactured. From the forests in the north comes much of the wood for furniture made at Grand Rapids. Connecting Lake Superior and Lake Huron is the busiest canal in the world, the Sault Ste. Marie. Two of the five locks in this canal are reputed to be the longest in the world.

The spirit of the defenders of old Fort Detroit is the spirit of modern Michigan. It is a worthy heritage.

Readers' Comment*

As the Twig Is Bent—

I BROUGHT my two boys up reading BLUE BOOK; they turned out fine. I give your clear thinking articles, exciting clean stories and interesting, educational features quite a bit of the credit. Now I find my young daughter is one of your fans. Well, I guess girls need imagination, adventure and facts, too. But I surely hate to think of being second in reading my BLUE BOOK for five or six years more.

REX CAMPBELL

Rescued from Satan's Calling Cards

CRITICISE a life-saver? What do you think I am? This is a bouquet of roses if you ever saw one!

Here I have been doing my wifely duty to keep my husband contented evenings by playing cards with him night after night for months, when I just hate to play cards. Then our son was home on a visit, and he left a copy of BLUE BOOK. One night I attended P.T.A. meeting and when I came home my husband was reading BLUE BOOK—even took it to bed with him to read some more!

I resolved to investigate the very next morning, and the sad part of the story is that my ironing was not done until that evening while my husband was again reading the BLUE BOOK. But I didn't have to spend the evening juggling "Satan's Calling Cards."

MRS. GENEVIEVE THOMPSON

A Volume of Best Ones?

AT 29 perhaps I am too young to be sighing for the "good old days"; but I would like to suggest combing through your back issues and publishing in hard-back form some of the best stories from BLUE BOOK. The Peter B. Kyne story in the February, 1950, issue started me thinking of other yarns by this author from years ago, leading of course to thoughts of contemporaries from the same period. I am certain many of your long-time readers would re-enjoy some of the tales by H. Bedford-Jones and Max Brand and others. What about asking reader reactions?

H. MATHIEU TRUESDELL

*The Editors of BLUE BOOK are glad to receive letters of constructive criticism and suggestions; and for the ones we publish each month we will pay the writers ten dollars each.

Letters should not be longer than two hundred words; no letters can be returned and all will become property of McCall Corporation. They should be addressed: Editor of Letters, Blue Book Magazine, 230 Park Ave., New York 17, New York.

BLUE BOOK

August, 1950 **MAGAZINE** Vol. 91, No. 4

A Complete Novel

Twelve Short Stories

Stories of Fact and Experience

Special Features

The short stories and novel herein are fiction and intended as such. They do not refer to real characters or actual events. If the name of any living person is used, it is a coincidence.

PHILLIPS WYMAN, *Publisher* **DONALD KENNICOTT**, *Editor*

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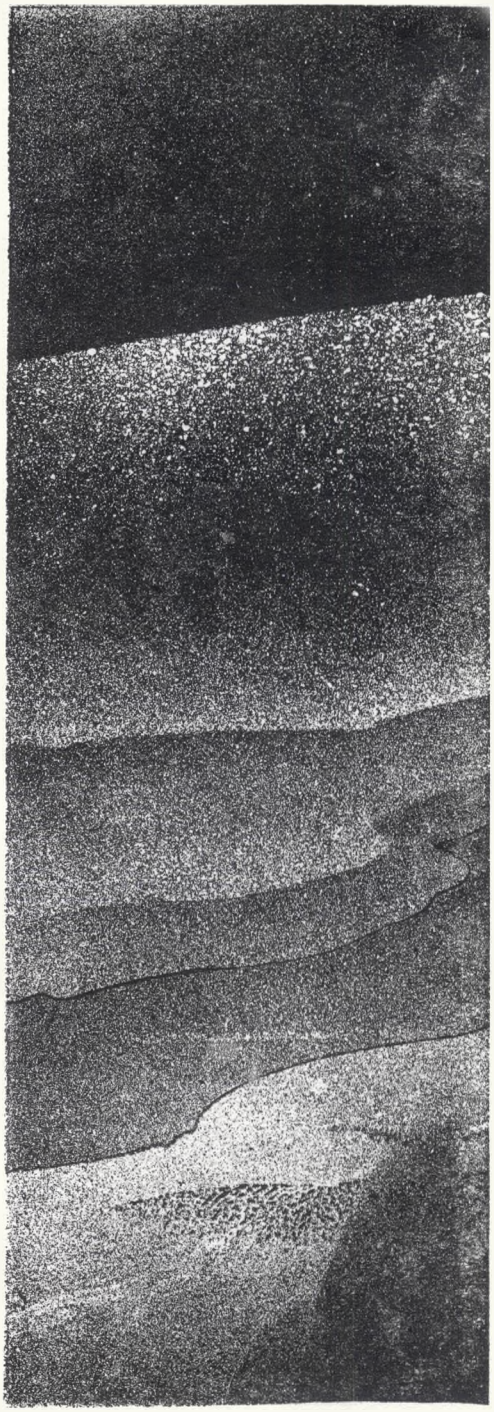
SURVIVAL

A Story of Deep Horror and Great Courage

by FARLEY MOWAT



ON a spring day I sat in the doorway of the trader's cabin, watching an Eskimo in his kayak, out on the broken waters of Hudson Bay. The kayak—vanishing and reappearing—might have been no more than an idle gull, at rest on the heaving surface of the sea. It was too fragile to be real; and yet I knew its reality, and the reality of the mission that had taken Anoteelik to sea on such a day, and in such a craft.

I had helped him load the kayak for the journey. Together, we had carried the dress-goods and food down from the store; and I had helped the squat little man lash the cargo to the foredeck of the tiny craft. Then I watched him, until the bright flash of his double-bladed paddle was only a white flicker on the gray sea.

It was the third time—the third spring—that I had seen him make his way out through the estuary to the farthest islet in the river delta; but it was the first time that I understood all that lay beyond his yearly voyage.

I saw him go, for the first time, in the spring of 1946; and old George Rush, the trader, drew my attention to him then.

"You see that old Huskie?" George asked. And when I had nodded: "For ten years now—each spring when the river ice clears—old Ano goes out there alone, out to the farthest rock islet; and he takes a good hundred dollars' worth of my trade goods along! And why? Well, that dirty old savage is taking a gift to his wife! . . . Yes—he buried her there, as near to the sea as there was rock for her grave.

"The old priest from Eskimo Point—he calls Anoteelik a heathen; and he's tried, maybe a half-dozen times, to make Ano quit his giving of gifts to the dead. Says it has a bad influence on the rest of the tribe—they're supposed to be Christians, you know. But old Ano, he smiles and says: 'Yes, Father,' he says. But by God, every spring he turns in his fox pelts to me. I sell him the same bill of goods—and he takes it, and dumps it out there on that rock in the Bay!"

That was all that George knew; and for two years it was all that I knew. But during my second year in the land I wintered with a family of Eskimos from the Post. It happened that I was able to do them some good when Angwa—he was the head of the house—got the prong of a fish-spear stuck in the flesh of his leg. When spring came again, I was no longer looked on as an intruder, but Angwa had indulgently taken me into the life of the band. He had given me a new Eskimo name. Kipmik, it was—and that means, *Little Dog*.

Down at the coast, when the People gathered that spring, it was spoken about, that Little Dog, though foolish, had at least enough sense not to jeer at the way of the People. That gave me an edge on the traders and priests. One day old Anoteelik found me laboring away at the language, with Itkut, his son. Ano listened as I tortured the intricate sounds for a while; then he laughed, a good laugh that was with me, and empty of scorn. After that he took over the task of instructing my tongue; and by the time summer was over, we had formed a close friendship between us.

On a night during that summer, when the flies were still thick and the sky was still touched by the warmth of the late-setting sun, I went to a drum-dance at the tent of old Ano. His only son, Itkut, danced the tale of the Killing of Deer—and as it was danced, I saw Ano's face. And the deeply scarred mask of his skin was livid with pride—and with love.

Later on, when the guests had belched their good-nights in traditional style, Ano suggested a walk and a smoke, down by the shore. So we walked over the gravel at the time before dawn, and flocks of gray plover fled shricking before us, out to the dim wastes of the sea. And after a while we rested our backs on a boulder, and smoked, while the sea-loons yapped at each other like dogs when the deer are in sight.

The scarred, grotesque face of the man was turned to the sea; and after a time he spoke to the sea—though his words were meant for my ears.

"Kipmik," he said, "I know that you wonder at me. Yet you look on this torn face of mine, and your questions are swallowed, still deep in your throat. You watch, as I make my spring journey out into the sea,

but your questions remain buried, unheard, in your heart.

"That is the way of my People; because you respect the old ways, and because tonight Itkut danced well for my guests, and brought memories back from times past—because of these things, I would tell you a tale—that of my life. And it has never been told to my People, for they are too close; nor yet to the white men, for they are too distant from me. But you stand in between, Little Dog; and if you will listen—then will I speak."

I made no answer, where none was needed. And in the hour that gives rise to the dawn, Anoteelik told me his tale:

"My wife was my belly and blood, who waits for me now in the far land where the deer are as many as stars. But in her wide tent there is no man to slaughter those deer, until I shall come there myself. So for her I must take the spirit gifts every spring to the sea, though the trader may laugh, and the old priest threaten my soul!

"Kala was not of my tribe; yet I loved her beyond all things that are, in the land. It was said that I loved her too well. But because I was a hunter of fame, men respected my love; even the Shaman, old Mahuk, spoke, saying that the Sea Mother, Takanaluk Arnaluk, was pleased with the love that I held for my wife.

"You know that I was not born here on the coast, but with the Inland People on the Great Plateau of the treeless land. My mother was Kunee; and my father—one of five men. For those were the days when the People passed like snow, before the hot breath of the plague. I was born in the last years of the Great Dying, when the camps of the Inland People were emptied of men. But Kunee was a good woman, and she did not lack men to bring meat to her tent—while there were still men alive.

"I was born in the late summer months, and my mother was dead before autumn. Then I was taken into the childless tent of Ungyala, and

became the son of that tent, and accompanied the man and his wife when they deserted the land of the dying, and fled far to the west.

"It was a new land that we went to—by the Lake of the Heaped-up Bones. The deer were plentiful there, so we lived in that place while I grew to the age of a youth, and learned to hunt by myself, and drive the long sled over the hard-packed snows of the plains.

"But during the years at the Lake, we found no signs of men in all the land to the west and to the north. The plains were given over to the immense herds of the deer; to the musk oxen, and to Akla, the great brown bear of the Barrens.

"Now in the winter of the year that I became *angeutwa*—a youth—the storms were hard and the winter grew very long. Ungyala and I had made a good kill of deer in the fall, and so we were able to live through that winter; yet we increasingly longed for the coming of spring, and fresh meat.

"When that winter was already old, there came a space without storms; and so I, in the pride of my youth, resolved to make a long journey alone, into the land to the west. I hoped to kill a fine musk ox and bring back fresh meat to the igloo, and pride to the hearts of my foster folk.

"Ungyala gave me his word—though I think he gave it unwillingly, for he was afraid of the land to the west. Then I took seven dogs, and drove over the snow-hidden hills for the time of three sleeps, and I saw no living thing, nor even the tracks of a hare.

"But on the fourth day I came to the lip of a valley, and as I began to descend, my dogs broke into a shrill chorus of fear. They would not be driven, but crouched in the snow, in a terror that stiffened their limbs, and made them numb to the sweep of my whip.

"I left them then, and walked cautiously forward on foot, until I could look down into the flat run of a gully that lay sheltered from the fierce breath of the gales. I looked, and I knew why my dogs were in terror, for below me, looming large on the snow, was the huge form of Akla, the gigantic brown bear!

"I knew why my dogs had refused to be driven, for all things fear Akla, even the People themselves. But I was young, and a fool in those days, and I thought only of the pride of returning home with that vast skin stretched over my sled.

"So I went back to the team, and I beat the lead dog until she forgot her fear of the bear. Then I took my bow from its case and drove the dogs down the slope.

"But Akla, the frightful one, was afraid of a boy and his dogs, and he fled heavily away, over the drifts. When I came up to the spot where Akla had stood, I saw something that took my heart out of the chase, for the bear had been standing on the roof of an igloo!

"Now we had always thought that no man lived to the west of our land—yet here was an igloo before me. The door tunnel was drifted in tightly, and the high drifts covered all but the top of the dome. I supposed that the place was abandoned, but my curiosity swelled, and I took my snow-probe and plunged it into a crack between the blocks of the roof. The probe slid in easily, so that I knew that the igloo was still empty of snow.

"My dogs crouched in terror. . . . I walked cautiously forward; looming before me was the huge form of Akla the bear!"

"Then I grew cautious and slightly afraid, for the thought came that this might be a home of the bodiless devils who live in the land. Yet the thought that it might also, perhaps, be the shelter of men, gave me courage to do as I did.

"With my snow-knife I cut into the dome, then dropped through the hole—falling roughly on the floor of a room that was dark as the night. I lit a piece of oiled moss, and by the faint flame, saw that this had indeed been the shelter of men. I could see a litter of bones and the fragments of old hides, and robes. But suddenly, there on the sleeping ledge, I saw something else—and my breath froze in my chest! There were skulls, two skulls, on that ledge! The flesh still clung to the scalps, but the black hair hung down over bones that had been stripped bare.

"My terror was great, yet I quickly recovered myself, for I knew that the wolverine, Kawik, will treat the dead so. But as the little lamp flared in my hand, there came movement from under a pile of old hides on the floor! I think that I shouted my fear. I know that I gripped the snow-knife in my hand, ready to strike, as I kicked back the hides with my foot!

"But, Kipmik, it was no devil that lay hidden under the skins—but all that starvation and madness had left of a girl!

"Kipmik, you have seen the corpses of deer that have dried under the pale suns of autumn, when the flies have not found them? Well, so it was with this woman who lay there before me. I think that her body was dead, for the bones seemed to burst forth through the skin; yet her spirit was there in her eyes, for her eyes were still alive.

"Now though I was young and afraid, still I knew what to do, for starvation is never a stranger in the camps of my People. There was a soapstone pot on the floor of the igloo, and this I held under my arm, while I sliced into my flesh and let the hot blood flow into the bowl.

"Then—through the space of a day and a night—I fed the thing I had found with the blood from my veins. Drop by drop, was she fed. And between feedings I held her close in my arms, under the warm robe that I brought from my sled, till the warmth from my body warmed the chill from her limbs.

"Life flowed back to her slowly, and after three days she could move and sit up by my side without aid—but she spoke not a word to my questions. Yet she must have had strength in her body the day I first found her, for later that day, when I came to look again for the skulls on the ledge, they were gone. I thought I had dreamed of their presence, but this was not so. For the girl had found strength, even in death, to hide them away from my eyes that first day in the igloo.

"On the third day she was ready to travel. So I brought her back to the place of my People, and my parents-by-right took her in and were glad she had come.

"Only afterward, when the excitement of the return was finished, did I again remember the skulls that I thought I had seen. Then a cold horror came over me; and one night I told old Ungyala of what I had seen—though I guessed how he would explain it.

"He spoke to me, saying: 'Anoteelik, this woman has eaten the meat of the dead. She is unclean in the eyes of herself, and of all men. Yet until you too have faced death in the way that he came to this girl, do not judge of

Illustrated by
JOHN COSTIGAN, N.A.

her act. But let the memory die in your soul—for I think she has suffered enough, that the spirits of those she has wronged will forgive her her deed.'

"So we in the camp never spoke again of the thing. The girl quickly recovered her youth—she who had seemed beyond age; and as she grew fat, she grew comely; and often my heart beat faster when she was near. But the girl spoke little to us, except to tell us her name, and to say that her People had come from the northern coast to hunt musk-oxen, and had lingered too long in the land.

"It was during the moon before spring that she suddenly broke into words, one day when we men were away from the camp. Then she told my mother-by-right how the family dogs had all died of the madness, and how her parents had followed the dogs into the far land of Sila—the god of the sky. She told how she waited for death, till her hunger also brought madness, and she fell on the frozen corpses of those that she loved, and ate the flesh of the dead. When she stopped telling her tale, she cried out: 'Sila—I am unclean!' And she would have gone out into the night and perished, but for my mother, who held her until we returned.

"After that we built her an igloo apart, for that was her wish. She lived alone there, till the spring; and my mother brought her food. But we men did not see her at all.

"It was good that the spring came soon after, for spring is the time of forgetting. The deer came back to our land, and the does were heavy with fawn. The ptarmigan mated, and cried from the hills; and the male lemmings sought out the females under the moss.

"The igloos decayed and collapsed under the sun, and Kala, the girl, came back to the family and lived in the big tent that we had built. Kala seemed to put out of mind the things that had passed in the winter, and she willingly helped with the work.

"As for me, my love for the girl had grown during the days that she kept out of sight; and it was more than the call of my loins in the spring—for I had known pity for her, and pity breeds love in men.

"One night, after the snow was all gone, I sat by her side in the tent and spoke awkwardly of my love. Kala turned her face from me, but with one hand she fingered my arm, where the scar from the knife-wounds still stood. And that night, as we lay all together up on the ledge, she came to my arms, and then we were husband and wife.

"Now that was the finding of Kala, and it brought me the happiest days of my life. Kala showed that she was a woman of women. Her sewing was gifted by spirits, and her cooking made even my father grow fat!

"Then on a day in the winter that followed, Ungyala and I were sent out from the tent. We sat on a high hill and smoked, till the ordeal was done, and we heard the chant of my mother-by-right, singing birth-songs to the good spirits, deep down in the earth.

"My child was a son. And when I heard this, I thought that all spirits must love me indeed. But a man who thinks thus is a fool, for he cannot know what lies ahead.

"The years that followed the birth of Itkut, our son, drifted like snow-birds over the rocks. And in time we left the Lake of the Heaped-up Ribs, and journeyed eastward again. So at length we came to the start of the Great Fish River, that flows out of the Barrens to die here, at last, by the sea.

"Kala yearned to return to the sea, so we followed the river and came at last to the homes of the coastal people. We became one of the families that winter high up the river, and descend to the coast in the spring.

"Our life then, was as it is now. Each summer we journeyed far up the river to a lake where the autumn deer crossed in great herds. We were the most-inland camp, and there were a dozen camps on the river between us and the sea.

"Here, in the fall of the year, Ungyala and I speared the fat deer at the crossings, and cached the meat under rocks by the shore. By the time that the first snow drove the deer out of the country, we would have enough meat for the winter; fat for our lamps, and hides for our clothing and for our robes.

"When the deer had passed, in the late days of autumn, there was little to do till winter arrived, and it was in those days that I would sit and weigh up the worth of my wife. On behalf of my body, I loved her for the son she had borne; for the food she prepared, and for the clothes that she sewed. But these are the common gifts of all wives of my race. My love went beyond the love of the body, and it was greater, even, than my belief in the laws of the land. I do not know how to explain it—I never have known; but Kala held me in her soul. Her love passed all limits of simple respect for her husband, and entered that country of pleasure which we of the People do not expect to know in

"Only a few deer came to the river, not forerunners of the great

herds, but stragglers that follow behind. Still, we hunted like madmen."

this life. My love was as great, and it grew even as the child Itkut grew.

"I must tell you, that when we first came to the coast, we met the first white man that we had known. It was he who built the wood igloo that the trader now lives in; but he was a different man from the trader, and avid for women. By the time he had lived here a year, there were not many wives who had not spent a few nights in his house. But we liked him—and it was still the law of the land that a man must never refuse a gift to one who asks for that gift.

"Kala alone did not go to the house of the white man—though he often asked that she should. He put great embarrassment on me, for I was forced to refuse, even as I had refused my song-cousins when they asked for the loan of my wife on the long seal-hunting trips up the coast of the Bay. In refusing, I broke the old laws of the land; but all the People knew that my love for my wife was greater than I, and so I was never condemned for what I could not ever bring myself to do.

"As for Kala, I think that she would have died had I given her over to others—but she would have done as I asked. I never asked; and for the love that I bore her, she gave me reward in the end.

"That giving was made in a time long before you came to this land, Little Dog—in a year I may never forget!

"In the late summer of that year we had gone up the river, making our camp as usual, by the Lake of the Deer. Our tent was pitched within sight of the ford, and from the door of the tent we looked out each morning to see if the deer had arrived.

"Many mornings I went to the door, but always the crossing was empty of life, and the lichens on the banks were unmarked by the feet of the deer. At last the dwarf shrubs began to burn in the first frosts, and the moss grew dull and old on the face of the rocks—but there were no deer to be seen.

"We grew worried, and even the little child Itkut was frightened, for in his few years of life there had not been a time when the deer failed to come to the crossing.

"At last, on a morning there was snow in the air—only a thin mist of fine snow, but the signal that winter had driven upon us. But it had not driven the deer to the crossing.

"Then, on the day after the snow, the deer finally came. Ungyala and I went out with light hearts and killed at the crossing all day. But our fears had returned before dusk, for only a few deer came to the river, and these were poor, and lacking in fat; so that we knew they were not the forerunners of the great herds, but only the stragglers that follow behind! Still, we dared not give in to our fears, and we hunted like madmen, while there was light to see.

"On the fourth day there were no more deer at the crossing—and we had only enough meat for three months!

"Then the snow came again, and with fury, and we began winter with hearts that were filled with misgiving. During the first half of the winter Ungyala and I did not stay much at the igloo, but roamed with our dogs, over the land, and killed what we could find. There was no trapping that season, for we could not spare deer meat for bait; nor can a hungry man eat of the pelts of the foxes. Still, a few hares and ptarmigan fell to our guns all the same, but these were really no more than food for hope.

"In the midwinter we ran out of fat. Now there was neither heat nor light in the igloo, and the endless darkness made our misery worse. One day when a blizzard was blowing, I could stand it no longer, and Ungyala and I went out again, to make a great hunt. We drove till the starved dogs could pull us no further, then we rested in the lee of a drift, for the night. We ate nothing, and the old man talked for a little of the days of his youth.

"The next morning Ungyala did not rise to my call, and I buried him deep in the snow, in a grave that I cut with my knife.

"I did not go on with the hunt, for the dogs could not pull. So I returned empty-handed, and before I came to the igloo again, I heard the voices of women singing the songs of the dead. Kala had seen the death of Ungyala in the eye of her mind, and the women were mourning his death long before I returned.

"Not more than a week after the death of Ungyala, I wakened one night to hear the sharp whispers of women. I lay with my face to the wall, and listened to what they were saying. It was Kala who spoke, and she spoke to my mother-by-right.

" 'Nay, old woman,' she said, 'the time is not yet, to take your old bones out into the night. Your rest will come after; but now comes a time when I will have need for your weary old limbs. Ask no questions of me, but get thee back to the ledge, and think not again of going out into the night of thy life!'

"I knew then, that my mother had sought to meet death, and had been held from it by Kala, my wife. But I did not understand why my wife had restrained her, for it is the right of the old women that they be the first to die, when death threatens the camp. And my mother-by-right had already starved herself almost to death.

"But I had little time to wonder at this. Kala came and lay down beside me, and spoke softly into my ear, telling me the things I had been dreading to hear. For she said that now I must take the dogs that still lived, and make my way eastward, downriver, until I found a camp where there was meat.

"I argued, and tried to refuse. I called her a fool, for she must have known that the other camps that lie by the river could be no better off than we ourselves were. Kala was always more clever than I, yet I could not make her see that my trip would be futile. At the best, I could not hope to get help before reaching the coast if I managed to get there at all. And to make the trip eastward and back would take me nearly a month. In vain did I tell her that we had only food for a week or ten days in the camp, and that if I took the dogs with me, the last source of new food would be taken away.

"She would not hark to my words, and for the first time in our lives, I heard the hard edge of anger come into her voice.

"'You will *go!*' she said hoarsely. 'If you do not—then I shall myself throttle your son when you are out from the igloo, and so save him from the torments and madness that were mine in a time that you remember!'

"Kipmik, I loved her! Though I knew she was wrong, yet in my love I could not refuse her demand. No, and I did not refuse, though I should have known then, of the plan that was hidden so deep in her mind. I knew then, all that was needed to guess at her plan, but I was stupid with hunger, and my heart was filled with confusion. . . .

"At parting next day, we rubbed noses, each with the other—but only the old woman wept. There were no tears from Kala, who knew what she knew, and none from Itkut, who was too young to know what was afoot.

"Ah, that was a journey! I walked, four days to the nearest camp of the People, for the dogs were too weak to pull me at all. And in that first camp I found famine had been there before me. No one lived in that place. It was nearly as bad, all down the river, and I ate some of my dogs to keep me alive, and sometimes shared of that meat with the starving camps that I passed.

"I was within sight of the pressure ice of the sea, when I came to the camp of Angutna. The family of Angutna—who was my song-cousin—were alive and in good health, for they had been eating the flesh of the seals that Angutna speared on the ice of the sea. Angutna was glad to receive me, and when I told of our need, he gave me the flesh of two seals, and he took my few dogs, and gave me his own team of nine, well-fed beasts, to carry me home.

"I BEGAN the upriver journey at once. I was happy, and I sang to the dogs as they ran strongly over the upriver trail. I had been gone no more than ten days from my igloo, and I hoped to return there in five, now that I had a good team. So I sang as the sled ran over the smooth river snow; but as we passed out of sight of the sea, I suddenly heard a sound that drove the song from my lips!

"It was laughter! The high laughter of one who is mad, and I knew it for the voice of Apopa, the evil dwarf spirit who sets dead-falls in the path of the People!

"Then I was afraid for the future, and I drove the dogs with my whip, and I drove them without mercy or rest. The dark winter sky broke into snow and the long wind from the north began feeling its way under my clothes. A blizzard was born, but I did not halt my wild ride.

"Then darkness came on, and the blizzard drove into my face until at last I had to make camp. I made only a windbreak of snow for myself, and as for the dogs, I did not unharness, but picketed them where they lay. Then I crawled under my robes and slept—forgetting Apopa, the blizzard, and all things that be—for I was tired almost to death.

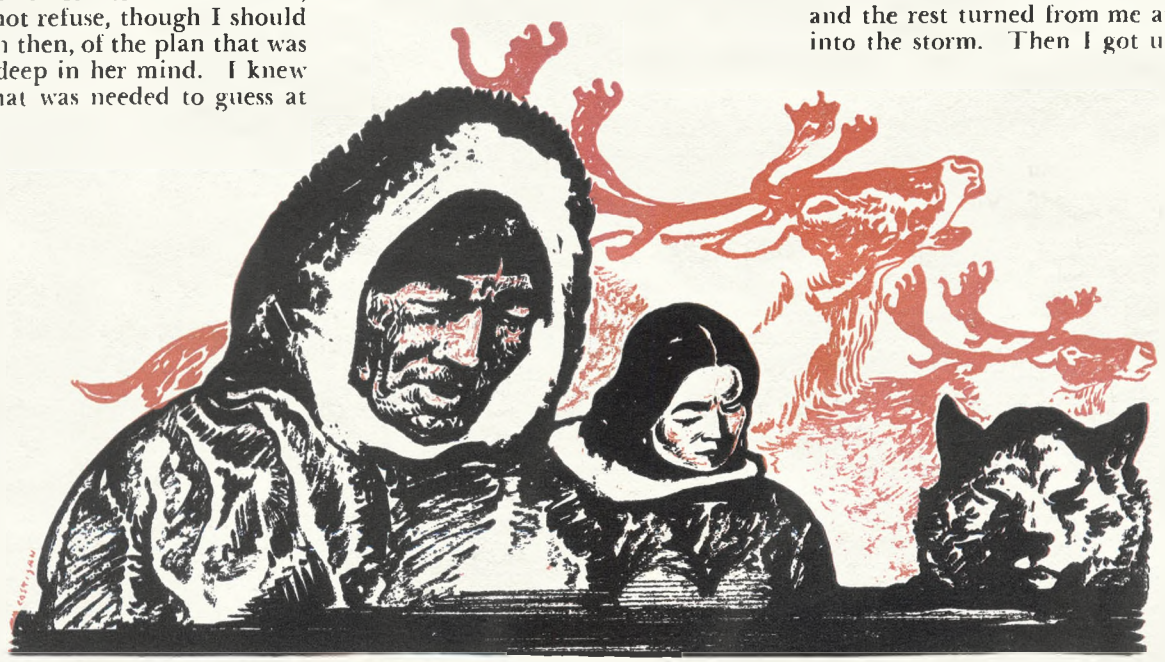
"So I slept, and the devil Apopa rode up on the back of the storm, and sprung the trap he had set!

"All unknowing, I had made my camp only a few hundred yards from a camp of the People, and the dogs of that camp had gnawed free of their tethers and were roaming about, a famished and half-mad pack. In the night, as I slept, they winded my load of fresh meat.

"Apopa muffled all sounds with the storm, and I heard nothing until the time was too late. But at last the marauders attacked the dogs of my team, and in the wild fury that followed, I was awakened by the screaming of dogs.

"I guessed what had happened, and in my anguish and rage I neglected all caution, and flung myself on the beasts with only my hands to protect me. So the dogs set upon me, and but for the accident that my hand fell on the snow-knife, I would have died there.

"But I fought with the heavy snow-knife until I killed five of the dogs, and the rest turned from me and fled into the storm. Then I got up from



"In anguish and rage I flung myself on the beasts; and but for the snow-knife, I would have died there."

the blood-soaked snow by the sled—but the meat was all gone, save for a few scraps scattered far over the snow.

"The next morning broke clear, and I saw the igloos ahead. I crawled to those igloos, and the remaining dogs of my team followed slowly behind, dragging the empty sled, and the beasts that had died in their traces.

"I remember but little of the days that I spent in that camp. My face had been horribly torn, as you see it, and for a long time I might as well have been dead. But the People were good, and they fed me with soups that they could not spare from the mouths of their own. And an old woman nursed me, and yet it was nearly a month before I could travel again; and by then spring was nearly upon us, and already the sun had grown warm. It was warm, but not even the sun of the new spring could touch the chill that lay in my heart.

"When I could travel, I took a light sled and the three dogs that remained. For food, I carried the meat of two dogs, and I set out to return to my home. Those who had helped me did their best to keep me till spring, for they said, with good reason, that there would be no living souls by the Lake of the Deer, and that I would only die there myself, if I went.

"But I did not fear death any more. I drove the dogs onward and the journey was quick, so that in ten days I came to the Lake. My belly was sick at the thought of what I would find—but as the sled swung down the bay where the igloo had stood, then my heart leaped up like a hare! The igloo was still in use, and the snow had newly been swept clear of the tunnel mouth!

"I shouted until my lungs cracked in the bright, cold air. Before the dogs stopped, I was off the sled and running up to the camp. Then I scrambled in through the tunnel, and so great was my joy that I cried, and my eyes were running like rain."

ABRUPTLY, Anoteelik stopped talking. He sat, staring out over the darkened waters—out to the islands that were no more than gray wraiths on the shifting sea. And tears were running down his disfigured cheeks—running like rain. Then he finished his tale.

"I was greeted there in the igloo, by Itkut, and by my mother-by-right. My mother had shrunk to a miserable thing that should have been gone long ago: but Itkut was strong, and his body was firm to the touch, as I took him up in my arms.

"So, holding the boy in my arms, I looked over his shoulder and said: 'Where is Kala?'

"I asked this, yet I knew what the answer would be. And the old woman answered, and said:

" 'What is done, I have done at her will. Now I do not go ever again from this place, for I too am defiled. Yet I only did what she said must be done—and Itkut still lives. Where is Kala? Hold thy boy tight in thy arms. Love him well, for the blood in his veins—hold him close, hold him close, oh, my son—for you hold your wife too, in your arms.'

"And so there is no more to tell. Only that, in the spring, Itkut and I came back down to the coast. And Kala? She came from the sea, so I took her bones out to the island that lies in the Bay. Now while I live, I take her the gifts in the spring—in the spring, when the birds make love on the hills, and the does are heavy with fawn."

Eager volunteers had cleared the way to the ferry. The courier spurred his horse through the cheering town.

The MAIL GOES THROUGH

THE DISTINGUISHED AUTHOR OF "THE FLAGRANT YEARS," "THE GORGEOUS HUSSY," "THE WORLD GOES SMASH" AND MANY OTHER MEMORABLE BOOKS HERE PRESENTS THE STORY OF WHAT IS PERHAPS THE MOST INTERESTING AND MOST AMERICAN CHAPTER IN THE WINNING OF THE WEST—THE PONY EXPRESS.

by SAMUEL HOPKINS ADAMS

THREE men sat over a map in Leavenworth, Kansas. They were traffic experts of a kind no longer in existence. They knew mules and horses and the draught power of slow oxen. They could tell you how long it would take an eight-mule team to snake a Pitching Betsy (Concord coach) across an eight-thousand-foot pass, and why the camels imported from Africa to the Southwest were no good for travel on the hard-surfaced desert.

Railroads did not interest them. There was not a yard of steel laid west of the Missouri River in that year of 1859. Their map was sparsely dotted with the names of towns. Mostly it was empty prairie, rugged ranges, and dead desert. Parts of it were so dry and poisoned with alkali dust that no life existed there. In other places, rivers cut the winding trails, and in flood-time, made the fords impassable.

There was blistering heat to be endured, and in winter sub-zero weather with mountain drifts rising above the tops of the covered wagons. Indians and outlaws were not indicated on the map, but each of the three knew by experience the dangers from attack. The trail to California was a test for determined souls.

Long-distance traffic moved on wooden wheels. It might be the Concord passenger coach, holding eight people, and bringing them in sometimes with arms or ribs broken from the terrific jolting. It might be the high, covered Conestoga wagon, built in Pennsylvania, drawn by sluggish oxen, and sheltering a whole family. Or it might be the lighter Dearborn, with four strong and patient mules in the traces, drawing the homestead-seekers to the Golden West.

Every trip was an adventure of hardy men and brave women. The course was marked with grim reminders: rough boards with brief and tragic inscriptions: "PERISHED HERE OF THIRST," "BURIED WHERE FOUND FROZEN," "DIED OF ARROW WOUND JULY 8."

The trio around the table well knew the rigors of the mapped routes, and of many another not yet on any map. They were the heads of a great freighting company, Russell, Majors & Waddell. Their trade was to carry the necessities of life from railhead and storehouse, out to the remote mining camps and cattle ranches of the developing country. Without them and other competing concerns, thousands of pioneers would have been isolated from civilization.

"It all comes down to this, gentlemen," W. H. Russell addressed his partners. He was a tall, grave man with a manner at once positive and enthusiastic. "A straight line is the shortest distance between two points. You can't get away from that."

"And maybe the slowest." W. B. Waddell was the financier of the little group, a calm-spoken and deliberate man.

Alexander Majors tapped with a nervous finger the bold red line his senior partner had penciled straight across the map. "I wouldn't say no for the summer," he said in his brisk, sharp voice. "But in winter—"

"It's been done," Russell broke in.

"And men have died doing it," Majors said. "Good men."

"Without organization," Russell returned. "We've got the outfit to lick the wilderness."

He outlined his plan: Light, strong riders on light, strong ponies. Eighty horsemen, to start with—more, if need be. A couple of hundred ponies. Stations with relays every few miles. Nothing but mail to be carried.

"California is starved for mail," he declared. "They'll pay anything in reason to get letters and send them."

"Yes; but can we get 'em through?" Majors questioned.

"What's to stop us?"

"We-ell, Indians for one thing."

"We'll outride 'em."

"Outlaws," Waddell added.

"We'll outshoot 'em."

"Snow in the ranges."

"A light-footed horse can make it through where a wagon train bogs down."

"You've got it all pat, William," Waddell said, looking keenly at his senior. "Why are you so set on this?"

"I've just come from talking with Senator Gwinn in Washington."

"Being from California, the Senator naturally wants the mails," Majors remarked.

"Friends," Russell replied soberly, "Senator Gwinn is a man of vision. He sees this as a beginning of great things. If we can maintain a stated service on the Overland Trail, the electric telegraph will follow. It will be only a matter of time when the railroad spans the continent from ocean to ocean." He hit the table a thump with his heavy fist. "Give the people a fast mail that can be relied on, and the Congress will pay us good money to keep it going."

"Fast?" Waddell repeated. "What do you call fast?"

Russell tapped out his answer with his knuckles, syllable by syllable. "Ten days Mis-sou-ri to Pac-i-fic."

Majors started, then smiled. Waddell dropped the pencil with which he had been figuring on a pad, and let it roll unnoticed to the floor. "Take a look at your map, friend William," he advised dryly.

"Four days from the river to Salt Lake City," he said with conviction. "Six from Salt Lake to Sacramento and on to San Francisco."

His assurance failed to impress his companions. "Twenty-three days is the best overland record," Waddell stated.

"The Butterfield Trail," Russell agreed. "Way to the south, a thousand miles out of the way."

"There's the water route by ship and across Panama," Majors added. "You'd have that to compete with."

"A month if they're lucky enough not to die of jungle fever, crossing the Isthmus."

WADDELL spoke with solemnity. "You have God Almighty's forces, worse than any weak competition of man: The blizzards of the plains; the snow-blocked passes of the mountains; the deadly heat and thirst of the desert."

"We can face them. Butterfield bypasses the snows and draws six hundred thousand dollars a year for his contract. It's a feeble service, as you know."

"Senator Gwinn is a member of the Committee on Post Offices and Post Roads," Majors said reflectively. "He should be able to help us."

The cautious financier entered his protest. "Not until after we have proved our route feasible. And that might ruin us. You know the fate of the other mail contracts."

William Russell nodded indifferently. "Charpenning, for instance," he said. "I know that he is suing the Government now, with small chance of success."

"What about the Kansas City-Albuquerque-Stockton scheme?" Waddell asked, and answered himself: "Lasted nine months. Delivered four parcels of mail to Kansas City and two to Stockton."

"And blew up," Majors completed the record. "Then there was McGraw in 1855," he went on. "What happened to him? Failed. Kimball's Mormon outfit took over, and lasted less than a year."

"That was because of the Mormon War," Russell interposed. "A lucky chance for us." He smiled; the firm had grown rich setting up a service of 3500 mule wagons to supply General Albert Sidney Johnston's attacking army.

"No war interfered with John Hockaday," Majors went on. "What he didn't know about freighting isn't worth knowing. Mails are different, as he found out. The Post Office Department chipped in with $320,000." He made an eloquent gesture. "Might as well have tossed the money into the Big Muddy." This was the irreverent name by which the Missouri River was known locally.

"The Post Office itself is against it," Waddell said. "Only two years ago the Postmaster General declared officially that the Overland Route delivery was a failure for four months in the year. I'll give you his exact words; 'entirely out of the question,' is what he said."

RUSSELL protruded an obstinate chin. "What does he know about it? He couldn't tell an avalanche from a gopher-hole."

"Look you, William Russell," Waddell said quietly. "We've built up a fine trade. Nobody else has as good an outfit. Our men are experienced and reliable. The Indians have learned not to fool with them. Our customers trust us. We're giving them a reliable service, and they are paying us well for it. We're the soundest concern operating west of the Big Muddy. Why should we risk our profits, and our reputations to boot, on a venture that has cost other men both? Let well enough alone, say I."

"You ask why," his senior retorted. "Your own words give the reason when you call us the soundest concern in the West."

"Well?"

"If we don't do it, who will?"

"Why should anybody do it?" Majors challenged.

"Gentlemen and partners!" Russell stood up, leaning over the outspread scroll. "There are five hundred thousand people on the far side of the Rockies. They are as much a part of the U.S.A. as we are. I'm thinking of them."

"And I'm thinking of our bank account," Waddell said bluntly. "What will it cost us to start with?"

"One hundred thousand dollars, gold."

Majors pursed his lips. A long, soft whistle sounded. "*Whee-ew-w-w-w!*" Waddell recovered his pencil from beneath the table, wrote six large figures on his pad, and stared at them.

"I've given Senator Gwinn my word," Russell continued.

"That is not binding on the company."

"Very good, gentlemen." The senior partner rose, rolled up the map and tucked it under his arm. "If Russell, Majors & Waddell are afraid to tackle it—"

"Wait a minute," Majors interrupted in sharp protest. "I don't like that word."

"Withdrawn," Russell apologized. "If you men don't like the set-up, I'll go it alone."

Waddell tore up the sheet of paper with the figure on it, and spoke quietly. "Sit down, partner. We'll talk this over."

"Ben Ficklin will come in," Russell said.

"Nobody knows the lay of the land better than Ben. I'll grant you that," Waddell admitted.

"And I'm pretty sure I can get Bolivar Roberts to recruit our hands for us," Majors added.

"Any man that Roberts hires I'll accept, sight-unseen," Russell declared.

Midnight had struck before the first plan was roughly drafted for an Overland & Pike's Peak Express Company, to provide a weekly fast mail service in both directions between the Missouri River and the Pacific Coast, twelve months in the year. To every camp and ranch and homestead from the heights of the Rockies to the sterile depths of Death Valley, that enterprise was to be lovingly known, first as The Pony Express and finally as "The Pony."

CHAPTER II

EAST and West were two different worlds in the 1850's. Mail communication was mainly by the Panama Route. Letters mailed in New York for California went to the Isthmus of Panama by steamship. Overland to the Pacific was only thirty miles, but it was an evil trip through fever-ridden jungles.

On the Pacific side, another ship picked up the sacks and steamed northward. A railroad built across the Isthmus in 1855 shortened the time of delivery. The record time, New York to San Francisco, was three weeks. Generally it took a month; often longer. There was much grumbling over the delay and the irregularity. When the Eastern mails

Illustrated by
CLEVELAND WOODWARD

"California is starved for mail," he declared. "They'll pay anything in reason to get letters and send them."

did get in, men stood in line for two or three hours at the San Francisco post office to get their letters and newspapers.

California demanded better service. It held stubbornly to the notion that a straight line over mountains, desert and prairie could be put through from the Missouri River to the Pacific Ocean. The hardy Missourians also thought so.

Between them they tried and kept on trying. Wagon trains were lost. Carriers were killed or died of starvation. Fortunes were sunk. Attempt after attempt failed.

The first mail East started on May 1st, 1851, on pack-mules. Charpenning & Woodward signed a government contract to carry the sacks between Sacramento and Salt Lake City in thirty days, leaving once a month in each direction.

The country to be traversed was wildly desolate. In all of what is now Nevada, there was not a white settlement. The pioneer Charpenning party got through, though not on time.

His partner, Captain Woodward, made the westward trip that same month. In November his mail squad left Salt Lake City, reached Willow Springs, one hundred fifty miles to the west, and disappeared. The next spring the melting snows disclosed Woodward's arrow-pierced body. Indians had beset the little force of five men. Woodward, breaking away, had ridden nearly a hundred miles, then crawled into a thicket to die. No trace of his companions was ever found.

Charpenning would not give up. One of his convoys under Edson Cody took the desperate chance of leaving Sacramento in February, 1852. They had ten animals, mules and horses. All of the beasts froze to death. The last animal died two hundred miles short of Salt Lake City and safety.

Cutting up the mule meat, they packed it on their backs with the mail. The last four days they traveled on foot without food. By a miracle they all survived. They were fifty-three days on the trail.

An April mail-party, snowed in, took forty-seven days. It was the practice for wagon trains, caught by the snows, to camp down for the winter, living on their supplies and what game they could shoot. But the mule parties, traveling light, must get through or risk death.

One mule train did outlive the winter, being blockaded by the heavy snows of 1856. They were "holed up" in the mountains from November until spring broke. Fortunately one of the men was an experienced hunter and trapper. All were woefully thin when they came out.

Another party was saved from starvation by coming upon a wounded buffalo, which they killed and ate. So perilous was the route that Major Charpenning could induce none of his men to go with him on one trip. The mail delivery was necessary, to save his contract.

With a pack of lead-horses he started out alone carrying his mail through a region full of Indians. That he reached his destination alive is something of a miracle.

It was not Indians but a blizzard that forced him to abandon the direct route and find an easier trail for his "jackass express," as the Westerners nicknamed it. The new trail

struck south to avoid the snows. It was slow and unsuccessful.

Another company soon entered the competition. John Butterfield, an up-state New Yorker who had run a coach line between Utica and Syracuse, mapped out a road for his coaches which avoided the dangers and delays of winter. It struck south from St. Louis to Fort Smith, Arkansas, then through Indian Territory and Texas to El Paso; thence to Yuma, Arizona, Los Angeles and San Francisco.

"Slow but safe" was Butterfield's idea. The Government gave him a generous contract and Southern California rejoiced. But to the north there was dissatisfaction. And San Francisco was still the most important city on the Coast.

The Post Office Department officially condemned the straight route across which the "jackass express" had so gallantly struggled. Postmaster General Aaron V. Brown issued a statement:

"The route through the South Pass" (in the Rocky Mountains) "is as much closed by snow from four to six months in the year as if barred by a gate of adamant."

What was true of the Rockies applied to the Sierras almost equally. By 1859 the route across the two barrier mountain ranges seemed hopeless to its supporters.

They had not reckoned on the Pony Express.

Poverty Slope has vanished from the map of California, along with Secret Diggings, North Fork Dry, Cragg's Flats and Blue Monday Butte. But in March of 1860 it was still a hopeful little mining settlement, cheered up by the occasional discovery of a gold nugget.

The slope from which it took its name was on the west side of the Rocky Mountains, a day's ride from Sacramento. Gold had run thin in the nearby creeks. A man who washed out five dollars a day was doing well. Most of the population had moved on, but Tom Bannister's grocery and general store continued to do a fair business.

A customer had been complaining of the high price of canned goods. An aged and grizzled prospector, known locally only as the Old Timer, said:

"*You* don't know what high prices are. Why, I can remember when beans cost ten cents apiece over the grub counter."

The door opened, and a broad-shouldered, well-dressed man of forty entered in time to hear the remark.

"That must have been the hard winter of '51," he said, stamping the snow from his fifty-dollar boots.

"Right you are!" the Old Timer said. He squinted at the newcomer. "You wouldn't be Roberts, would you? Bolivar Roberts?"

"That's me," the stranger answered cheerfully.

"Still with Russell, Majors and Waddell?"

The other nodded. "That's what brings me here. Picking up a few ponies. And maybe some men to ride 'em," he added.

The storekeeper leaned over the counter. "Thought your freighting was done with mules."

"This is something different." He moved over to the counter on which stood an old bucket, a quarter full of letters. A roughly inked placard was tacked to the side:

Gold is Where You Find It.
Mail is When You Get It.

"Unclaimed, eh?" he said, riffling the envelopes through his fingers.

"Likely to be," growled a big man near the stove, "when it comes in three-four months late."

"When do you expect the next one?" Bolivar Roberts asked carelessly.

One of four card-players beneath a smoky kerosene lamp in the corner turned his head. "When the Devil thaws the snow out of the passes," he said bitterly.

The new arrival tapped the side of the bucket with his knuckles. "This is my business," he said. "Mails."

"Russell, Majors & Waddell going in for the jackass mail trade?" inquired Bannister.

Bolivar Roberts shook his head. "No. Ponies. The Pony Express."

"Never heard tell of it," the Old Timer said.

"It isn't going yet. We start next month." He paused and added with affected carelessness: "Ten days, coast to coast."

"Say that again," the storekeeper demanded.

Roberts repeated it, and to clinch it said: "Eight days from the Missouri River to Sacramento."

"What on?"

"The best horseflesh money can buy."

The card-players had quit their game and crowded around him in excitement.

"You're crazy, Mister!" "What about the high passes in winter?" "What about the alkali plains in summer?" "Horseflesh'll never stand it." Bannister, who had been making calculations on a slate, said:

"It figures out to better than ten miles an hour."

"We'll do it," the other said confidently. "If we don't beat the best time ever made, we'll return the money."

"How many horses you going to have?" the Old Timer wanted to know.

"Three hundred."

"Whillikins! You *are* crazy. And how many men?"

"Eighty," Roberts said. He drew from his pocket an advertising leaflet and flattened it out on the counter. The little group pressed forward to read it. It offered one hundred dollars a month, with food and keep, rising to one hundred and fifty dollars, for mail riders.

One of the card-players read aloud the requirements: "Between nineteen and twenty-five years—strong constitution—weight under one hundred and thirty pounds—good moral character—read and write—previous experience with horses." He looked up from the paper. "You don't want much for two bits, do you, Mister!" he said sarcastically. "What do you calculate to pay for all this?"

"One hundred dollars a month, rising to one hundred and fifty."

"And found?"

Roberts nodded. "Found" meant that the rider would get his food and lodging free. "The best," Roberts said with emphasis.

Another player spoke up addressing his fellows: "What about Boston? His claim is played out, and he's looking for something else."

"Too young," the storekeeper objected.

"We might allow a year or two or a few pounds to get the kind we want," Roberts said.

A messenger was sent out. The Old Timer explained to the stranger:

"Young fellow from the East. College-bred, I shouldn't wonder. Kind of fancy spoken. So we call him Boston."

Roberts was accustomed to judging men and horses quickly and expertly. He liked at first sight the stockily built, steady-eyed youth who came in. Boston read carefully the leaflet and laid it back on the counter, waiting.

"I expect you know a mustang from a mule," Roberts said, smiling.

"Boston had a job horse-breaking on the Guerraro Ranch," the storekeeper said.

"That's good enough. Any mountain experience?"

"I helped break winter trail for the stages two years ago," the boy said.

The executive put a question which was not always safe to ask in that country. It was necessary for his purposes.

"Ever have any trouble with the law?"

"No sir."

"Do you want the job?"

"When do we start?"

"April third."

"One minute, ten seconds, for the change of mounts," the station-man shouted after him. "Good luck!"

"I'll be there."

The Pony Express had hired itself a hand.

CHAPTER III

WANTED: Two hundred gray mares with black hoofs not more than fifteen heads high to carry the mails. Apply to Russell, Majors & Waddell, Central Overland, California, and Pike's Peak Express Company.

THIS advertisement appeared in the Leavenworth *Times* and other newspapers in March, 1860. (The fifteen "heads" was a misprint for "hands.")

Originally Leavenworth, Kansas, was to have been the starting point and headquarters of the company. But the town of St. Joseph on the Missouri side of the river was full of "booster" spirit, and it bid for the Pony Express by offering land free. Besides, the railroad from the East ended there. Russell and his partners moved to St. Joseph.

Being president of the company was not enough for the energetic Russell. He appointed superintendents for the three divisions, Eastern, Central, and Western. But he intended to cover the whole territory himself, on frequent inspections, working out of headquarters at St. Joseph. As Eastern Division superintendent he took charge of the line as far as Salt Lake City. Experience fitted him for the job. He had freighted over every mile of the route, time and time again.

He knew the fords across the rivers, and the passes through the mountains. He knew which Indian tribes were friendly and which were sly horse-thieves and which might turn ugly and take the warpath. Every town and settlement and single ranch-house on the long trail was familiar to him. Most of the thinly scattered residents were trustworthy. A few were suspected of being more friendly to outlaws than to the law. W. H. Russell knew them all.

Horses first, men later. That was the Russell system. In that prairie country, prime horseflesh would be easy to find. Riders of the proper mettle would be more of a problem. He shrewdly guessed that the advertisement for the mares would stir curiosity and bring in men. Youth of the prairies were always ready for adventure.

Running through his list of applications, he smiled at some of the names and self-descriptions.

Bronco Charley Miller....*Wrangler*
Jim Randall.....*Bullwhacker*
Cyclone Thompson...*Ride anything*
William Richardson.....
.....*Sailor and horsebreaker*
Tough Littleton.....
.....*Plain cook and muleskinner*
Bill Gates.....*Herd boss*
Sawed-off Cumbo.....*Stage-driver*

Others had no more identification than "Whipsaw," "Highsaddle" and "Shorty."

These were the final choice of Mr. Russell's assistants. Others had been weeded out as unfit for the hard service. Several graybeards had applied, one of them known to be approaching sixty, though he stoutly insisted that

Leading his mustang, he climbed and climbed; an hour, two hours, three hours; he was lost.

he was "hardly more'n what you mought call thirty." Another, when rejected, burst into tears and refused to leave until an angry father appeared and led him away by the ear. He was going on thirteen, he sobbed, and old enough to kill Injuns if somebody would give him a gun.

Mr. Russell circulated among the men, explaining what would be expected of them. Those selected for the flat plains must understand rivers and streams. They must know quicksand. They must judge what the chances were of swimming a flood.

They must be trail-readers, able to interpret the marks of man and beast. Some acquaintance with Indian tribes was desirable. At least they should have a working knowledge of the sign language, which was universal. That they possessed courage and were expert horsemen was taken for granted. He put questions to them at random.

"How long would you ride a horse at top speed?"

"Thirty miles," said the lad being questioned. He wanted to prove his hardihood.

Mr. Russell shook his head. "Not our horses. You'd ruin 'em."

Of another he asked: "If you met Indians on the trail, what would you do?"

"How many Indians?"

"Say three or four."

"I'd fight 'em."

"And get fired," the boss said vigorously. "We're hiring you to carry the mails, not to amuse yourself shooting at redskins."

The rule for the rider was to think first, last and all the time of the mails. They were to stop for neither animal nor man. Their horses were the best that money could buy, able to outrun any pursuing Indian. Next to the safety of the mails, the horses must be their main consideration. It might be necessary to force a horse to exhaustion. In extreme cases, the animal might even be ridden to death. But any needless brutality would be punished by instant discharge.

A quiet-appearing young man spoke up.

"How far apart are your stations?"

"Twenty-five miles."

"That's too far."

The older man accepted this with a sort of respect. "You think so?" he said.

Pony Bob Haslaw, though not more than twenty-five, was famous for his horsemanship.

"Look, boss," he said earnestly. "Suppose you have to push along at eighteen or twenty miles an hour."

"There will be times when we have to," the other agreed, "to make up lost time."

"How long can you get that speed out of an animal?"

The boss nodded. "Not more than an hour, maybe not that. Depends on conditions."

"You ought to have a change of ponies every ten or twelve miles," the young man said positively but respectfully. "You'll never keep to your timetable any other way."

"I'll take it under consideration," the head man said gravely.

Within a month after the start, the change was made. William H. Russell was a man who could take good advice, even from a hired man.

Twenty-two employees were taken on. The oldest was "Major" Egan, a noted trailsman of more than forty; the youngest, Don Rising, not yet seventeen, though his bristly brown mustache added a good two years to his appearance. All were required to sign this oath:

"I hereby swear before the great and living God that during my engagement and while I am an employee of Russell, Majors & Waddell, I will under no circumstances use profane language; that I will drink no intoxicating liquors; that I will not quarrel or fight with other employees of the firm, and that in every respect I will conduct myself honestly, be faithful to my duties, and so direct my acts as to win the confidence of my employers, so help me God."

After the last man had filed out, Alexander Majors, who had entered as the pledge was being given, said to his partner:

"Did you hear what young Gelson said to his brother?"

"No."

"He said: 'It's a good thing they're giving us mares, not mules. If they asked me to handle a mule without cussin', I'd resign.' Do you really expect those wild young harum-scarums to live up to their oath, partner?" he added quizzically.

"If they don't," the other said, and his face was serious, "it may at least bring home to them a sense of their responsibility and the gravity of their task."

William H. Russell may well have been right. In the nineteen months of its existence, the Pony Express was served by its men with constancy and devotion.

CHAPTER IV

THE problem of recruiting was different at the western end of the route. The men must be mountaineers, hardened to extremes of cold and heat. They must know how to traverse the waterless deserts as well as how to break snow-trail.

Different qualities were called for in the animals also. The thin-haired mares collected at St. Joseph would not well endure the harsh winter of the Sierras. For this work, endurance was as important as speed. Mustangs were the answer—the deep-barreled, sturdy-legged, stout-hearted, undersized breed of the high-country ranches. They might kick, bite, roll, squeal and buck. Let them! If they could go and keep on going where a milder horse's heart would break, and even a mule would balk, the meanest tricks of temper would be forgiven them.

W. W. Finney, superintendent of the Western Division of the "Pony," was a graduate of the "jackass express" routes. He was a good picker of horses. Under his critical eye, a choice herd had been rounded up for distribution to the way-stations. Bolivar Roberts was Finney's chief agent and aide.

We have seen how Roberts gathered men for the company. Advertisements were bringing in others. Word-of-mouth news from ranch to ranch stirred the imagination of the younger men. The Pony Express was more to them than a way of making a living. It was romance; it was adventure; it was a patriotic service.

For every one of the eighty riders needed for the entire service, the company could have its pick of four or five hundred.

SEVENTY-FIVE applicants had gathered at Sacramento late in March for Superintendent Finney's inspection. These did not represent the majority of the candidates. There had already been a weeding-out. Those who were plainly too young, too old or too heavy had been dropped.

Not one of the lot looked thirty years old. A third or more were still in their teens. All were small, lean and wiry; they would ride light. Not one of them but was his own master, earning his own keep. Manhood developed early in the hard life of the Far West.

There were teamsters, ranch hands, prospectors, miners, clerks, trappers, farm help, waiters, a schoolteacher, several stagecoach drivers, and perhaps a few who followed less lawful occupations. They stared expectantly at the man on the platform.

Mr. Finney was a tall, bony man with a pleasant but decided expression on his heavily tanned face. The shrewd youngsters before him suspected that he knew his business quite as well as they knew theirs, and perhaps better. He had been outlining briefly what would be expected of them if they were taken on.

"Any questions?" he asked.

An intelligent-looking youth said: "What kind of outfit do we have to have?"

"Suit yourself, Bart Riles." Already Finney knew them by name. That is the sort of executive he was. "The Company pays. Just so you ride light. No ten-pound gold watches."

There were chuckles. This businesslike, easy-spoken boss suited them.

"Grub?" another suggested.

"The best that money can buy. Bacon, beans, hominy, biscuits, cheese if you want it. Fresh meat and vegetables at the stations. We'll put some grease on those thin bones of yours, Alex Carlisle."

"Can I pick my own cayuse?" another inquired. He had the bowed legs of one who was much in the saddle.

"A couple of hundred to choose from, Hardy. Half-breed mustangs at this end." He smiled. "They may not be *quite* well enough broken for your little sister to ride."

"If it don't take two men half a day to tie and shoe the critter, give him to somebody else," the wrangler said seriously. "I aim to ride a horse, not a jackrabbit."

"Two hundred horses cost money," a solid, short chap in the front row of chairs remarked. "Is the Company sound?"

"A sensible question, Jim Gentry. You all know Russell, Majors & Waddell." There were murmurs of assent. "Well, our money is in the pot. We're here to stay."

HE outlined the general set-up. There would be the carefully selected horses, costing up to two hundred dollars each. A ripple of satisfaction went through his audience. A pretty fair range animal could be had for fifty dollars; these fancy prices meant first-class stock. The two-thousand-mile stretch from Sacramento to St. Joseph would be studded with stations and substations, ten to twenty miles apart. The principal stations would be stout log cabins or adobe buildings. They would be supplied with all necessary horses, bedding and repair equipment for the ponies, and food for the riders. ("Make mine mince pie," said Irish Tom Ranahan in a loud aside, and got a jog in the ribs from his neighbor.)

There would be stockmen at the division points, the speaker went on, with mules to make trail repairs and do patrol work. Some of the smaller places, he continued with a twinkle, weren't just exactly the Astor House with a tin bath. There were places where a tent would have to do, or even a cave dug in a side hill and lined with saplings. But all along the line there would be a change of ponies, as needed.

"If there are no more questions," the speaker said, "I would like to give you a little history."

"What is this, a dame-school?" a voice in the back growled.

"Who spoke?" asked Mr. Finney quickly.

A surly-faced youth was pushed to his feet. The division boss identified him. "You don't want to listen, Jim Cusaw?" he said.

"I don't need no school professor to ride herd on me," the young fellow said.

"Get out," Mr. Finney ordered.

The objector reached back for his hip pocket, thought better of it, and

stamped out. A young outlaw of the same name was shot in a pitched battle with vigilantes a year later at the toughest mining region in the country—Alder Gulch, Montana.

"Anyone else here too smart to learn?" Mr. Finney inquired pleasantly. No one admitted it. "I am going back into the past," the speaker resumed, "because I want every man who works for us to understand the importance of his work.

"California has been as we know it now only a few years. Before the gold-strike in 1848, it was a quiet land of ranches and farms and slow-growing towns. Gold changed all that. Twenty thousand gold-hunters came across the mountains the next year. They were the 'Forty-niners. In 1850 a hundred thousand more came in. They kept coming year after year.

"First they wanted gold. Second, they wanted mail. They were not yet Californians. They were Yankees and Southerners, moved to California. Back East was home to them. They wanted to hear from home. Letters were so important that they were hardly private property. If a man in a mining camp heard from his family, he passed the letter around to all his friends. The arrival of a newspaper was a great event."

"My father has got a New York *Try-bune* he paid ten dollars for," a boyish voice piped up.

MR. FINNEY nodded. "That's too much," he said. "Eight dollars was the regular price in '49. And then the paper might be three months old.... Mails are slow now," he continued. "They were slower then. If they came by ship and made a good connection at the Isthmus of Panama, they might make it in six weeks from New York. Mostly it was overland by stagecoach or mule train, which was slower—or oxcart, which was slowest of all.

"The letters would go to San Francisco, and there they would stay until somebody picked them up and sent them out, hit-or-miss, into the camps. A postal clerk named A. H. Todd worked up a business. He operated out of San Francisco into the wilds. Letters that came into the post office there, and lay unclaimed, he bought from the Government for a quarter apiece. Word was sent out through the camps that people expecting mail could register with Todd for a dollar.

"When he had pocketed the dollar, he was already seventy-five cents ahead. It was not enough for him. He organized mule trains and sent mail out through the camps. His charge for delivering a letter was four dollars. On the return trip, his drivers brought in gold. The charge for this was about twenty dollars a pound. Todd was taking in a thousand dollars a day.

"This was the nearest thing to a regular mail service that the outlying districts had. It was called 'the jackass express.' A camp humorist suggested that it was named for the men who were foolish enough to pay Todd's prices."

"I got a letter last spring," a lanky young fellow put in, "that laid overwinter the other side of the pass."

Mr. Finney turned to him. "Yes, we aren't so much better off than the 'Forty-niners," he said. "It's still a lot slower from here to the East than from the East to Europe. We're out to remedy that, and we're going to do it. The Pony Express is going to do it."

He paused, stood for a moment, thinking, then went on in deeper, more deliberate tones:

"These are touchy times. You're young, but you are old enough to understand that the nation is in peril. Several States in the South are ready to split off on the slavery question. They are prepared to rebel. War between North and South may come any day.

"California entered the Union as a free State opposed to slavery. It must remain so. But many of our citizens sympathize with the South. Others wish to see California in a new nation made up of the States west of the Rockies.

"Here is where the Pony Express comes in. It is important—it is vital—that there should be fast and reliable communication with Washington. News is more important than ever before. Every day counts. We *must* keep the lines open. Any one of you boys"—he paused, smiled, and corrected himself—"of you men may carry the fate of the State in your mail boxes. Yes, of the nation! A few hours might make all the difference. I ask you to remember that. The mails must go through. The schedules must be kept up."

There was a faint suggestion of applause. His young hearers were too serious for much of a demonstration. The speaker resumed more briskly:

"So much for history. Now, about yourselves; I don't want to fool you. This is going to be no picnic. Indians may turn hostile. Outlaws are working the trails, plenty of them. You are going to travel some of the toughest country the Lord ever made, and you are going to travel it *alone*. I can promise that you will be cold and hungry and dried out with heat and thirst, and saddle-sore—oh, how saddle-sore!

"But you have to go on. You have to deliver the mail. If your relief isn't there, you ride his route as well as your own. Maybe you won't get any sleep. Maybe you'll be killed. There's always the chance. I'm not holding any cards up my sleeve. The Company guarantees you nothing for your pay but danger and hard work. Take it or leave it. Now, I'll get out and let the doctor go over you."

About half the applicants had been weeded out when the boss returned. Medical inquiry had developed that half a dozen had suffered from frozen hands or feet in the past. Mountain work in winter would not do for them. Three reported a touch of sun. The inspector rejected them as unfit for the hundred-degree-upward heat of the alkali desert. There were cases of rheumatism and malaria, and some suspicious coughs. Some of the applicants had never learned to read and write. A few prudent souls were discouraged by Mr. Finney's warning.

He dismissed them with good will.

"I think none the less of them," he told the remaining candidates. His smile broadened. "But I think the more of you." He continued with a confidential lowering of his voice: "It isn't a job that I'd advise my own son to take, if I had one. But I'm counting on you to stick. This much I will undertake to say: the Company will stand by you to its last dollar and its last bullet. Good luck!"

They answered with a shout.

CHAPTER V

APRIL 3, 1860, was the date set for the start. The whole West knew Messrs. Russell, Majors and Waddell to be men of their word. Where they were concerned, if a date was set, it was met.

This date was met.

"CLEAR THE WAY AND LET THE PONY EXPRESS GO THROUGH." The Leavenworth *Times* spread an exultant headline across the front page.

All was ready at the eastern end. A hard-muscled young horseman and a spirited mare were waiting at the St. Joseph railroad station. An excited crowd milled about. The mail from New York was due at four o'clock. Quick hands would transfer it to the waiting courier, and he would be off at a gallop on the first stretch of the two-thousand-mile journey.

Then—bad news! The train was being held at Detroit. The eastern connection was late. Horseflesh was ready, but steam and steel had failed.

Johnson William Richardson, the former sailer, dismounted and loosened the mare's girth for ease. He had won the honor of being the start-off man by drawing lots. No better man could have been picked.

He stood five feet six and weighed less than 130 pounds. His weather-hardened face made him look older

than his twenty-three years. Every motion of his lean, muscled body was quick and decisive. Now he was slumped against a wall of the rough frame station, half-dozing when he could. Men hardened to constant and violent effort learn the trick of complete relaxation.

He was ready in every detail for the ride. He wore a red flannel shirt, tucked into light blue pantaloons. His fine leather riding-boots might have cost fifty dollars. His ten-dollar sombrero would shed water like an umbrella. A first-quality buckskin jacket, light and warm, hung over the railing at his elbow. For extra color he wore a gay bandana neckcloth.

Nobody rode the trails unarmed in those days. Richardson carried a Spencer rifle and two Colt's revolvers. Later this standard equipment was found too heavy, and it was cut down to a single forty-five, with an extra cylinder full of cartridges.

Even food was sacrificed to weight. The courier's pockets carried only a handful of Navy biscuit, "hard enough to break a false tooth," the plainsman said, and a few strips of bacon. His small canteen was full of cold tea.

The pony also traveled light. The expensive Landis saddle was very strong, but weight was saved in every detail of construction. Over the saddle was hung a thin leather blanket called a *mochila*. To this were attached the *cantinas* for holding the mail: four hard-leather boxes with padlocks lettered OVERLAND PONY EXPRESS. The mare's flank bore the company's brand, X. P.

Where was the mail? Five o'clock came, and no sign. The crowd began to mutter angrily. A brass band marched in and played patriotic tunes, "Hail, Columbia," "Dixie Land," "Camptown Races."

Six o'clock. Two precious hours lost, and still nothing. Billy Richardson, now nervous and alert as a cat, talked soothingly to his fidgeting mare.

Half an hour later a faint whistle sounded. *Boom!* went the Express Office cannon to signal the arrival. Men whooped and yelled and fired shots of welcome into the air.

Before the brakes had stopped grinding, a voice shouted from the car:

"Mail here! Ready?"

"Ready and waiting," Richardson answered, swinging into the saddle.

Packets of letters were hustled across and locked into the *cantinas*. They were written on tissue paper, sealed into tissue-paper envelopes, and then bound in oiled-silk pockets to protect them against water, or perhaps blood. The mail rate was five dollars an ounce—hence the lightest possible paper.

Eager volunteers had already cleared the way to the ferry. The courier spurred his horse through the cheering town and aboard the waiting boat. At the far side of the Missouri River he dashed off and vanished quickly into the gathering darkness.

Then began the long test. It was like a relay race. At the end of each stage, rider and mail would change to a fresh mount, ready-saddled and bridled. The rider would cover forty to eighty miles before he got his rest; more if necessary.

Richardson settled down to the long, steady lope that eats up the miles. He rode through the reservation of the friendly Kickapoos, to the combination stagecoach and Pony Express station where the second mare waited. The first animal had covered the twenty-odd miles in a little over an hour.

Two minutes was allowed for the change of mounts. Willing hands whisked the *mochila* and its boxes off one saddle and swung it upon the other. Richardson snugged it into place and was off.

"One minute, ten seconds," the station-man shouted after him. "Good luck!"

Riding in toward Granada, twenty miles farther along, Richardson lifted the horn which swung from his belt and blew a warning note. He might have saved himself the trouble. His relief, young Don Rising, was dancing with impatience.

"Where have you *been?* You're near two hours behind."

The starting rider had made up a good half-hour. His relief added another thirty minutes saved when he galloped into Marysville, one hundred and twelve miles from the starting point. Jack Keetley, young in years but old in the ways of the wild, took over at Marysville.

From there on, the anxious officials could hope for no quick news from the line of travel—unless, indeed, some chance immigrant wagon might have exchanged a hasty message with one or another of the riders. But eastbound travel was rare at that time of year.

Somewhere in that great wilderness a Pony rider from the West would meet and pass a Pony rider from the East. Whether it would be in the high places or the low places, no man could say. The two couriers would pass along the word. Not until the final riders reached their destination, one across the Rockies, the other at the Big Muddy, would the Company know whether its daring experiment was a success or a failure.

The start from St. Joseph had been unlucky. The anxious officials there, with so much at stake, could only trust in the determination and pluck of man and horse.

CHAPTER VI

As in the East, so in the West. The Pony Express lived up to its word. April 3rd saw the start at San Francisco.

"No picnic," Mr. Finney had warned his men. But the send-off in San Francisco had a picnic flavor. There were fireworks, flowers, parades and brass bands. The pony wore bells, and the rider's jacket had genuine gold buttons. An immense crowd cheered him off at the waterfront, as if he were a hero.

No heroism was required of him. He had only to lead his horse onto a river boat, spend a pleasant night aboard, and walk off in the morning at Sacramento. There began the real race against time. . . .

William Hamilton, one of Bolivar Roberts' "finds," took the trail in the dark of a rainy morning. Bad news had been coming in all night, brought by muddled and weary horsemen. After an unusually mild winter, belated blizzards were sweeping the ranges. The Marysville stage, which had not missed a trip in three years, was stalled. Roads in many places were indistinguishable. In other spots they were simply mudholes.

Clear roads or deep mud, Bill Hamilton had to make Sportsman's Hall, fifty-seven miles away. The first part of the route was flat and easy. He could make time here. Then came a steady upgrade, and the foothills of the Sierras. Four and a half hours was his schedule. Not too hard in fair weather. But with the rain pouring down and the footing treacherous, it was doubtful going.

Fifteen-mile House was the first change. The eagerly waiting stationmen were ready before they heard his horn. Lights flashed. A lantern bobbed across the stableyard. The waiting pony whinnied. The rider shifted from saddle to saddle. Off for Placerville!

The bustling gold-town had not expected him so early. He was a good half-hour ahead of his schedule. Another swift change of horses, and he was loping out of town, escorted by a whooping crowd.

He was still farther ahead of the clock when he approached Sportsman's Hall. This is where the really tough going would begin. That would be his successor's job.

The successor was young Warren Upson, now breakfasting at Sportsman's Hall. Upson had been picked by Bolivar Roberts for the sternest test on the trail.

He was the son of the editor of the Sacramento *Union*. At twenty-one, although short and slight, he was said to be the best athlete in the diggings. He was a crack shot, hardy as a wolf and, as the word went in the camps, "weatherproof." He knew all the mountain trails and some passes that were not yet trails. He had been prospector, trapper, horse-wrangler and woodsman, all for the love of adventure. The Pony Express appealed to him as probably offering more exciting adventure than he had known before.

It did.

EIGHT o'clock was striking, and the morning sun was trying to break its way through the clouds, when Bill Hamilton rode up, still a good half-hour ahead of schedule. The night before, Warren Upson had selected the fastest horse in the station. Looking at the heavy clouds still blanketing the mountain, he changed his mind. He would be in snow an hour after the start. Stamina would be more important than speed.

He saddled up the strongest and stockiest animal in the stable. The station-master had breakfast ready at seven. He peered out anxiously into the wind-driven mist.

"You going to try it, Warren?"

The young man regarded him with surprise. "Certainly I'm going to try it."

"Nothing has come through since yesterday morning."

"What does that prove?"

"The trail's blocked. This is only rain here. It'll be snow in the pass, and long before you get to the pass. You'll be lucky if there *is* any pass."

"If there isn't, I'll go over the hump," Upson said cheerfully.

The other ran to the door. "Here she comes! Here's Bill! Half an hour early. Good man!"

Jumping for his bearskin cap and elbow-length gloves of prime beaver, the rider got into his jacket. As the *mochila* was being shifted, there was time for a hasty exchange of words.

"Betting is three to one at the Mining Exchange that you won't get through," Bill Hamilton said.

"Somebody's going to lose money," Upson returned with a grin.

"Give my regards to Bolivar Roberts' mules. I'm going to bed and sleep the clock around," the weary rider said.

Bolivar Roberts' work-mules would be hard at it in the mountains keeping the trail broken. At Strawberry Valley, before the range was reached, every wheel-trace and hoof-mark was blotted out. Pony and rider must pick their own way. Yank was the last station in California.

Here there was news from the summit. A trapper who had come over reported twenty-foot drifts in the nine-thousand-foot pass. He earnestly advised Upson against the attempt.

"If you can make it, why can't I?" the young man said.

"I came on snowshoes. You can't put those on a horse."

The rider was willing to admit that. But he was not to be discouraged. He left his rifle and even his revolvers at the station. Every ounce saved to the pony was going to be vital.

Two miles out, he met the mule-squad valiantly battling the drifts. From here on, he would fight his way alone. There would be no human help.

He was familiar enough with the landmarks; here a dead pine, there a jutting rock, farther along a scar on a distant mountain face. But everything was blotted out by the savage snow-blasts beating down from the high peaks. Only his compass and the mustang's instinct were left as guidance.

For long reaches the gale had swept the ground bare, and Upson could put his mount to a gallop. But bare ground in one place meant piled-up snow in another. The gallant pony struggled knee-deep, then body-deep. The rider dismounted and picked his way up the breath-taking slopes, pulling the tired animal after him.

They had reached a turn around a cliffside where the snow was shallow. Swinging into the saddle, Upson urged the pony to speed. But for once, the animal did not respond. Its body stiffened under him. He could feel it trembling.

Puzzled, he got off again and looked about. No dangerous animal would be abroad on those heights and at that season. Yet the horse had sensed some peril not evident to the man's duller perceptions. Upson stood and waited, alert for what might come.

He had not long to wait. There had been a lull in the gale. Now the air seemed to shiver. There was a tremendous soft *"Swoo-oo-oo-ssshhh!"* and the snow mass came sliding down from above. Gliding at first, it quickened. It plunged over a declivity, blotted out the road under thousands of tons of snow, and went thundering down into the valley beyond.

Fifty yards farther along, horse and rider would have been overwhelmed and carried along in the irresistible course of the avalanche. Their bodies might have been found after the snow had melted off. Or they might have been lost without a trace.

The pass across the range was not hopeless. Upson's problem was to find a way across the high and rocky shoulder. At Friday's, there would be a fresh pony. But the station was seven miles away, perhaps longer by the pathless route that he must take across-country.

When and where he could expect clear road again he did not know. Leaving his pony, he climbed a tall rock and surveyed what he could see of the range. A study of the snow-gusts—the wind had risen again—gave him an idea of where the drifts would be deepest and where the ground might be bare or lightly covered.

Leading his mustang, he climbed and climbed; an hour, two hours, three hours. His lungs strained in the thin air of the heights. At one spot he found himself confronted by a wall of stone that ran straight up into the low cloud-bank. He had to make a long and hard detour.

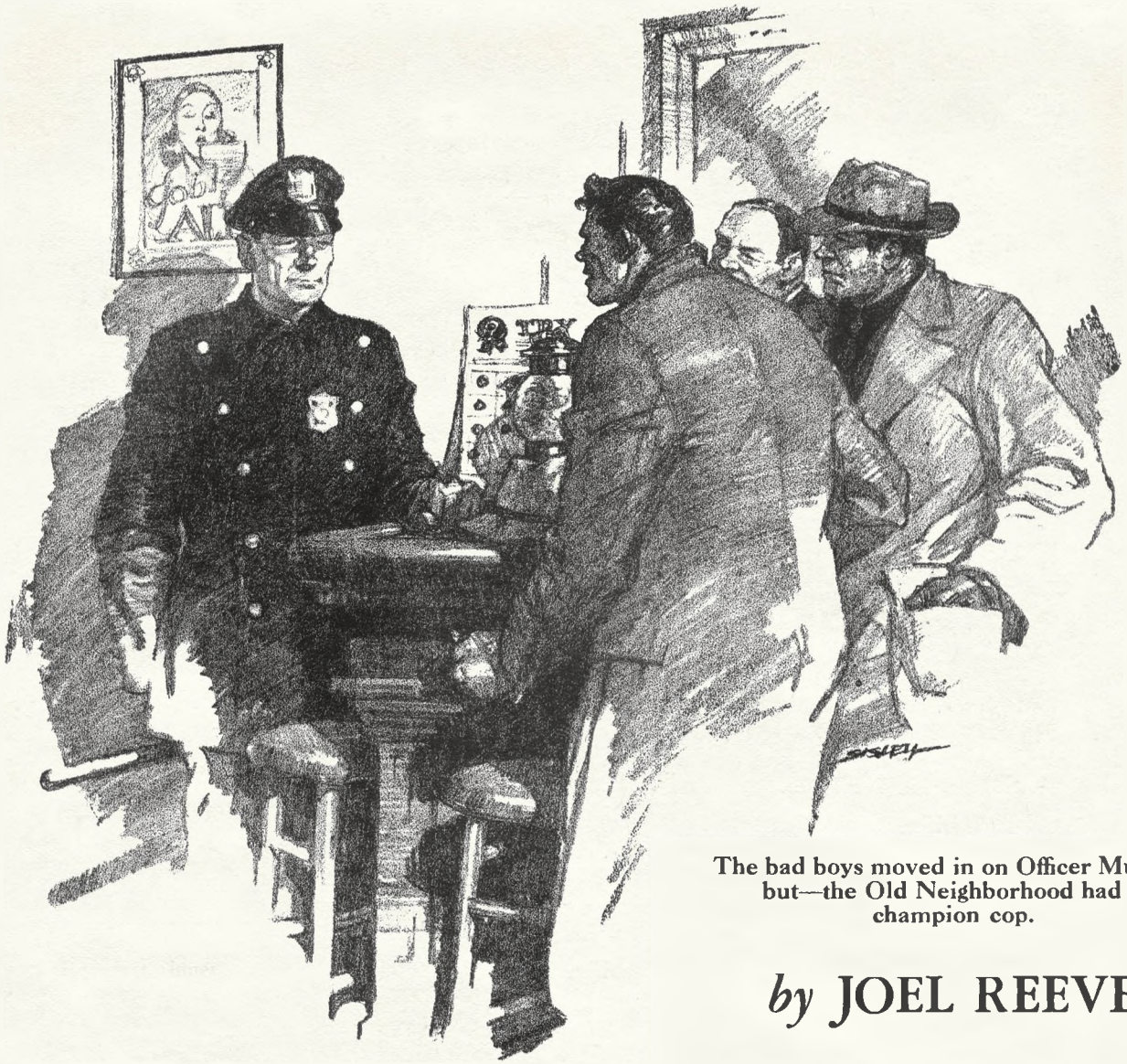
At the end of it, he was lost. East and north by compass he went. He still did not know where the wagon route was until he rode out of a deep arroyo between bare mountainsides, plump upon it.

THE sun was shining and the snow melting on the eastern slope of the Sierras. The station-keeper at Friday's, just across the line in Nevada, urged him to warm himself and take a little rest. He refused. Time enough had been lost already. The stout pony had earned his rest. The rider had to go on.

At the Mormon settlement of Genoa it was the same way. Fourteen miles to go before he would reach his final stop, and the sun already low over the peaks. He made the two-minute change and hit the trail for Carson City.

He came in at six-forty-five in the morning. If it had been anyone but Warren Upson, the townspeople might not have believed that he had come across the pass. He had covered eighty-three miles of distance, including twenty miles of "impossible" trail under "impossible" conditions of weather.

The lad known only as "Boston" took the mail-boxes on into the darkness. The hardest test was over, and the Pony Express had won.



The bad boys moved in on Officer Murphy, but—the Old Neighborhood had a champion cop.

by JOEL REEVE

Neighborhood Champion

THE way it was in the Old Neighborhood, you had to be fairly good to make it. If you lived to be twelve, you had shown you were tough and strong. Therefore many notable people had at one time or another come from the environs of the Old Neighborhood.

However, and Officer Murphy knew this very well, there was an unfulfilled dream shared by all the people who lived below the Slot. They were sturdy people, proud people; and of this dream none spoke openly except in his cups—and never even in those circumstances within the precincts of Harry Hoople's family saloon; and perhaps none thought of it very often, yet the dream lay there amidst the folks Officer Murphy dealt with daily.

For although many men and women had come to some fame claiming the Neighborhood as the place of their nativity, never yet had there been one who could lay indisputable claim to a title labeled "World Champion." This was a regrettable thing.

Duke Mosby, managed by Harry Hoople, was a very fine lightweight boxer and had fought several champs and ex-champs, defeating them at catch-weights—or when they were not currently wearing a crown; but Duke had never been able to win the title. Cass Bellamy was a three-cushion billiardist of note, who made a living displaying his talent around the world; but Cass was never the sole world titlist. Once there was a Neighborhood football team which beat everyone in sight—but it never got to play Notre Dame, so how could it claim a world championship?

Tony Paginni, once a candidate for Reform School, pitched the Panthers to a pennant—but the Dodgers won the Series, and Tony split even in his two tries. No—not in any form of endeavor had the Old Neighborhood ever produced an indubitable World Champion.

Harry Hoople, a stocky, respectable, grizzled man, spoke quietly of this to

Officer Murphy one fine morning. It was springtime, and a valorous bird sang from a telephone wire strung between Hoople's Saloon and the pole at the curbing. "The good Lord knows Duke should 'a' been champ. But the politics was ag'in' it, and now Duke ain't what he was," said Hoople. "It does seem we should have had us one man could call himself champ."

Murphy said, grinning a little: "We have had some notable thieves, murderers and swindlers, Harry."

"But you yourself put them away, one by one," Harry pointed out. "No, that I will not buy. World Champion crooks would always be free, spendin' their ill-gotten gains and laughin' at the law—and then how would they ever claim a title?"

Murphy said: "It would be nice to have a real champ. The kids would look up to him; and if he was a good boy—or girl—maybe they would not steal so many bananas and smoke cigarettes on the sly only in vacation-time, and not try to steal beer and wine for their potato-roastin' parties."

Harry Hoople looked up and down the narrow street. He said: "You know, Murphy, the Neighborhood ain't pretty. It ain't very healthy, neither, what with the factory smoke and all. The Old Neighborhood, it sort of has to live on its dreams."

Murphy said: "Maybe you're right, Harry. I'll give it some thought."

"Me too," said Harry. "I'll give it some thought too."

The two good friends parted. . . .

Going to meet Jingle, at the end of his duty for the day, Murphy chuckled at sight of the lean cop who had for so long been a hair shirt to him. Recently Murphy had prevailed upon the Commissioner to return him to the streets, to walking the Neighborhood, where he could get close to the roots of crime. The prowl car was now driven by a pair of rookies named Houlihan and Levy—and Jingle was required to paddle his big feet along the pavements.

JINGLE was not of the Neighborhood. He was from cross-town, where it was equally tough but in a different way. Cross-town was new-tough, modern tough. The Old Neighborhood was as it had been a hundred years before, and its crimes were mainly old-fashioned. Even the criminals of the Old Neighborhood were more sporting, Murphy thought. Like the McGarritys.

Jingle wailed sourly: "This walkin' around is the screwiest thing you ever dreamed up, damn you, Murphy."

"It'll give the corns on your tail a chance," said Murphy. "Now remember, be careful in the loft district tonight. I'll try to be around, but look out. The McGarritys have been driftin' in and out of Geoghan's with Big Moe and Lefty. There's some valuable furs down in Staley's warehouse."

"Let Houlihan and Levy worry about the warehouses," muttered Jingle. "It's dark down there for a man walkin' on his feet."

"The prowl car's got three districts besides this to cover," Murphy said patiently. "Now mind what I tell you, and stop your gripin'."

"This damn' neighborhood!" Jingle moaned. "If only me uncle had won in the last election, I'd be uptown wearin' civvies."

"And if you don't behave, you'll be wearin' those civvies anyway," Murphy snapped. "And the Force would be better off by far!"

He walked away. Jingle was not a proper cop, he knew. Jingle was a bully, wrong-headed, stupid, loud-mouthed. In the Neighborhood he was despised and ridiculed to his face. For years Murphy had protected him and tried to teach him because he was a member of the Force, but it was of no avail. Jingle, in the parlance, was a jerk.

Murphy went into Humperknickel's Delicatessen; and Gretchen Traudt, who had been Gretchen Humper-

"The prowl car's got three districts besides this to cover," Murphy said patiently. "Now mind what I tell you, and stop your gripin'."

knickel, came smiling to take his order. Little Gooney, her husband, stood in the late Herman's place, carving the corned beef and salami and dishing out the kraut and kartoffelglasse, and the steamy odor of good food made Murphy warm and comfortable. Hogue, the radio man, came in and sat with him and talked about television.

Franny Mosby and her husband Duke, the lightweight fighter, sat across the way and joined the chatter. Joe Zack came from his drugstore for a sandwich; Cohen closed his Jewelry Emporium to join them; and soon it was a *Kaffeeklatsch,* everyone having his say—and most of them deferring to Murphy for judgment.

It was fine to sit among them, these people, the solid backbone of the Neighborhood. Murphy expanded a little, watching them, forgetting the McGarritys and Big Moe and Lefty and the denizens of Geoghan's. Someone started the Duke to telling of the time he fought the champ, over the weight; and Duke shook his head, saying: "Well, I win, see? But he was out of shape." He smiled at his lovely wife. "I've had it. I ain't putting out the con. I never quite was big enough. Boxin's been good to us. So I'll never be champ—but me and Fran, we're happy!"

Murphy sighed. That was the way of folks, and that was good. Still, the dream persisted. The good old Neighborhood—too bad it had never had a champion.

The thought of the McGarritys returned to him through the dream, through the fine conversation. He drained his coffee, paid his tab at the cash register. Little Gooney Traudt, reporter for the *Clarion,* said: "Goin' to the Bijou? They got a good crime show."

"I'll be walkin' a bit," said Murphy. "The McGarritys are around and about."

Gooney's biscuit face was interested. "Anything for me?"

"Later maybe," shrugged Murphy. "You know them McGarritys."

Gooney said: "Watch out, Murph. They know you as good as you know them."

The cop nodded. "Bad boys. Never were anything but bad. I was sorry to see 'em come back. But there you are—they did come back."

He went out and set forth to return to his little apartment on Elm Street. He had to pass Geoghan's Saloon and decided to take a look at the other half of Neighborhood citizenry.

Geoghan's was dark, long, narrow. There were two back rooms, one into which you could see, another for more private confabs. Patsy Geoghan was Black Irish and stubborn. There had never been evidence that an unwary drunk was rolled in Geoghan's—but many a drunk from Geoghan's had been robbed in an alley.

In a certain sense, Murphy always figured, there was justice in a place like Geoghan's. Everyone could not enjoy a quiet beer at Harry Hoople's, a sandwich and coffee at Humperknickel's. In the young, wild boys, reared on the edge of poverty, there was a rebellious spirit which led to wild thoughts and wild doings. Geoghan's could be the place to let off steam, talk big, act tough, a safety-valve place for some.

But for others it was, of course, the center of evil. In forgathering with kindred spirits they could plot, and could swill Geoghan's cheap booze and act, unwisely and without the law. It was Murphy's job, as he saw it, to prevent this when possible.

When he turned into the barroom, Lon and Babe McGarrity were drinking together. There were three of the boys, orphans. They were all tall and good-looking, with wavy black hair and blue eyes and heavy beards even when in their teens. They wore "sharp" clothing and thick-soled brogue shoes and snap-brim hats, and they were quite alike, except Jack McGarrity, the eldest, was the biggest and smartest—and worst. There had been bad trouble with the McGarritys, and Murphy had chased them away once, but now they were back. They were loft thieves of great skill, he knew, although they had never been caught. They were violent boys—all in their twenties now, and steeped in crime. Murphy wondered if Jack McGarrity was off some place with Big Moe and Lefty, those two strong-arm lads upon whom he had long kept an eye, lest they take a life here and there in their enthusiasm for violence.

He paused at the end of the bar where it made a turn, looking across at Lon and Babe. Geoghan, scowling, came reluctantly to take his order, shoved a small beer in front of him, ringing up a dime with a hard, angry forefinger.

Geoghan muttered: "Whyn't you leave the boys alone? They're goin' straight now."

Speaking so the brothers could hear him plainly, Murphy said: "Now, I'm glad to hear that, Patsy. And your testimonial is high credit to them indeed. Goin' straight, eh? That's a fine thing. More power to the McGarritys!"

Lon snarled out of the corner of his handsome mouth: "Don't double-talk me, copper. We know you're on our tails."

"Why should I be bothering honest lads?" Murphy raised his brows, sipping the beer. "Walk the straight and narrow, and I'll lend you crutches to keep on it."

"We don't need crutches. Nor coppers to tell us how."

Murphy said gently: "Well, if you should need me, I'll be there. Matter of fact, there's a small truckin' business for sale that I know about—you boys could handle all the work yourselves. Come and see me tomorrow, and I'll see you get a chance to buy it on credit."

He finished his beer, nodded to the scowling trio and walked out onto Main Avenue. It was not very far to his walk-up flat on Elm, and he thought of Jingle, unhappily walking the beat, wishing for the days when he drove the prowl car up and down the narrow streets of the Neighborhood. Walking would be good for Jingle; maybe he would learn something of the minds of the people, something of their daily problems and heartaches, the things that made them what they were—humans in a harsh world not entirely of their making.

He mounted the steps, musing of the McGarritys, who could go straight, at that, if they so wanted. But in that clan, he thought, was a twist, a rebellious streak which went above and beyond pursuits which brought slow gain for hard toil. Some were like this, he had learned through bitter experience; some of the boys would rather have a go at the furs in Staley's warehouse.

He was deep in his thoughts when he turned the key of his flat. He stepped inside, reaching for the wall switch. He would listen to that funny Groucho Marx, he thought, resting himself; then he would check up. Off duty, on duty, it made no difference to Murphy when there were problems in the Neighborhood. He had neither kith nor kin, nothing to make him mind his hours except his responsibility to himself and the folks among whom he had been reared. He took a step inside; and when the switch did not work he knew the truth, smelling it through his nostrils as he reached back for his billy, every muscle tensed and ready.

But they came at him in the dark like an avalanche. There was no fumbling, no sound, just bodies coming at him. The hands which grasped him were expert; and though he fought, he knew it was no good. He managed to swing his head when the blackjack struck at the spot behind his ear. A man could get a fracture from a blow like that, did it catch him right—so he moved his head.

Then when the blow struck, he let himself go, falling forward, limp as an empty sack. He lay in their grasp and went limp, his head buzzing, his senses wandering, but still with that

relentless spirit burning, still able to hear dimly what was said.

A voice whispered: "Got him! Make it good. Tie him and gag him, and then we'll sap him again for luck."

Another voice said: "Don't mace him no more. You wanta kill him? You wanta kill a copper?"

"Well, lash him up good, then," said the first voice impatiently. "You know him. He ain't got any sense. He'll come after us barehanded. I'll kill him if I have to, I swear it."

"If you have to, okay," said the cool voice.

Then they were tying him. They had wire and adhesive rolls and they knew their business. He tried to pull a trick he had learned long ago, but he was still dazed, and he was afraid to let them know he could tense a muscle for fear they would hit him again with the blackjack and really knock him out.

So he lay there, trussed like a mummy, while they stole out. He heard them slipping down the back stairs. He counted footsteps, although he knew them. It did not take any *Sherlock Holmes* to know this caper, all the way through.

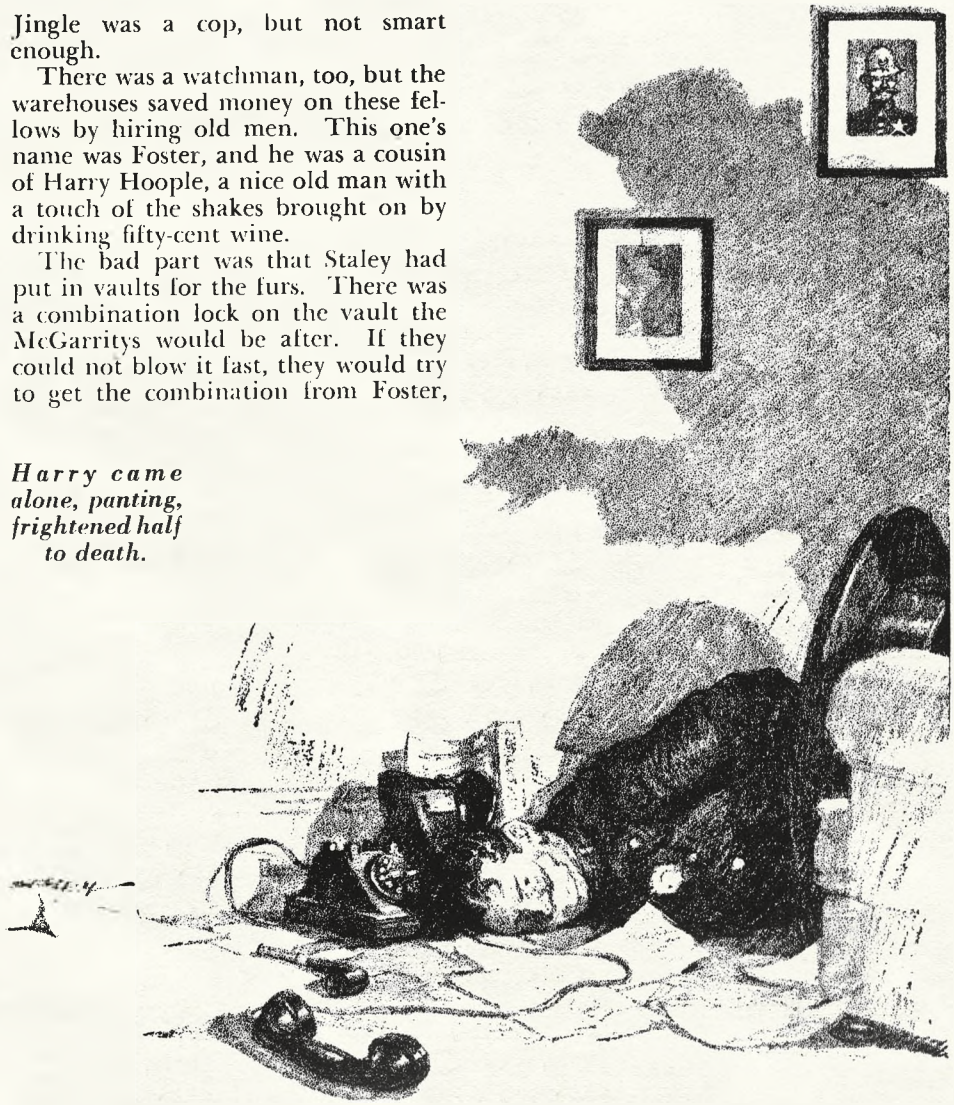
ONLY Neighborhood boys would know the back way to Murphy's apartment, know enough to lie in wait for him as he came to take his short rest, his bath and lonely smoke. Only experienced strong-arm men could handle him like that. With the furs lying in Staley's Warehouse and the McGarritys close to the only big fence who could dispose of them quickly and at a good price, it was A, B, C to figure the plot.

Not that it did him any good. He was wrapped up tight in the wire and the adhesive. If he moved, the wire cut his wrists and ankles. The tape almost stifled him, closing his mouth, adding to the binding of the wire. They were smart boys, all right, the smartest in the neighborhood. Jack McGarrity, Big Moe and Lefty, that would be. With Lon and Babe waiting in Geoghan's, while Murphy, the dolt, walked into the trap.

And down by the lofts there would be a boat in the river, he thought, because they would not chance a race with Houlihan and Levy, did the prowl car by accident sight them. He wondered if Jingle would blunder into them. He had sent Jingle to the warehouse district, meaning to get there himself and back up the stupid cop. If Jingle stumbled across them, he might be killed, because Jingle was not a man who could cope with the McGarritys and Big Moe and Lefty. Jingle was big in the mouth, but he was not too hot in an affair like this. Brave enough, because Jingle was a cop, but not smart enough.

There was a watchman, too, but the warehouses saved money on these fellows by hiring old men. This one's name was Foster, and he was a cousin of Harry Hoople, a nice old man with a touch of the shakes brought on by drinking fifty-cent wine.

The bad part was that Staley had put in vaults for the furs. There was a combination lock on the vault the McGarritys would be after. If they could not blow it fast, they would try to get the combination from Foster,



Harry came alone, panting, frightened half to death.

and the way they would do this was not nice to think about. Parlor matches, they used, running them up and down the bare feet of the victim, first striking them, of course, into flame. Murphy had seen men whose feet had been misused in this fashion, and had shuddered, not only at the damage to their soles but at the deadness in their eyes, the shock and horror which torture can induce.

It did not occur to him then that his own pain was exquisite. He was busy trying to roll. In order to do this, it was necessary to rock as far to the left as possible, then throw himself to the right. The wire cut him at each motion of his lean frame.

They had left him in the middle of the floor of his small square living-room. He wanted to move to his right, because there was a small table alongside his low leather reading-chair. On the table was the telephone.

He never knew how many times he rocked back and forth. After a while he could feel blood on his wrists and ankles, and that worried him, because he wanted the free use of his limbs when he did get loose.

There was never any doubt in his mind that he would get free in time to do something. He kept thinking of Jingle and old Foster. And he kept thinking of the three McGarritys and Big Moe and Lefty too, those Neighborhood boys who had now gone too far over the line. Regret was in him, and urgent haste too, for if he could get free in time to prevent murder, more than life might be saved. There was always a chance to save a boy, he believed, even a McGarrity.

HE finally came up against the small table. He rocked back to the left, threw himself as hard as he could against the legs. The table rolled away from him.

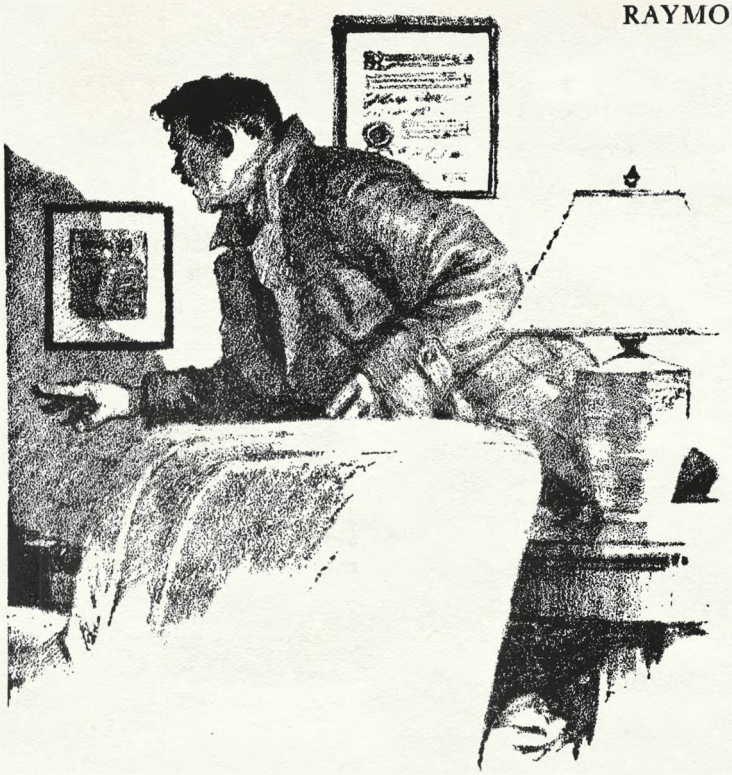
He gathered himself. He tried again.

The table fell over. The telephone banged on the floor and rolled some place, Murphy could not know where.

He had to rock around some more, trying to find it. Finally his bound feet kicked it.

That meant he had to start over, describing a sort of circle on the rug, inching and squirming. His mouth was smothered in adhesive tape. He

Illustrated by
RAYMOND SISLEY



could not utter a sound during this struggle. He moved as though inside cotton batting, seeking the telephone.

At long last his chin rested upon the dial, the metal pressing cold and sharp against his skin. He tried to get his nose in the holes to operate the dial, but that was no good.

He worked his face against the instrument for a while. It hurt and finally it cut him, but he got a prong under the folds of adhesive. He moved his head back and forth, infinitely patient. The adhesive tape bunched a little at a corner of his mouth. He worked like a sculptor, moulding this bunch.

They had been generous with the tape in their great care to gag him. It was inch-wide stuff, new and stiff. He finally thought he had succeeded in his endeavor.

He counted the holes of the dial with the tip of his sore nose. It was slow, agonizing work. He got the pointed end of the tape into the "M" slot. It slipped out.

He went back at it again, learning how to apply the pressure through failure. He was sweating profusely when he managed the "M—A" to get the exchange.

He had to pause then, to rebuild the bunched tape. It kept coming unraveled under the pressure. Now that he had the exchange, he did not dare fail to dial each number correctly. Only one number would do—that of Harry Hoople's Saloon, and there was a strange reason for this.

Long ago, privately to his friend Harry, Murphy had confided that he had a horror of dying alone in his flat. If anything went wrong, he told Harry, he would dial, whether or not he could speak. He would let the phone ring three times, then cut it off in the middle of the fourth. He would ring Harry's private phone, behind the bar, MA-2-5500.

Never after that did Harry Hoople answer that telephone until after the fourth ring. That was neighborly, a courtesy between friends. It was a thing never spoken of again, but always remembered between the two who had been boys together in P. S. 47, where even then they had dreamed of being champions, or of having champions for friends, boys from the Neighborhood.

So Murphy struggled through the numbers, and then, scarcely knowing whether he had succeeded, half-fainting from the pain and the smothering effect of the tape, he lay back and waited, staring into the darkness, thinking of what might be happening down by Staley's Warehouse.

When Harry came, alone, panting, frightened half to death, using his passkey given to him long ago, Murphy was quite calm and even able to grin a little when Harry ripped off the tape, and to say: "I'm not dyin' this time, pal. I'm passin' out with disgust at myself, though. Unwire me, lad. Quick!"

Harry screwed the light bulbs back in their sockets. The McGarritys had loosened them. He bent over Murphy, asking: "Who did it? What is this caper?"

"It would be the McGarrity boys after Staley's furs," Murphy stated, wincing at the laceration of the wire as Hoople untwisted it.

"And I got old man Foster the job of watchin' there!"

"Pity him now." Murphy arose, limping, almost falling, knowing the pain of returning circulation of blood in his veins. He went to the bureau to get his spare gun, but they had taken it and all his other weapons. They took no chances, these McGarrity boys.

Harry said, "Surely you are goin' to call Headquarters?"

"Before I know for sure there's been a crime committed?"

"They waylaid you!"

"I should report that? Me? Murphy? In my own neighborhood? Harry, for shame!"

"But let me rod you up, Murph. I got a Colt's at the shop—"

"Now, that's a sensible suggestion," said Murphy. "Leave us go at once."

The revolver was a great long-barreled weapon. Murphy put it in his pocket, but it did not seem to fit, so he held it in his hand, feeling a bit foolish in so doing. "A cannon, you give me," he muttered as Harry climbed back into his car and set off for the river district. At Kay and Rome streets Murphy made him stop. He got down, still limping a little and said: "Go back and pray for your old cousin, Foster. And thanks to you for the loan of the wee pistol and for untying me, the fool that I was to ever let them jump me. Go 'long now—this is my business here."

Harry Hoople went protesting, but obedient as always to a friendly order from Murphy. It was very dark in the shadow of Staley's Warehouse, with the river lapping at the stone pilings, and never a footstep to break the silence. Yet there was movement here, and Murphy felt it, secret movement within the thick walls of the building. He checked the time, then the time when old man Foster was to make his round.

The cousin of Harry Hoople did not appear.

Murphy knew the way in. He climbed a platform greasy with oil from the trucks. He held the huge .45 Colt's in his fist. If there were thieves within, there must be a door open, and he knew which door it must be. He slid along the slippery platform.

Staley's Warehouse was the largest along the river. It had many wings, several floors. The furs, however, were kept in locked vaults on the ground floor, in the rear. There the windows looked out upon a river black and swift in the springtime night. And there he could see, as he

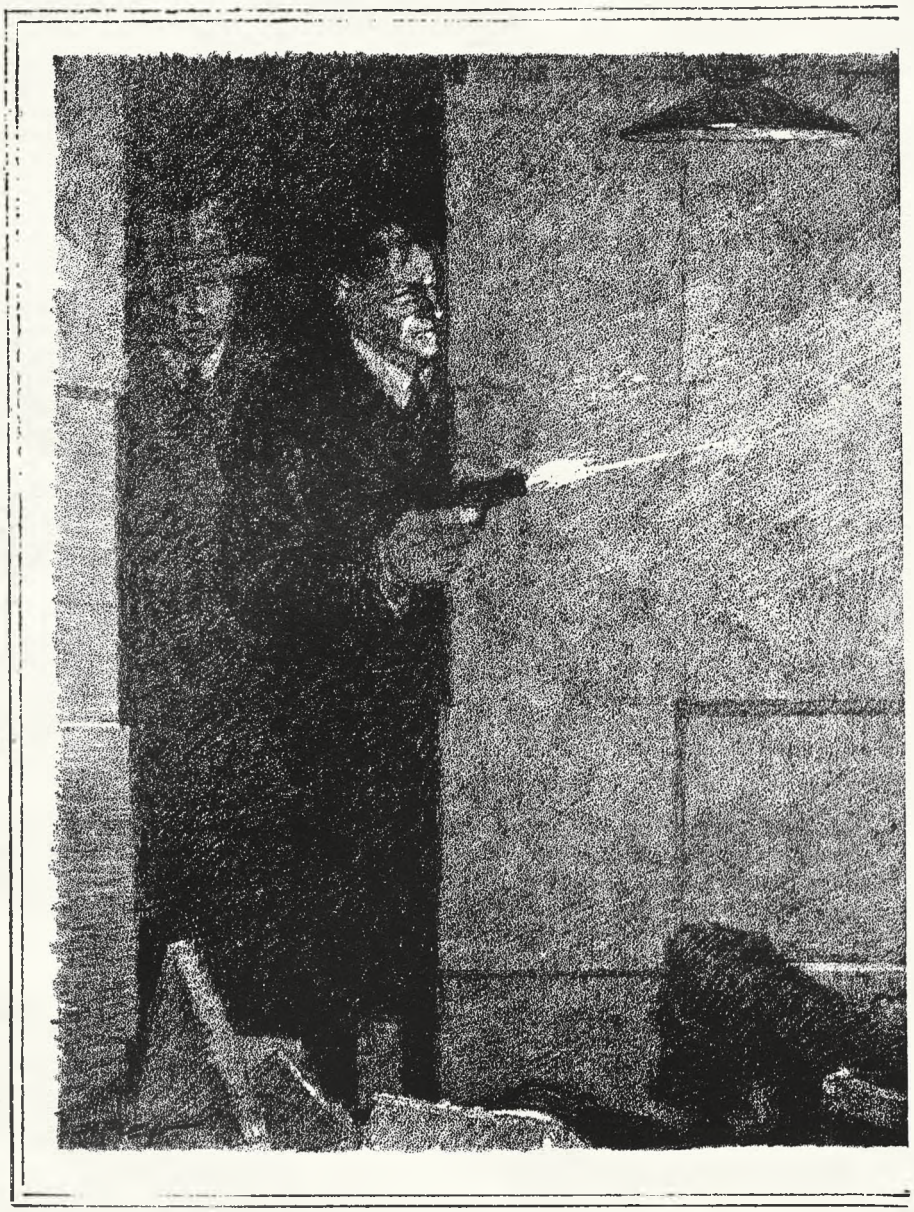
found the door at last and looked in, a small light coming from the partitioned office of the shipping clerk.

He hesitated, just inside the door the thieves had entered. He heard a faint cry, and his blood ran cold, then hot. He waited, though, because the McGarritys would have a lookout stashed somewhere, and indeed Murphy was amazed he had not encountered one before now. He balanced the big revolver in his hand.

He heard the hurrying footsteps. Someone had been derelict in his duty for a moment—a happenstance Murphy had often noted in his dealings with criminal types. It was, he perceived from his deep shadow, Lefty, the hulking strong-arm boy.

He waited until Lefty was very close, until he could hear the big man's breathing. Then he stepped in and jammed the revolver against hard muscle and said: "Not a word, Lefty."

But Lefty, having been remiss, was the stupid, valorous type. He made a grab for the gun. Murphy, unwilling to shoot, tried to bring it up against the strong boy's head.



THE oil from the platform had coagulated upon Murphy's shoes, and his foot slipped. Lefty opened his mouth to yell. Murphy, unused to handling the unwieldy Colt's, felt the gun slip from his grasp. It banged on the floor, but did not, luckily, go off.

Murphy filled Lefty's open mouth with fist. He cut at the thick throat of the big thug with the edge of his hand. He slammed Lefty against the brick wall and pounded his jaw.

Lefty's head snapped back with a dull thud. He sagged. Murphy let him down with practised hands, searched him for weapons. He could not locate the Colt's he had dropped in the darkness. It had probably slid among the piled merchandise on the floor, and he had not time now, to search. He took a blackjack from Lefty. The stupid big boy had no revolver—another tribute to the acumen of the McGarritys, who knew Lefty was not to be trusted with firearms.

Murphy swung the limber weapon expertly against Lefty's skull and rolled the man outdoors, locking the portal. He bent low, aware now of his hurts as he tried to move fast. Another small, whining human cry stirred him to greater effort.

He crept from shadow to shadow across the vast floor of the warehouse. He came to where he could see intent forms bending over something within the pale of light in the shipping clerk's office. He poised there, holding the blackjack, knowing the odds, knowing his strict duty. He should call for help now, call for Houlihan and for Jingle and for Headquarters and the riot squad. There were four of them, armed, and they had Foster and were torturing him. He could hear a match being struck, and never was a simple sound more horrid.

He could not, of course, take time to make the call. There was a man in torment; there was a score to settle. Murphy in himself represented the law for this time. He was acting as an impersonal force, performing that which he believed with all his soul must be done.

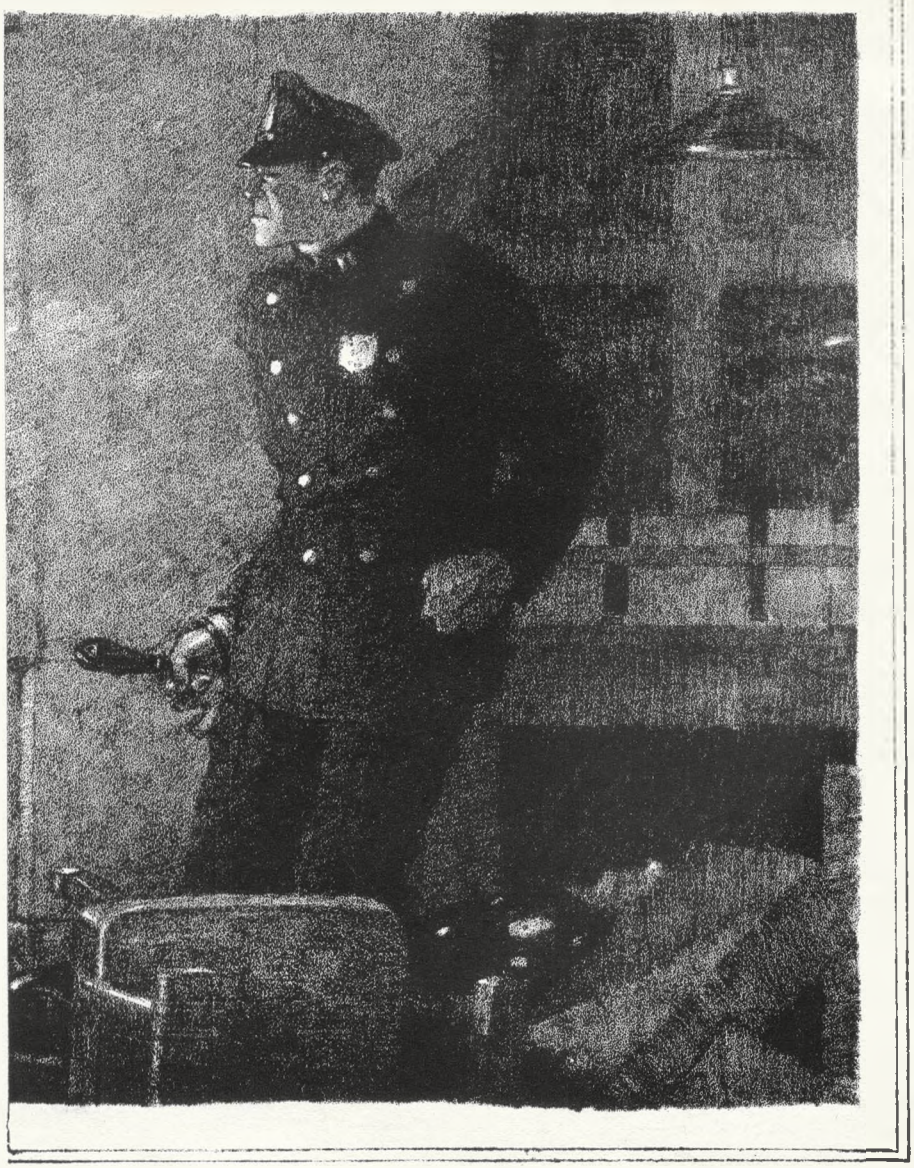
He gathered the remnants of his strength and moved. He came low around the corner of the partition and there was a door, half glass. He whipped it open with silent speed.

Mainly he did not want them to see him before he struck. Then if they doused the light, he was better off—he could hit anyone, while they would not know friend from foe. He thought of this, noting the shaded single bulb, seeing the group of them about the prone figure of Foster, seeing the man's pathetic, mended shoes and socks tossed carelessly aside, smelling the scorched flesh.

Even then, in action, there was a sadness deep within him, a knowledge that it was too late, that the handsome wild McGarrity boys had gone too far for salvation. He had known them, the bad kids of old P. S. 47, watched them rule the playgrounds with their strength and skill at games, and their brutality; and he had hoped that something might be made of these boys. But now it was too late, now they would torture, for their stealing, an old man, Harry Hoople's cousin, a simple old wino who probably did not even know the combination of the safe which they sought.

He got to Big Moe first, the slow giant. His blackjack made a short arc and spatted against the thick skull. The bone crunched a little, for Murphy was swinging from his toes then.

Babe McGarrity yelled: "It's that damned Murphy!"



Again the shots came. Something wrenched at him, spinning him.

Then the light went out, and Murphy jumped. He got clear of Foster, but fell across someone else. His hand scratched across a badge, and he knew this was Jingle, that Jingle had walked into them and had been taken.

Shots lanced the darkness with spates of orange. He moved again, swinging the little weapon he had retrieved from Lefty. He felt one of them go down under his blow.

Again the shots came. Something wrenched at him, spinning him, and he fell, but he had caught the direction of the fire. He managed to crawl along the floor and grab a leg. A cursing figure crashed down, and one of the boys yelled, "Jack!"

Murphy's hand clutched Jack's throat, rammed his head against the floor with stunning force. He had to shift the blackjack because his right shoulder was going numb.

He got up, staggering he knew not which way. The frightened voice was Lon calling his brother: "Jack! *Jack!*"

Murphy got to the voice. He was a bit clumsy with his left hand, and the gun went off again, but he slammed into Lon McGarrity with everything he had.

He kept staggering around now, but finally he found the switch to throw the lights. They came on all over the place, and now the burglar alarm was going off. They had failed to cut the secondary wires. The McGarritys had slipped twice this night—not three times, for they should have killed Murphy in the beginning if they hoped to succeed. He knew that, standing there, men strewn all about him, old Foster moaning over his pitiful, burned feet, Jingle stretched cold in a corner, and wrapped with wire and tape as Murphy had been trussed. He was glad to see that, as it meant they had not killed Jingle.

He picked up the phone and made his call. Then he sat in the swivel chair of the shipping clerk. He had picked up a gun from the floor. It was one of his own, he knew at once. He held it, watching the prone figures of the McGarrity gang, hoping he'd not lose consciousness until the prowl car arrived with Houlihan and Levy.

It was a bad night's work, a bad ending for boys who might have amounted to something. Who knows, one of the McGarritys might have been a champion, an answer to the Neighborhood dream, had he so minded.... It was a sad ending to a spring day, Murphy thought. The blood ran from the wound in his shoulder and from the cuts on his wrists and ankles, but he mourned there for the boys of the Neighborhood who had gone too far the wrong way.

HARRY HOOPLE came to the hospital. He had a half-pint which he slipped under Murphy's pillow, bonded stuff, ten years old. He sighed: "Foster's okay, the old rip. Jingle's back to work, cursin' the Old Neighborhood like always. You know about the McGarritys. This time it will be life for all of 'em."

"A sad thing. I'm sorry," said Murphy. "Did they ever find your big whopping revolver?"

"Yes, they found it. You never shot it off." Hoople shook his head. He had a package in his hand. He said, with some embarrassment: "I got somethin'. I told 'em you would never stand still for a presentation—doodads, speeches. So they give it to me to bring in here. Staley and—well, Hogue and Hatch and Cohen—and the Traudts and the Mosby kids, you know. The Neighborhood. They got it up."

Inside the wrappings of the square package was a simple shield of dark wood, and on it a sheath of silver. There was engraving: Murphy tipped it to the light, squinting to read it.

TO THE FINEST OFFICER IN THE WORLD
THE CHAMPION COP
MURPHY
OF OUR OLD NEIGHBORHOOD

"It's nothin'," said Harry hastily. "Not even expensive. It's just—we feel we got a champ, he should have somethin' for his wall. You should look at it sometimes, maybe it will make you feel better, like when you lose boys the way it was with the McGarritys." He added anxiously: "You ain't sore they did it, Murphy?"

The lean cop held the plaque in his hands. He said mildly: Why, no, Harry. I see what you mean, all of you. Why shouldn't it make a man feel good, to know his neighbors think well of him? No, I am not sore."

They sat in the hospital, the two old friends, not saying anything now, content in each other's company.

ROUTE ZERO

THEY FOUGHT TO WIN HOME TO FRANCE AFTER DEVIL'S ISLAND AND YEARS OF JUNGLE PRIVATION.

by ROBERT CARSE

THEY were in the back of Maria's place when he left the boat, came up from the landing at Ciudad Feliz. It was the beginning of the rainy season, and Howard had been in the jungle for weeks on the downriver run. This time the experience had given dark, tremendous depths to his sense of hopelessness. He told Maria to cook him a steak; then he sat still. His thought was gathered around the decision he had made. He barely noticed the three men.

But they were the only other customers. One of them rose and went to play the crack-sided juke-box. He stopped afterward in front of Howard. "Join us in a drink," he said.

"No, thank you," Howard said, startled that in this country the man spoke to him in French.

"Join us," the man repeated. He didn't raise his voice or make any sign; yet the pair in the corner quickly moved forward.

Brett Howard felt sharp exasperation; their presence kept him from considering his decision. "What a nice bunch of boys!" he said.

The three sat in silence and stared at him. Maria had her broad back turned, was bent over the steak on the charcoal brazier. *Your pistol's aboard the boat,* Howard thought, *and these aren't boys.* He brought his glance to the one who had spoken.

That man was dressed as the others, wore a wide straw hat and the cheap cotton shirt and trousers common to most of South America. But at the opening of the loose shirt, just below the breastbone, Howard could make out a blue tattoo. It was in the form of a human eye, large, keen and somehow malevolent in its regard.

Fear touched Howard. He knew already, he told himself as he examined the man's face. The features were blunt, the bones prominent. Old scars marked the eyebrows. A gash, probably from a broken bottle or a bayonet, stretched from the mouth to the corner of the right ear. The face was so tanned that the eyes seemed weak, pale. But their scrutiny was as steady as that of the tattoo which Howard realized meant the eye of the police.

"Yes," the man said; "I'm Coco Framac." His broadly veined hands swept in a short gesture to the two beside him. "My pals are Minou and 'Ti Baguette. We're *evadés,* escaped ones from French Guiana."

"I know that," Howard slowly said.

"There's no holding secrets long on the river," the little one named Minou said. "What will you drink?"

"Nothing," Howard said. He was studying Minou and the third man in fascination. They had the appearance of willfully contrived opposites. Minou's face was like that of a battered doll. He was of frail stature, and gaunt from the years of prison privation. Yet he was almost dapper. His hat had a rakish flair, carried an egret feather. His shirt was tightly held with a braided belt.

Baguette was amazingly huge in contrast. He gave the effect of having been hewn out of a mahogany log on the upper river. Everything about him was rough-cornered and solid. His hands were square, the fingers spatulate. It was obviously true, Howard thought, that Framac was the leader of the group, and a very powerful man. But Baguette was to be feared for his strength alone.

"Bring four anis along with the steak," Coco Framac called to Maria. "We drink," he told Howard, "to celebrate our arrival on the lower river."

Brett Howard couldn't restrain himself from glancing out into the rain-slatted street. "How about the cops?" he said.

"The cops don't like the rain," Framac said, smiling.

Maria brought the steak and the drinks, and set them down without word. Maria was the confidante of Oleivas and the rest of the river smugglers, Howard remembered. It wouldn't help to talk to her. This was his to settle. But then the heavy-pressing, hard weight of his own problem dominated him.

"What do you men want?" he said harshly.

"Liberty," Minou said in a high, melodramatic voice before Framac could speak.

"Your mouth!" Framac said to the little man warningly. He turned to Howard. "That's what we're after, though—liberty."

"But there's no more prisons in French Guiana." Howard made a jerking motion of dismissal. "Let me be. You can go back there."

"France is where we're going," Baguette said, erect on the bench. "We're through with Guiana."

Coco Framac said: "Your mouths, both of you! I'll explain to the American."

"Talk fast," Howard said. Auger had supplanted the fear. He needed all the time he could get for himself. The details of his plan had to be put in shape. But the three seemed to think they could work on him because of what they had heard along the river.

"We've been told that you served in our country during the war," Coco Framac said, "and that you know our language. So we've come to rent your boat for a little trip."

"Not a chance," Brett Howard said.

"Listen to me," Coco Framac said. His eyes had suddenly the same glare as the naked light bulb overhead. "When the prisons in Guiana were abolished after the war, we were already escaped men. If we go back there, we'll be sent straight to prisons in France. But to get to France on our own is different.... Freedom means very much to us. We've worked hard so we can have it. Take a look."

The small sack was of monkey hide. It was packed about half full with gold-dust. "The Dutchmen sweated us for it," Minou said hoarsely. "For

Howard flung the glass of anis to the floor. "I don't like you or your drink," he said.

years, we rafted timber on the Oyapok and the Surinam, then the headwaters of this river. Almost as bad as the work in the prisons, yes. But we did it to get back to France as free men."

"I'm sorry," Brett Howard said. He pushed the sack from him, then stood. Oleivas would pay him a lot more than the contents of that to make a coastwise run in the boat and deliver a load of contraband in Venezuela. "The oil company owns the boat. I only handle it for them. So long now, and watch out for the cops."

Coco Framac thrust him backward with an easy violence. "Wait, American," he said. "You haven't touched your drink."

Howard raised the glass of anis. Rage was rough along his veins; his brain burned with the need to be left to himself. He flung the anis past Coco Framac to the floor.

"I don't like you or your drink," he said softly.

Baguette was leaping in at him when Framac said: "Back up, camel. The American just doesn't want to do business with us." Framac smiled, but his hands were taut. "Get out," he told Howard. "Out fast, before you're killed."

Howard wasn't sure what kind of bill he dropped beside Maria. He hardly saw her upward-staring eyes as he passed her at the fire. Then he was outside in the street, hearing the pound of his heart louder than the rain on the sheet-iron roofs, the clack of the palm fronds or the rushing sound of the river.

When he reached the police barracks there was a light on. He hesitated there for an instant, then walked on toward the oil-company building at the end of the plaza. *Let be,* he thought. *You don't want to bother the cops. It might get you in trouble later. Anyhow, those guys are escaped convicts from one of the worst penal colonies in the world. They've been whipped by the jungle the same as you. If you can't stand up to it, you're not the one to turn them in.*

Thought of the three remained with him after he had entered his room in the company quarters. The engineering crews usually stationed here were in the field finishing up their work before the height of the rainy season. He was alone except for a couple of native servants in another part of the building.

It did him no good to look at Julie's photograph on his desk. The jungle had dimmed, all but destroyed what she had meant to him. His thought was obsessed. The jungle had become a fantastic cavern of terror which could grasp out and claim him even here. . . .

Howard rested slack-bodied, once more trying to discover what had brought him to the jungle. He'd done all right back in Wisconsin as a kid. First baseman and end on the high-school teams was pretty good. His war record was better than most, too, what with that stuff in the Mediterranean. He'd had trouble, though, getting straightened out after the war. The jobs he took weren't what he wanted, and he was fired from some, quit others. Then he went on the "fifty-two-twenty" benefits while he'd looked around. Julie surprised hell out of him one night when she told him her mother believed that he was a kind of pool-hall bum.

That hurt. It made him real angry. But Julie's father talked with him alone. Her father said: "I know you love Julie and are serious about marrying her. But the way you've been going is no good, Brett. I can line

Miraculously Minou had taken them to Montmartre; the song opened a dream.

you up with a proposition in South America. You'll save your money there, and when you're through with it you and Julie will be all set."

The contract was for three years, at fine pay. The job was to handle a boat on some river, which wouldn't be much for him after what he'd done with the LST's in the Navy. "Sure I'll take it," he told Julie's father, pleased and happy.

Howard put his hands on the edge of the desk. He shivered as he recalled his first trip up the river into the jungle. The idea that the tropics were romantic was still with him. But then he made fast to the bank at night. Alligators splashed, coughed gruntingly, close to the boat. Monkeys screeched like maddened people among the trees. Out beyond the matted wall of lianas and leaves, a jaguar roared and struck, killed some beast that wailed while it died.

Downriver, here at Ciudad Feliz, he had done his best to recuperate, get ready between trips. But the engineers who shared the quarters formed a close group, of which he had no part. They were career men in the company and most of the time they were out on surveys. He joined their poker games, got to know their first names, and that was about all. They regarded him, he knew, as just a paid hand who hauled the company's supplies from one river landing to the next.

So in his loneliness he came to fear the jungle, then to hate it. Now he'd had enough. The last trip had finished him. He was going to pitch in with Oleivas, run that load of contraband along the coast and afterward clear out for keeps. The money he made from it would take him to Rio. For a few weeks at least he could live in a swell hotel, gamble in the big casinos. Then . . . Then, hell, it didn't matter. He was at the bottom now, too tired and beaten-up to care.

A scorpion skittered out of shadow across his foot. He stamped upon it in wild fury. To him it was a symbol of the jungle, all of his life here. The thought had suddenly entered his consciousness that he had tremendous need yet for the boat. *If you don't make the deal with Oleivas,* he told himself, *you'll go completely nuts.* But those guys at Maria's might try to steal the boat!

He laughed with relief when he ran out along the dock in the rain. The boat lay lean and palely handsome as she strained against her lines in the brown froth of the river. He played his flashlight beam over her, then jumped down onto the empty foredeck.

He was warned simply by the point of the knife against his back. "Start the boat," Coco Framac said. "We offered you a price. Now you take us for nothing." Howard tried to turn, and the knife was through his clothing, against his spine. He

let go a gasping cry before Framac pushed him into the cockpit.

Minou and Baguette were on the dock, throwing off the mooring-lines. The boat was being caught by the current. Howard fumbled for the switches and the motor controls. His self-respect was gone, he realized; still, he must try to save the boat.

"Downstream," Framac said as the motors boomed. "Straight out to sea, and keep right in the middle of the channel."

Howard swore at Framac, but then swung the wheel. The town was obscured in the rain. He felt the tremor of the coastal ground swell, and stared almost unthinking ahead at the open sea.

The sun, russet-rimmed above low dark horizon clouds, roused him. It was nearly four hours since they had left the landing, he calculated. He checked his gauges and said: "Come here, Framac."

Framac had been studying charts. He walked with a wide stride to Howard. It gave Howard keen pleasure to ask: "How far do you want to sail?"

"Out to Ambos Mundos reef buoy. Your course is good."

"We haven't," Howard said, holding back the laughter, "got anything like enough gasoline to reach Ambos Mundos."

"You're a poor liar, American," Framac said. "The reserve tanks hold plenty. I took a look at them. But now about some breakfast?"

"There's the galley," Howard said in a voice dull with defeat.

But he began to think of the pistol while breakfast was cooked. The pistol hung in a small compartment forward of the wheel. He could get it with two swift motions. *Be patient,* he told himself against the thrust of his rage. *You're being watched. One of them is always in the cockpit with you. So wait until later. Not now.*

Minou brought him breakfast, acting the rôle of waiter with broad comedy. "Well served, sir?" he said. "You like our cuisine?"

"Excellent," Howard said; he made himself smile.

"In Paris," Minou said, "when I was a kid, I was a bus-boy, but never a waiter. Not for me, that trade."

"Minou means that he's a singer," Baguette said. "He used to pick up the cigarette butts that the waiters dropped."

It was said with laughter, but Minou scowled, stood tense. "You," he told Baguette, "a dock-walloper doing work that a donkey could do better! If they paid you with more than a few rope yarns, all the Cannebiére knew it. What can you say of singers?"

"Enough talk." Coco Framac was between them, lightly poised on the balls of his rough-calloused feet. "Slow down your motors, American, and Minou will sing for us. There's a lot of time."

Minou strutted on the afterdeck as the motor stridence lowered to a faint drumming. He twitched his straw hat to a wider angle, pulled down the tattered shirt beneath the belt. The illusion was already existent, Brett Howard recognized with surprise. Minou had taken him and the other men here to Montmartre.

They were no longer off the rain-rotten mangrove forests of South America. The searing blaze of the tropical sun had become the dim blue density of a Montmartre cellar. Candle flames shivered over champagne bottles. The sudden flat white of the spotlight was veined, cracked by cigarette smoke. A piano was touched in darkness.

Minou sang with his head back, his eyes shut. He gave his hands, his arms and body to the melody, and miraculously he was young. The song was of love. Howard had heard it on the Place Pigalle when he had come from the Mediterranean on leave just after the end of the war. Drunken GI's and cheap women had been jammed around him, yet the song, tawdry, over-sentimental in itself, had opened for him the dream in which he held Julie.

He was with Julie in Wisconsin. The wind was harsh against their faces as they lay side by side on the hurtling ice-boat at Manitowoc. They were in the summer brilliance of Green Bay, and Julie burrowed her hand beneath the sand to reach his hand. They were together, together, in love, in peace. . . .

Now he was returned once more to Julie, and the thought of her was an unbearable agony. This guy singing was a beaten-up convict, he told himself, to break the thrall of longing. The song was as old as hell and Minou had lost what voice he ever had years ago.

But he saw that Coco Framac sat entranced. Baguette leaned forward, eyelids down, every muscle at rest. *They're a strange bunch,* Howard thought, *stranger than you knew.*

The song was finished. "Another, friend," Baguette murmured.

It was of the South and Provence this time. Howard remembered the fishermen of the Old Port rowing through the bronze-hard sunlight past the Chat' d'If. He could hear their chants, and the plaintive, yet gay cries of the peddlers in the maze of the Marseilles back alleys. Schoolboys whistled; church bells rang. An Arab girl argued passionately with a Norwegian sailor on the Cannebiére. All of that was contained in Minou's song.

Minou looked up with the last words. He was very pale. "We'll make it, Coco?" he asked. "I'll see the Butte again?"

"Yes," Coco Framac said. "Don't worry, little one. Just give us another. Maybe a song"—the frown had deepened the brow scars—"that my woman might've known."

Minou was motionless as he sang the lullaby. It was fragile, simple and brief. In the dusk, a mother held her child and promised that his father would be home soon from the fields.

Howard gazed in astonishment at Coco Framac. He was aware that Framac was close to tears. It was to him an almost shocking revelation that the convict could be moved by such a song. "You'd think," he told himself, "that the jungle would have knocked that out of the man. But Framac still loves his family, must keep some sort of ties with them. All three have been through a lot more than you; they've had the jungle for years. Yet they're able to go on." He didn't like the thought, took his mind away from it because behind it was a great deal that had to do with him.

"No more," Minou said, fingering his throat. "It's to be saved for them." He looked to the North, and Howard knew that in imagination Minou was walking up Montmartre.

"Then go to the bow and keep a lookout," Framac said. "Get some sleep, Baguette. Later you'll relieve me here."

Coco Framac sat wordless for a time on the settee beside the wheel. Then he said: "He sings all right, our Minou?"

"He brings back France," Howard said, forced by a sudden, fierce desire to understand Framac and the other two.

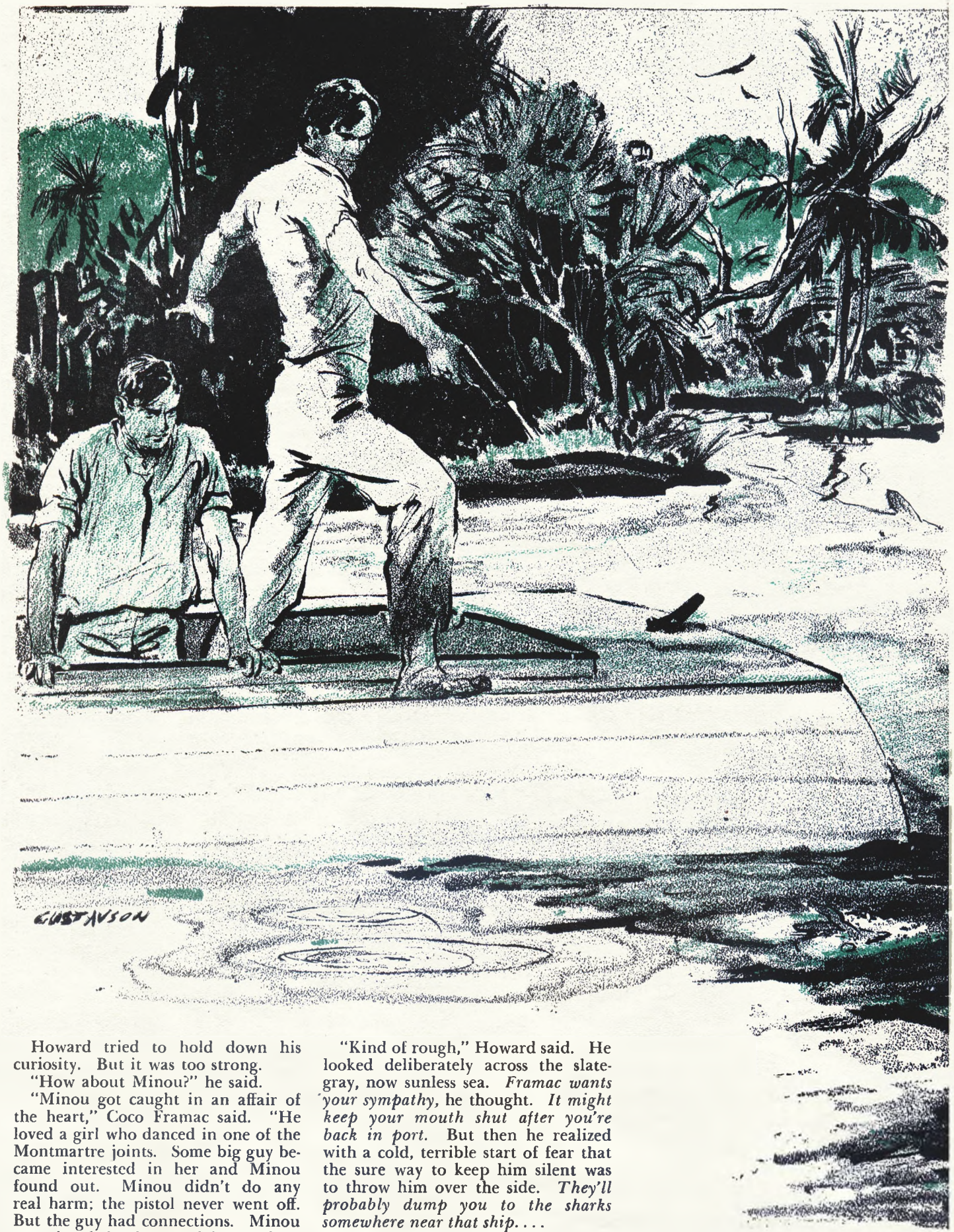
"It's of France I want to talk," Coco Framac said; "also of my pals, myself."

"Go ahead," Howard said hoarsely.

"Those guys," Framac said, his stare steady on Howard, "have been with me in the prisons for years. Baguette is from Marseilles. As a kid, he got into a couple of scrapes with the cops around the docks. Nothing serious, but it counted against him. When he was grown-up and his own kids were starving in the depression, he tried to steal some stuff for them. A cop chased him. Baguette was desperate, and he's so damn' strong he nearly killed the cop."

"They sent him to Guiana for that?" Howard said.

"For that and the earlier arrests," Coco Framac said. "He was sentenced as an habitual criminal."



Howard tried to hold down his curiosity. But it was too strong.

"How about Minou?" he said.

"Minou got caught in an affair of the heart," Coco Framac said. "He loved a girl who danced in one of the Montmartre joints. Some big guy became interested in her and Minou found out. Minou didn't do any real harm; the pistol never went off. But the guy had connections. Minou was handed the straight Guiana ticket."

"Kind of rough," Howard said. He looked deliberately across the slate-gray, now sunless sea. *Framac wants your sympathy,* he thought. *It might keep your mouth shut after you're back in port.* But then he realized with a cold, terrible start of fear that the sure way to keep him silent was to throw him over the side. *They'll probably dump you to the sharks somewhere near that ship. . . .*

His glance went wildly searching to Coco Framac. But he learned

Coco Framac fired until the

nothing from the low-lidded eyes or the scarred, darkly tanned face. "So how about you?" he said, unable to bear the tension of silence.

"I came from La Cime," Framac said; "a little place in the Maritime Alps near Italy. Most likely you don't know it."

There was a sound of hysterical relief in Howard's laughter. Framac constantly astonished him. "I passed by it one time," he said. "It's on the road up the mountain from Mentone to Sospel."

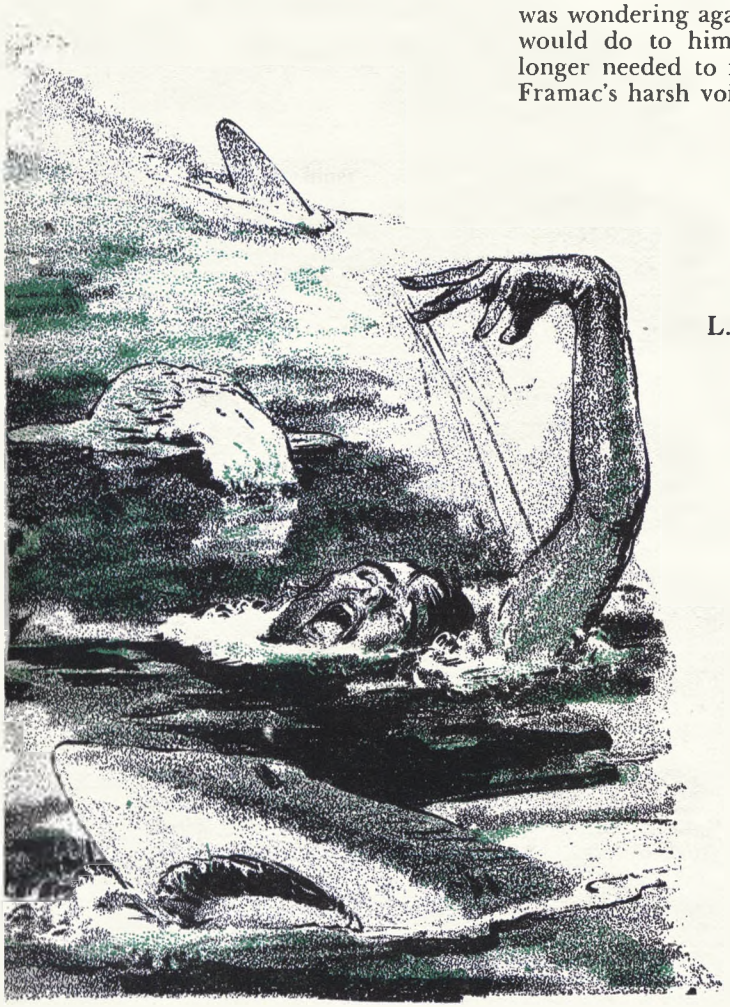
He was glad to recall the memory, lose in it his feeling of dread. He had left the LST and the rest of the war-weary crew at Monte Carlo. Then he had gone up from the coast. Along the road he followed, an army he had helped serve and carry had marched to win their part of the war.

La Cime was to him no more than a signpost marking a low huddle of houses among olive groves. But he vividly remembered the view that spread below the village. You saw past the last plunge of the mountains the roofs of Mentone, the pastel blur of Monte Carlo, and to the horizon the sheer azure flame of the Mediterranean.

"Then you know," Coco Framac said. "You know enough.... It was a great place for a kid. I ran wild there, and before I was fifteen I was one of the best poachers on the mountain. Some of the guards on the big estates were hot after me. My father warned me that if I got caught I'd have to serve my military duty the real hard way with the Colonial Army in Africa. Well, they never caught me, but I took my service in the Colonial anyhow. I wanted something different from just slogging around a barracks square." Coco Framac grinned and lightly touched the facial scars. "I got it."

He was still, returned far back in thought. Then he said, "I stuck with the Colonial, made the grade of sergeant. My girl came out from La Cime and we were married in Morocco. She stayed there during most of the campaigns. But when the kids got big enough to work on the farm, she took them home. When my time was up, I joined them. La Cime, though, that wasn't like the Colonial. I was a pretty unhappy guy. So I started a little poaching."

"Don't bother to tell me the rest," Brett Howard said. His nervous restraint was almost exhausted. He was wondering again what this group would do to him when he was no longer needed to run the boat. But Framac's harsh voice kept on:



Illustrated by L. R. GUSTAVSON

pistol clacked empty. "No more ammunition," Howard whispered.

"There was an estate guard who'd been after me years before. He hadn't forgotten, and in the café one night he promised to shoot me if I came on the land he watched. I laughed at him and told him that he shouldn't talk so big. He might get hurt, I said.... So when the case came to court, there that was, and it made it look like premeditation. He tried to shoot me, sure, and I fired back. But it was only birdshot. The trouble was he got blood poisoning before they could take him down the mountain. He died in the hospital at Mentone. Strange how it can happen to a man."

Howard stared to the eastward at the dark-massed cloud and the sea. That cloud marked the tail of a hurricane which had swung far north, he knew. But the whirling winds had left a furiously disturbed sea which now hauled in fast against the coast.

"You won't reach Ambos Mundos," he said flatly. "Heavy weather is making up out there. This boat isn't built for it. We'll have to head back for the river. If we don't we'll be sunk."

Coco Framac made a quick, compressing gesture with his hands. "Steer the course," he said. "We're meeting a ship at Ambos Mundos. We have it all fixed up to board her. Then we go on to France. Stop your foolishness, American."

HOWARD kept his gaze on the huge, heavy sweep of waves. "You've got one chance," he thought, "and it's the pistol. The boat will founder if you keep on this course. But Framac won't make sense; he's gone nuts with his dream about France. Talk to him, keep his attention away from you so you can get set to pull the pistol."...

"What if you did catch your ship?" he asked Framac. "You three are well-known to the cops in France. You'll be lucky if you're free a couple of weeks before they put you back in prison."

"We know that," Coco Framac said. His eyes shone; his lips were tightly pulled. "The cops will surely grab us. But we're gambling for a few days, even hours of freedom. Minou wants to walk the Butte again, sing a song there. For Baguette, it would be fine to sit on the Cannebière with some of his family, buy a drink for old friends. Me, I have a grandson in La Cime. I'm going to see the kid. I'm going to stand in my own house, American, and hold in my arms the boy who bears my name. You hear me?"

Brett Howard made no answer. The waves were upon the boat. They broke with enormous force over her. She had been designed for the alluvial river, with a shallow draft and low

freeboard. She rolled to the waves, pitched and flung under their weight.

The cockpit was almost awash. Howard and Coco Framac crouched drenched. Baguette stumbled around still part asleep in the cabin. But from the foredeck Minou gave a wild shout of warning. Another toppling comber was about to come aboard. Framac turned to watch it.

Howard reached past the wheel and grasped the compartment catch, then the pistol. But Coco Framac had seen him. Framac sprang at him, head and shoulders low as the wave pounded across the side.

They fought back and forth waist-deep in the water. Framac hit him cruelly about the face, but kept one hand vised over his on the pistol.

Howard struck back with all his desperate strength.

The boat was broadside to the waves. She went beam-under. Howard looked up, aware that this was insane and that in a moment more they would all be lost. But Baguette was at the wheel, he saw, and brought her around so that she wouldn't founder. Then he noticed the mallet-like arc of Framac's fist. It took him beneath the chin. He was hurled backward, downward, the pistol no longer in his grasp.

He heard the thin stutter of the motors as he lay close to unconsciousness. "Get up, stupid," he told himself through the pain. "Framac may shoot you right now, but you have to try to fix the motors before they conk out."

His hands on the coaming, he dragged upright. The motor sound was gone. He looked at Framac, tensed for the pistol flame, the cracking report. But Framac only pointed at the motor hatch.

DULL-EYED, Howard looked into it. Water was around the cylinder heads and the carburetors. "You asked for it," he said thickly to Framac. "Now you're stuck with it."

"Shut up," Framac said. "Baguette steers her in front of the waves. She won't sink. Rig your pump. Then we'll fix the motors."

Howard cursed him, past the point of physical fear. "I can pump her out," he said. "But it will be hours before she'll start again. Keep in front of the waves and the boat will beach herself. Tear up those tickets for France. They're no good to you."

Both Baguette and Minou came in at him. Framac had to stop them with the pistol. "Not yet," Framac said mildly. "Let him pump first. As for us, we can still meet the ship on time."

Howard pumped until he reeled from side to side. Coco Framac relieved him, then Baguette. But little Minou was losing control of himself. He stood screaming shrilly as the boat was carried toward the shore. "The other way!" he cried. "To France, to *France!*"

Then he began to talk to the land. His rambling words possessed a weird, frightful meaning. He spoke of the years in the prisons, the filth, the disease, the unremitting misery. Framac and Baguette stared up, their faces haggard, and told him to be silent. But he went on; he described the guillotine at work and the solitary cells where men were kept in darkness year after year. He was back in the labor camps, naked as he hauled the vast baulks of timber. He was in the jungle trying to escape, and it wasn't once that he had tried, it was four times.

His arms opened wide in a frenzied gesture. He indicated the gray-black expanse of coastal mud that was now quite near, the rotted, twisted mangroves beyond and the steamy mass of the jungle itself. A reek of decay rose from the mud. Alligators slid among the mangroves. Vultures dipped, lazily swung over the jungle.

"Route Zero," Minou shouted. "The end of everything. From you there's no escape. Better the sea, the sharks!"

He threw himself sidewise from the deck. Coco Framac fired the pistol until the breech action clacked empty. "No more ammunition," Howard whispered. "That's all I have." But the shots had killed the sharks around Minou, and Baguette dragged the man gasping aboard.

Minou had gashes along his arms and body. He was incoherent, spent, and they put him on the settee, covered him with a sheet from the cabin. Baguette knelt beside him. "My friend," he said; "sleep. Soon you will be there, walking up the hill."

But the boat had been caught by a high surge of waves. She staggered with the mud sucking under her. The waves fell back and she lay sharply listed and aground. Baguette got to his feet. He looked at the jungle in the same fashion as Minou. "Route Zero," he said. He swung around. "You brought us back, American. If you'd kept on, we would have met the ship."

"Your mouth," Coco Framac said. "We can still get to the ship."

"Yes." Baguette was faintly smiling. "But the American—"

Coco Framac broke the force of Baguette's blow with his uplifted arm. "Let be," he said. "The American has to fix the motors." But then Baguette struck at him.

The blow was to the face and Framac went almost supine. His knife was inside his trousers waistband. He drew that, held the terrible blade before him. "You forget," he told Baguette.

"Not me." A kind of eagerness was in Baguette's voice. "I remember." He stripped back his shirt. "Right here, Coco. I'm finished with waiting."

"You're wrong." Coco Framac had put away the knife. "The promise is still between us. We're on our way to France."

BAGUETTE gave a thick shout of laughter. He advanced toward Framac and held out his hand. "I want the knife, Coco. Let me have it. France, that's a dream. See there what's left for us."

Coco Framac ducked when Baguette sprang. He passed the huge man over his back, lithely wheeled. He kneed Baguette, and kicked him aside, but in return took a fierce stomach blow.

It was very difficult for Brett Howard to move. He was trembling badly, held with horror. But he found the big steel wrench, brought it down on Baguette's skull.

"You know enough," Coco Framac muttered. "You didn't kill."

"I've got a girl at home," Howard said. "She—" He stopped, amazed by the words. *You've gone screwy, too,* he thought.

Coco Framac stood staring at the shore. "Bring me a rope," he said, "that will reach to the mangroves on the bank."

"Sure," Howard said. "But try to crawl through the mud and you'll drown. Swim through the channel and the sharks will get you." He moved to the side of the boat. The last of the heavy seas was subsiding as the wind veered offshore. He studied the black rottenness of the mud and the winding of the tidal channel past it. The nearest mangroves were a hundred yards away up the channel. Despair settled on him. He closed his eyes.

"There's only one shark around," Coco Framac said slowly. "The rest of them I shot with the pistol. Give me the rope, American. Too much time has been lost, and the ship won't wait. When I'm ashore, start your windlass. The pull of the rope will take the boat over into the channel."

Howard looked out and saw the shark. It was close to the boat. The fins showed, and the curve of the great under-jaw. That shark watched, he knew, for anything that might enter the water. Cords tightened in his stomach, his throat. "You can't," he said. "You'll get torn apart."

"Give me the rope," Coco Framac said.

He tied an end of the rope around his shoulder. Then he jumped from the stern. The shark followed him at

Brett was trembling badly, held with horror. But he found the big wrench, brought it down on Baguette's skull.

once. But Framac swam with deliberate strokes. His knife was out; Howard saw the flash of the long blade.

"You can't," Howard kept saying. "The shark will come in behind you."

Then there was the swift, slanting attack. Water was lashed up into a tumbling brown column around Framac. It collapsed, and Howard made out Framac's head and upper body. Strain was still kept on the rope. Howard gave slack, gazed unbelieving at the man who pushed up through the shallow bank mud.

He took his glance from Framac before he could be certain. The shark floated belly-up in the channel. Then Framac had killed the shark. For that Framac had paid with his left foot. It was gone, snapped away quite cleanly right below the ankle bone.

Brett Howard put his hands up over his face. He wept in humiliation and in joy. He had hated Framac for stealing the boat, endangering his life. But all the man wanted was a brief time of freedom. Framac lived for the moment in France when he would hold his grandson in his arms.

Howard climbed up onto the stern of the boat. He saw that Framac hadn't reached the mangroves, lay hunched on the bank below them. A high tide would finally float the boat back into deep water, he realized. He could leave Framac to bleed to death, shove the other two over the side.

Thought of Julie rose strangely in his mind. *She'd tell you to go to Framac. But there's a lot more than that. If these guys die, something will die in you. Then you won't even want to take yourself out of here.*

He swam with his teeth locked. He imagined hundreds of times the rapid-rending slash of shark upon his body. But when they found him, he promised, he'd keep Framac from hearing his scream. *You can do as well,* he repeated over and over. *You must.*

Framac had put about the ankle a tourniquet torn from his shirt. Howard tightened it, then went on with the rope to the mangroves. He came back and Framac gave him the knife. "I won't be much help on the way out," Framac said in a voice shaken by agony. "But we'll get to Ambos Mundos?"

"That's it," Howard agreed. "Ambos Mundos. Hold onto my shoulders, and I'll swim you to the boat."

The boat rode hard and slow to the veer of the rope. But the steady power of the big anchor windlass sent her sidewise-sliding after it through the mud. Then the channel water was beneath the hull. There was a lurching splash and the motors lifted a quick roar as they started. Brett Howard shook the sweat from his eyes, cast off the rope and swung around to seaward.

He kept silent as the three left the boat off Ambos Mundos. His emotion was beyond speech. All he could do was to shake Coco Framac's hand before Framac boarded the small, lightless ship.

But that was enough.

Heading back into the river, he waited until the jungle was somber, thick-walled on either side. Then he smiled at it. His feeling for the jungle was unchanged; still, he knew that he could work out his time here. He would write to Julie tonight, explain to her the reason. From the men he had left aboard the ship, he had learned the power to dream.

LAST MONTH WE FOLLOWED THE CAREER OF THIS OLDEST UNITED STATES MILITARY UNIT FROM ITS ORGANIZATION BY ALEXANDER HAMILTON, THROUGH THE WAR OF 1812, THE MEXICAN WAR AND THE CIVIL WAR. THE BATTERY'S RECORD THROUGH THE TWO WORLD WARS COMPLETES WHAT IS, IN EFFECT, AN OUTLINE OF OUR ENTIRE MILITARY HISTORY.

OUT with Crook and Miles against Crazy Horse, their guns carried in prairie schooners, avenging Custer; garrison duty at San Francisco; the Plains again—this was the Bannock War of 1878; then to Plattsburg Barracks and to Fort Warren on Boston harbor; finally out to the Bad Lands for that last campaign against the Sioux in 1891, ending at Pine Ridge Agency.

Little wars, petty skirmishes. Few cannon-balls spent, but marching aplenty; hunger and thirst sometimes, cold always. Such were the campaign adventures of Hamilton's Battery until 1898.

Off then, to Cuba and the Santiago trenches, to the tune of "There'll Be a Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight," armed with their new 3.2" quick-firers, our latest and best ordnance. To the Philippines in '99; that would be northern Luzon with Lawton; Samar with "Hell-Roaring Jake" Smith to help take grim toll for the massacre of Company C, 9th Infantry, at Balangiga.

More little wars, these; bickerings and skirmishes. Sometimes as a unit, frequently with its guns scattered amongst various small expeditions into the jungle, Hamilton's Battery shared the snipings, the man-traps, the quick, sharp bursts of fighting, the heat and the mud of the tropics. A change in name; it was the 8th Battery, Field Artillery, when it came home in 1901. Another change in name before it went back to Camp Stotsenburg in the Philippines in 1905; Hamilton's Battery was now Battery D, 5th Field Artillery Regiment.

No fighting, this tour; but lots of marching and maneuvers over the Luzon hills. "See those caissons come rollin'!" cried a scout one day to Lieutenant Edmund L. Gruber as they peered at their battery—Hamilton's Battery—winding up a trail beneath them. And "Snitz" Gruber, as good at the piano as he was at tactical studies, went home that night to hammer out a song we all now know:

"Over hill, over dale, as we hit the dusty trail,
See those caissons come rolling along!"

And that's how the "Caisson Song," hallmark of the U. S. Field Artillery, came to be born in Hamilton's Battery, in 1908. The wording is almost unchanged today.

Now we come to World War I, when batteries became small pawns on a large chessboard. No more silver rings on guidon staffs for individual actions; battle-streamers replace them. There are no individual actions; it's teamwork.

Hamilton's Battery

by COLONEL R. ERNEST DUPUY, U.S.A., RET.

The 5th Field Artillery Regiment which went overseas as part of the 1st Division became a "medium" outfit; that is, its six firing batteries each boasted four big, unwieldy but close-shooting Schneider 155-mm. howitzers, drawn by eight-horse teams, instead of the conventional six of the light guns. There would be no galloping into action in this war by Hamilton's Battery—still D of the 5th.

There was Einville in Lorraine, where the battery loosed off its first round of this war November 20, 1917. And there was the Toul sector, later, and sticky French mud, as the 1st Division relieved the French 1st Moroccan in the drudgery of trench warfare.

There was Cantigny—All-American, with Hamilton's Battery one of many supporting Ely's 18th U. S. Infantry in the first American attack. After that, the big howitzers slewed their muzzles around to get into a game of long-bowls and counter-battery against the German Chemin de Dames offensive until that rush was stopped.

Then came Soissons, July 18, 1918, after a night of rain and thunderstorm through which drenched gunners manhandled their pieces in split-second rush to get them up to support the doughboys jumping off at dawn. Summerall's 1st Division was attacking, brigades abreast, and the medium artillery was in general support of the lot. Missy au Bois, the Paris road, Berzy; finally Buzancy and victory.

That was grueling work for Hamilton's Battery, for Summerall had put a new wrinkle into artillery fire. The going would be stiff, he knew. So his infantry brigades attacked in a sort of "one-two" series of punches, right, left and right again. Each time *all* the fire of *all* his guns poured into the area in front of the punching brigade.

The cannon swung to the right; they swung to the left; slowly the elevation hand-wheels crawled as muzzles lifted ever higher, to keep the range ahead of the doughboys. Hot pieces got hotter as the gun-crews slammed projectiles home in steady streams. And when the battle began to creep out of range, the eight-horse teams sucked the big-wheeled howitzers forward through the ruck to a new position to do it all over again.

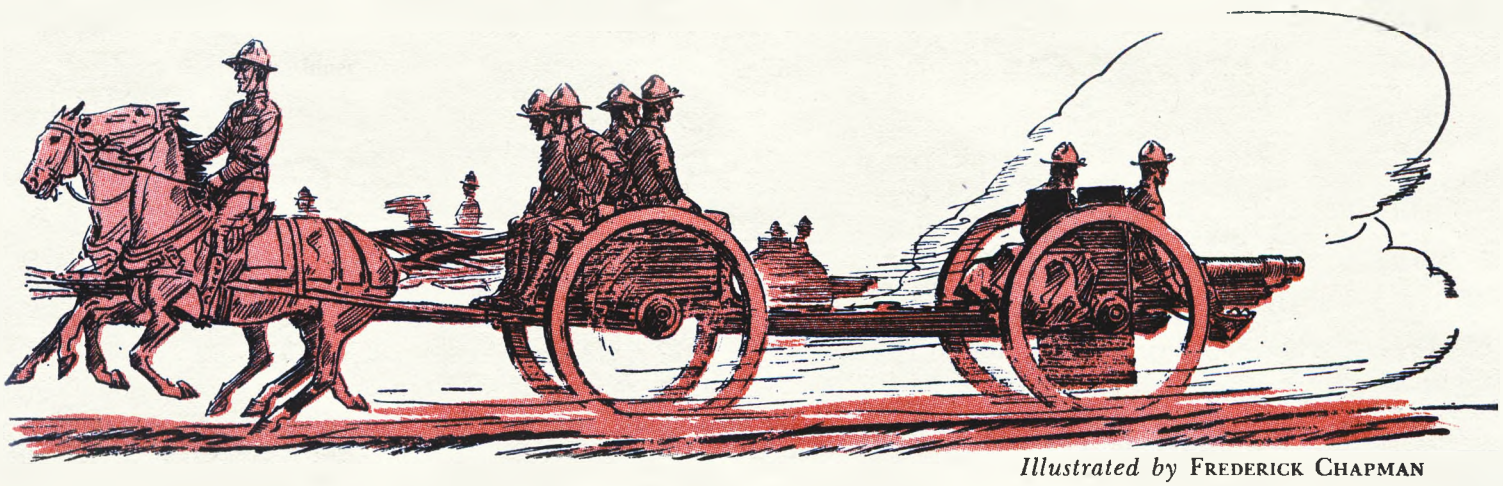
It worked. The German tide was turned, Hamilton's Battery playing a good part in the turning. . . .

There was St. Mihiel, our first full-dress offensive; a double envelopment. Hamilton's Battery joined in the roar of tremendous concentration of hundreds of guns in the black night of September 11-12. It was firing fast, from positions near Beaumont as the 1st Division smashed north from Seicheprey and Montsec. Careful firing, too, it was; for the New Englanders of the 26th Division at the other end of the pincers were coming down southward. Our howitzers ceased speaking when 1st and 26th met at Hatton-Chattel and Vigneulles.

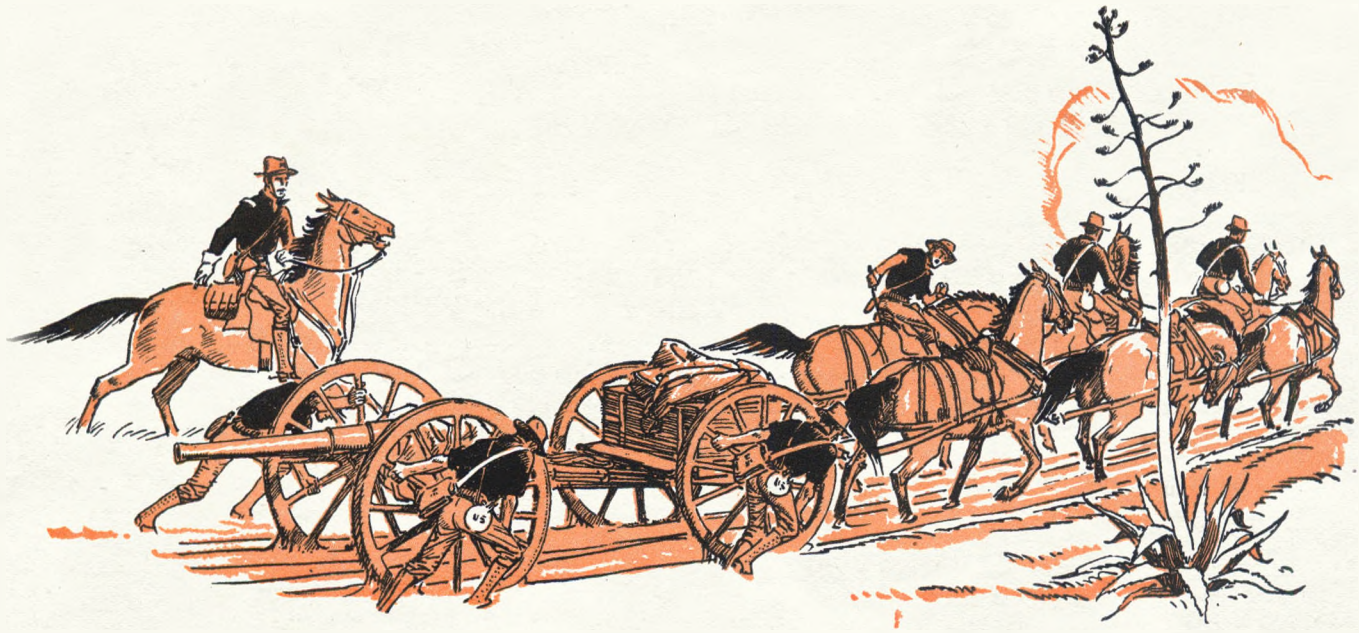
Then came the Meuse-Argonne; forty-three days of continuous battle for our artillerymen, for although divisions came and went, their artillery—once engaged in that fight—stayed. There were those first five days at Charpentry—where Hamilton's Battery with the rest of the division waited silently and took the German fire and gas sweeping on them over the 35th Division they were to relieve.

Then the doughboys of the 1st went in. Hamilton's Battery was pounding ahead of them, at the Exermont Ravine, at the glowering Montrefange Hill, at Hill 272, with the Arietel Farm nestling just below it. They switched their fire to catch a German counter-attack coming out of the Bois de Moncy on the right, and they smothered it. The advance then ground to a slow halt; and the big howitzers waddled through the mud to get a nearer whack at the Côte Dame Marie.

The Division was assaulting again October 9, with Hamilton's Battery and the rest of the 5th Field plastering Hill 272 and the Côte de Maldah beyond it, until at long last the men of the Big Red One swept over the heights to straddle the Sommerance road. Then the 1st Division was relieved to get a breather. But Hamilton's Battery and the rest of the divisional artillery remained, to support the relieving 42d (Rainbow) Division as it inched its way up to the Côte de Chatillon. And when the 2d Division replaced the 42d, Hamilton's Battery was still there, in a ravine north of Fleville, helping to blast the way ahead of the Indian Heads as



Illustrated by FREDERICK CHAPMAN



they swept up through Landreville and Bayonville.

Hamilton's Battery was beyond Landres-St. Georges now, to stay in range as the infantry moved forward; then they leapfrogged on to Nouart. The offensive was moving fast. On November 5th, the 1st Division came hurrying back into the line, the infantrymen cheering their artillery as they swung past the battery positions.

The Big Red One was off, Hamilton's Battery and all the other guns bundling away with them for that fantastic forty-eight-hour dash for Sedan. They were halted only by frenzied orders from GHQ after the Division, in five columns, had swept across two other American divisions and part of the Fourth French Army, to get within two miles of its goal.

Then came the Armistice, November 11, 1918.

It was December 1st when Hamilton's Battery first trod the soil of Germany, as the 1st Division marched for Coblenz. Down the Moselle Valley the long columns rolled, then crossed the Rhine December 15th, the colors of the 5th Field Artillery leading the way. Not until August 19th, 1919, would Hamilton's Battery—and the Division—start back home, its chore of occupation done. The men of Hamilton's Battery watched reverently the Stars and Stripes come down from Ehrenbreitstein's frowning battlements—the 5th Field was garrisoning the castle—little dreaming that a quarter-century later the battery would be in action again within earshot of those ancient walls.

On September 10th, 1919, Hamilton's Battery really came home. Up Broadway it marched with the rest of the division, "Black Jack" Pershing leading, in what is still probably one of the metropolis' greatest military demonstrations. One wonders if the spirit of Alexander Hamilton hovered over his old outfit rolling now on concrete where he had wheeled his six-pounders along a country lane so long ago.

Between wars Uncle Sam changed the cut of his military coat. Divisions were streamlined, artillery regiments cut down to three-battery battalions. Transformed as were the others, the 5th Field Artillery Battalion had one distinction: Its firing batteries, instead of being A, B and C, were A, B and D. Someone in the War Department with a rare sense of *esprit de corps* let Hamilton's Battery stay put—the only Battery D in the U. S. Field Artillery.

It was an infinitesimal part of a great war machine when the war-drums beat again for World War II. And it was still part of the 1st Division—an interesting outfit. The men who wear that Big Red One on their shoulder patches become testy when addressed by the meticulously official title of "1st Infantry Division." Instance the doughboy from Brooklyn answering the querying war correspondent: "There ain't but one Foist Division, brother!"

It's all part of that fabulous 1st Division spirit so ably expressed by the late "Red" Knickerbocker—"the power of the Myth . . . that the 1st Division never retreats; the 1st Division always goes forward; the 1st Division always takes its objectives; the 1st Division is invincible. That is all, and it is everything. For the miraculous thing about the myth was that because the 1st Division believed it, it *was*."

Put that sort of spirit into an outfit like Hamilton's Battery, which has counted *coup* since 1776, and you have something.

So it's the 1st Division. The 1st Division, hitting the beaches of Africa on a drizzly cold morning, November 8th, 1942; Hamilton's Battery a part of the 16th Infantry combat team at Arzeu, east of Oran. Our gunners have 105-mm. howitzers this time, instead of 155's, for they're in direct support.

A winding coast road; a fire fight with the French who wouldn't conform; three days of hard fighting until they rolled into Oran. The men of Hamilton's Battery saw some fantastic things those days. Some of them appear corny now, but they didn't in the cold and rain and the nervous tension of men in their first battle, when hot steel comes screaming overhead.

There was Terry Allen's order: "Nothing in hell must stop or delay this attack!" There was *"Heigh-ho, Silver!"* for password; *"Away!"* for counter-sign. There was that big American flag, a pyrotechnic masterpiece outlined in the night sky; someone had spent money and skull-work on building that firework—supposed to comfort the French; instead, it drew their fire. There were the brown-skinned Tunisian *tirailleurs* at Arzeu who wouldn't surrender; Hamilton's Battery had to open up on them. Finally, there were the cheers of the Oran populace when the French did capitulate.

Then Hamilton's Battery was off on the long rush to Tunisia, this time with their own new 155's, squatty howitzers bounding on great rubber tires behind roaring six-by-six trucks. The plan was for British General Alexander to seize Tunis, the German stronghold, while the rest of Eisenhower's thin-spread force would line

a corridor between the spiny mountain-ridges and the sea into which Rommel's hard-pressed *Afrika Korps* would be herded by Monty, driving west from El Alamein. It was "Tunis by Christmas!" It was a nice plan, but the Kraut had other ideas. He slowed the British V Corps in the northern mountains—with them our 18th Infantry combat team, Hamilton's Battery part of its artillery.

THERE was weather and mud and a dead-end road, and American armor bogged down—to be hit from the air by swooping Messerschmitts and Junkers, to be stopped by a savage counter-attack on the ground. That blow came almost to the muzzles of Hamilton's Battery's howitzers before it ended. And when it did end, there was no more American armor in that vicinity; there would be no, "Tunis by Christmas."

Instead, there was a North African winter with Fritz on the high ground, with Axis planes dominating the air, and the long-range 88's taking toll. It was not a nice winter. German reinforcements were pouring in from Italy and Sicily; the Allied command was a jumble of fragmentary planning and divided authority.

So came spring. Came St. Valentine's Day, and a greeting in the form of Rommel's 10th, 15th and 21st Panzer Divisions, and the Italian 131st Centuro, thundering through Sbeitla and up the Kasserine valley, gobbling parts of the 1st Armored Division (not to be confused with our 1st Division) piecemeal, rocking the entire front. Tiger tanks, self-propelled 88's, grim, lean warriors of the *Afrika Korps* on the ground, screaming Stukas in the air, rolled on.

They next caught the 26th Infantry of the Big Red One, as it tried, with the 5th Field, to block the pass, and overran both. Bitter beer for Hamilton's Battery and the rest of the battalion as the assault crest broke over them. For the second time in its history Hamilton's Battery abandoned its guns. Ninety-eight medium tanks, fifty-seven half-tracks, twelve 155-mm. howitzers—these the 5th Field's—and seventeen 105-mm. howitzers, to say nothing of hundreds of American soldiers, were gobbled up in that débacle.

"Desert Fox" Rommel was bound for the great Allied supply dump at Tebessa. Given luck, his stroke would split the Allied front, nullify all the gains to date. But at that dump were ordnance stores, including plenty more cannon. So when Rommel made his next lunge, twenty-four hours later, he stubbed his toe on a scratch force of British and Yanks, a re-equipped 5th Field Artillery among them. Hamilton's Battery, spitting on its collective hands, was throwing steel faster, perhaps, than it had ever thrown it before. It rained and it snowed, and Rommel raged. But he was stopped, cold. American air power, bombers heavy and light, and British night-bombers, joined in, and Rommel faded away.

Then there was Gafsa, and following that, El Guettar, where the 1st Division, advancing through the mountain passes, debouched to be hit by the 10th Panzer again. Hamilton's Battery's howitzers were almost glowing red in that fight, as the American artillery broke up the fierce attack which actually carried right into our positions before it crumbled.

And then there was the fight for Tunis itself—the death-knell of the *Afrika Korps*. Monty had crushed in the Mareth line to the south; Rommel was reeling up the coastal plain toward the north. Omar Bradley had taken over the II Corps from Georgie Patton, had side-slipped it to the north through the British First Army.

Bradley's part was to be a holding attack—the British were to burst through. But from Bradley down to the last buck in Hamilton's Battery, the II Corps thought differently.

Ten days of bitter fighting, of foot-by-foot advance from hill to hill, with the howitzers pounding incessantly, brought the Big Red One and its sister divisions to the Promised Land. It was May 3rd, 1943, that the men of Hamilton's Battery, from the heights beyond Djebel Tahent, saw the 1st Armored far below go slashing into Mateur, then split to branch north toward Bizerte and east toward Tunis. That was that.

IT was dawn, July 10th, 1943. Heavy seas piled up by the screaming wind were bobbing assault craft crammed with seasick men. Machine-gun fire lanced across the beach beyond. This was Sicily.

Two combat teams were already ashore, pushing through Gela village, with Rangers busy on the far flank. Some light guns were already on the beach; others would never get there, for their landing craft were blazing in the Mediterranean. Out of the maw of an ugly LCT nuzzling the surf, the first of Hamilton's Battery's howitzers came grinding behind its big tow-truck.

The Division is deploying toward the Ponte Olivo airfield, driving back elements of Italian coast-defense troops as our battery lumbers up. It drops trails with the rest of the battalion on the eastern side of Gela Plain. A mixed-up outfit this is, all round; with some of the 82d Airborne men scattered all over that area joining the firing line. But landing waves always get mixed up. Gravel-voiced "Young Teddy," Brigadier General Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., beloved assistant division commander, gathers the scattered fragments together for a drive inland.

But out of the north, slicing down into the bedlam comes a roaring. Tanks! Kraut tanks; Tigers and Mark IV's of the Hermann Goering Panzer Division. They rip through the infantry battalions, and Lieut. Col. Robert Tyson, commanding the 5th Field, opens up. There are targets aplenty; ten tanks here, twenty there. "We are being overrun!" reports an infantry regimental commander.

So it's snap-shooting for the gunners, our heavy howitzers banging as fast as the light guns and the snapping anti-tank and AA weapons. There isn't much ammunition ashore yet, and those steel bores are drinking it down like nobody's business. The busy trucks shuttle back and forth from beach to battery as fast as boats can dump loads ashore.

FOR the rest of that day it's a cat-and-dog fight round and beyond Gela, with the Big Red One momentarily back on its haunches. But the tanks are halted—at least for the moment. The sequel is typically 1st Division. Summerall did it at Soissons, Terry Allen now on the Sicilian beachhead.

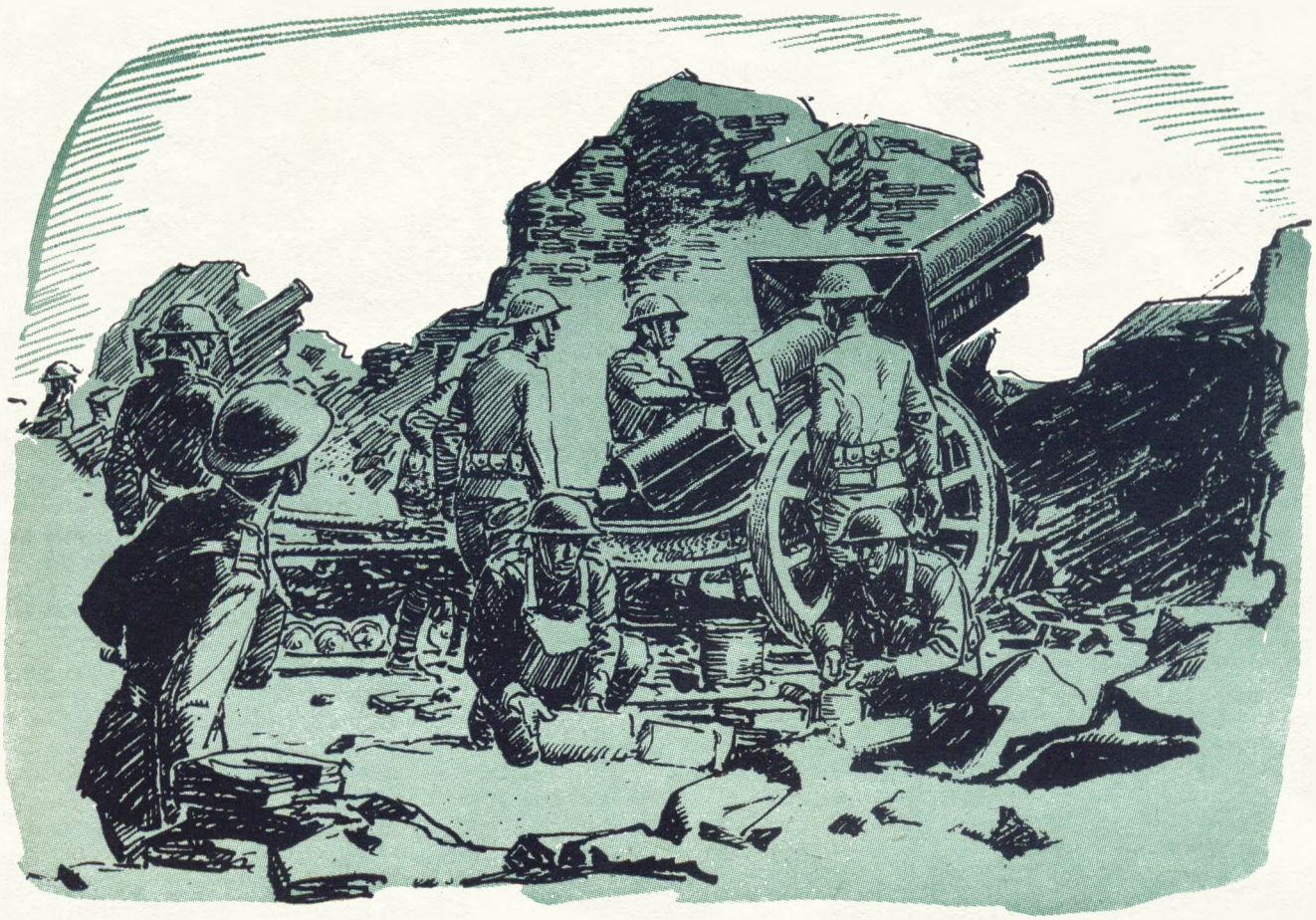
"The Division attacks at midnight!"

It did. The doughboys moved into the darkness, while the guns—Hamilton's Battery and all the rest on shore, and Navy guns from the sea—kept pounding on all known and suspected enemy assembly positions. By dawn next day the Big Red One had cleared its area out. The beachhead widened; Hamilton's Battery and its sisters rolled inland to new positions. The Seventh Army was ashore.

A succession now—for dreary, never-ending days—of twisting passes and crumbling rock mounds; of roads sprinkled with hellish land mines, as the Division ate its way into the island's heart. One hill-town after another was attacked, stormed, cleared; howitzers hurriedly emplaced, their bursts assisting the doughs as they clambered over the stony ground.

March order then, to another spot, to do it all over again. Long-range shooting, too, like that concentration of enemy vehicles on the Nicosa road, blasted to nothingness by Hamilton's Battery and its sisters of the 5th Field. They got those babies on July 26th, at seventeen thousand yards' range.

Then came Troina—mid-Sicily; an attempt at envelopment, snarlingly resisted. Twenty-four counter-attacks by the 15th Panzer Division in four days of desperate fighting. For



It was grueling work for Hamilton's Battery, for Summerall had put a new wrinkle into artillery fire.

Hamilton's Battery it is never-ending wrenching and tugging and pulling from one ravine to another, the gunners eating dust as they slam shells into their pieces to send them screaming into a succession of stone fortlets; Battery observers directing fire while enemy bullets rake their posts; sweating gun-crews dodging bombs from German and American planes alike. And that was Sicily, too.

But the Axis back was broken at last; the long columns surged on, most of the 1st Division getting a breather as the 9th Division took over. But Hamilton's Battery went on, together with the rest of the 5th Field—they weren't relieving red-legs in this war, either—until the 1st came back after five days of rest. There was no more fighting to speak of; the division was on the north coast road by August 15th, and Hamilton's Battery could cool its guns after thirty-seven days of battle.

Then it embarked for England; it had a date with the Great Armada.

It was D 2—June 8th, 1944 to you—that Hamilton's Battery and the rest of the 5th Field went ashore on Omaha Beach. The hell of D-day was gone—only the crumpled debris of dead men, tanks and boats fringed the shingle. Up ahead the 16th, 18th and 26th Infantry regiments had won their toe-hold, and with most of the light guns were fighting their way inland while the flood of reinforcements came ashore.

The gunners and their guns went lurching up the cliff-side road and into the fight, to spray the enemy out of Formigny, to splash their shells on the high ground near Tour-en-Bassin. They took part in the fire fight at St. Anne, helped in the line-straightening of the Big Red One, reinforced the fire of their sister batteries of light artillery. By June 11th, the Division squared away to take the Caumont area, its first organized assault since landing. And by next day the hard core of German resistance on the beachhead had been broken.

It was intermittent fighting from then on for Hamilton's Battery as the Division climbed slowly through the hedgerow country until guns and men went rolling away westward on July 14th. The 5th Division was taking over; the Big Red One had a date with Operation Cobra.

On July 25th, 1944, it was clear and fine. The gun crews of Hamilton's Battery, like the crews of hundreds of other pieces, were clustered about their howitzers, waiting for the word. For today was the day; Hodges' First Army was going to break through the German front, making interference for Georgie Patton's Third Army coiled behind it—hence "Operation Cobra"—to strike south along the coast.

In our zone the doughboys of the 1st Division would jump off behind the 9th, which had the job of opening the hole. And as the minutes ticked off, an ever-increasing roar in the bright skies above turned our gunners' eyes skyward while wave after wave of big American bombers passed, wing-tip to wing-tip. Boy! Would they ever stop coming?

To the front a pathfinder smoke-bomb curled lazily down; then hell broke loose as tons and tons of high explosive rained from the skies, in earth-shaking detonations. Into the smoking inferno of churned-up earth the infantry staggered, while the artillery behind them began a saturation shoot—pop-guns in comparison with that appalling rain of aërial bombs.

But part of that aërial bombardment fell tragically short. It actually caught—and broke—two battalions of the 9th Division; among others, Lieutenant General Lesley J. McNair, observing, met death. It was a momen-

tarily shaken Big Red One that took the advance, thanking its stars for the fire of its artillery. It didn't shoot short.

They cleared the Bois du Hommet, pushed on. They crossed the Periers-St. Lo road, swept into Marigny. And the howitzers went lumbering up to new positions.

By July 28th, Hamilton's Battery was putting down fire, yards only away from its doughs, as the 1st Division pressed for Coutances. The famous "Pocket" was in the making while the scythe-like movement progressed. Overhead the racing fighter-bombers buzzed while the ground troops pushed ahead through the débris of German resistance.

Mortain—the hinge of the pocket—was taken August 5, the 1st Division turning over to the 30th and pointing for Mayenne; the race through France was on. Firing here, for Hamilton's Battery, was almost the last for a while. Henceforth, as armor and infantry raced westward and northward toward the Seine, the artillerymen would for the most part roll on wheels. There was little time or necessity for the mediums to unlimber, it seemed; Jerry was on the run.

One night a chateau billet; next night a thin blanket under the stars. During the days dusty roads and trees flitting past in endless succession: Longny, Courville, Chartres and its cathedral. Then the Seine at Corbeil and Melun. And that was August 25th; north of them Paris was being brushed of its German garrison.

Across the Seine; le Cateau, then Mons. Battle here, with Hamilton's Battery once more in action while a sizable portion of the battered enemy was bagged after five days of fighting on old World War I battlefields. On then, across France, through Soissons, where their guns had roared in 1918, to cross the Meuse September 12th. The Siegfried Line and Germany; the Big Red One was facing Aachen, gateway to the Rhineland.

This breaching of the Siegfried Line, the encirclement of the city, was a 1st Division battle; a succession of sharp conflicts in which Hamilton's Battery had its share. Tough fighting in this vicinity; Fritz had got his second wind. From pillbox and behind dragons' teeth his last-ditch soldiery fought until smothered by artillery fire or flame-thrower. Not until October 16th, did the ring around shell-plastered Aachen close, and five days later, the garrison threw up the sponge.

And then the Hürtgen Forest—a name which still can put shudders up the spines of those who fought there. Hürtgen Forest; trees and hills and rocks studded with German pillboxes; muddy roads and mountain torrents, snow and cold and dampness, defended by good troops who knew how to handle their guns and *Nebelwerfers.* Hürtgen Forest; eating up seven American divisions and one armored combat team from November 10th to December 8th, 1944. Two got through—the 1st on the north and the 78th on the south.

That was a place to try the artilleryman's soul, straining every effort to get the guns up, to find a field of fire, to pick a target from the close-knit forest defense, twenty miles deep, resisting our infantry. The Kraut could counter-attack too, as the 1st Division found out. But he never could understand that hair-raising American habit of calling in your own artillery to fire on you when the enemy smashes in. There were times in the Hürtgen when the men of Hamilton's Battery, loosing off their volleys, kept their fingers crossed that

"The 1st Division never retreats; the 1st Division always takes its objectives; the 1st Division is invincible."

forward observers and doughboys might hit cover before the bursts came screeching through the trees.

Hamich, Heistern and Langerwehe; just names to you and to me, but to the veterans of the 1st they mean unadulterated hell. Schloss Frenz, the medieval castle whose last-ditch defense was not obliterated until the gunners took a hand. And finally, on the further outskirts of the region, Merode—a heap of dust and rubble when Hamilton's Battery and the other guns finished with it. Moving targets, too, from time to time, as quick-witted observers called fire down on hostile tanks.

They cleared it at last. Hamilton's Battery and the rest of the 1st Division plodded back December 15-16, to rest areas near Eupen, their places taken by fresh units for the Roer Dams drive. Twenty-four hours later the Big Red One was stumbling back to stop Hitler's Sunday punch—the Battle of the Bulge.

When the armored enemy wave came crashing through our thin lines in the Ardennes that chilly dawn of December 16th, 1945, the basic German strategy was to pound on the shoulders of the Bulge, to widen it, crumple up the flanks, so that they could roll through in ever-widening tide. On the north the Monschau area, key to Brussels, was to be overrun.

So it was that the German right came pounding at the 2d and 99th Divisions on that vital spot, jamming them in, and licked farther on to the west to turn them. That they did not succeed was due first to Hamilton's Battery and its sisters, then to the infantry of the 1st Division rushed piecemeal into the fight—human sandbags on the dike.

Our gunners poured their fire on the Krauts threatening Monschau, reinforcing the hard-pressed defenders. The 26th Infantry came sliding in, racing the 12th SS Panzer Division for Butgenbach. Almost continuous was the artillery fire, through day and night, breaking up slash after slash of German armor, some of it boiling into and through the doughboys.

From that day to the year's end the fighting was one of stubborn defense, with the 1st Division artillery a major element of the stanch resistance that denied, once and for all, every German effort. Then as on their right the VII Corps to the west commenced a counter-attack, men and guns of the Big Red One constituted the hinge of "Lightning Joe" Collins' assault.

And on January 15th they went on the offensive themselves, through snow and ice, over frozen ground on which motor vehicles scrabbled like crabs on glass. Each assault, each storming of a Kraut-held ridge, was accompanied by the bellowing of the divisional artillery, with Hamilton's Battery backing up the general advance. By February 1 our guns and howitzers were blazing, for the second time, at Siegfried Line defenses, this time in the rugged Eifel hills. The Bulge was gone; was Bradley about to launch his offensive across the Roer.

The great American offensive driving over the Cologne Plain to lap the German Rhine met all the less resistance because Fritz had thrown away his reserves in that Ardennes gamble before. But the 1st Division, slicing through from south of Duren, toward Bonn, had several running fights, Hamilton's Battery a succession of snap-shooting brawls, as the outfit brushed the enemy aside.

For the second time in its history Hamilton's Battery faced, at Bonn, the winter-gray waters of the gloomy Rhine, with the broken fragments of the bridge leering from the lashing tide. Then the big news flashed: the 9th Armored had seized the Remagen bridge—was over! And the Big Red One, at top speed, rushed to help exploit the bridgehead.

Overhead, as the 1st Division rolled across the rickety Hindenburg Bridge on March 16th, streamed the colors of the 5th Field Artillery—the identical standards that led the way over the Rhine in 1918. And Hamilton's Battery unlimbered to support the infantrymen moving into the high ground along Hitler's pride—the *Autobahn* from Limburg to Cologne. More snap-shooting, as the enemy's surprise abated and remnants of his Panzer troops gathered to give battle.

A succession of small, vicious enemy counter-attacks each time the infantry moved forward; nasty fighting in the Westwald beyond. To the south now Georgie Patton's Third Army—"without air or artillery support," as the official flash read, was over the Rhine too; and northward, Monty's full-dress crossing of the Second British and Ninth U. S. Armies into the Ruhr was on.

First Army built up its bridgehead, the Big Red One blasting the way. By March 25th the objective was attained, First Army pouring across the river in full force. Two days later Hamilton's Battery limbered up for another drive.

The 1st Division was off for the Elbe; Hamilton's Battery would move and fight across Hesse—the homeland of those mercenaries of long ago, against whom they had fought at Long Island, in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, and at Yorktown. Then Lippstad, Kassel, another river-crossing—the Weser this time; Herzburg. Then up to the western slopes of the legendary Harz Mountains, where the last core of enemy resistance clung.

St. Andreasburg—there were no canary-birds warbling in that rat's nest of road-blocks and strong-points in craggy terrain so reminiscent of the Ardennes. Hamilton's Battery's howitzers would blaze against 88's and flak-guns gathered for the defense of Brunlage, too—finally smothered on April 17th after a real artillery duel.

And then the collapse, as the doughboys and armor swung around the hill-masses to the east and rear, Hamilton's Battery trundling with them, for the last sharp brushes until a battalion of the 26th Infantry took Hill 1142—crown feature of the Harz. The Wehrmacht's last refuge was reduced; the PW cages swollen to bursting point. Hamilton's Battery took a breather.

There was some mopping-up, then, with occasional clashes, until the whistles shrilled once more and Hamilton's Battery took up march order. The 1st Division, on a thirty-mile front, swept onto the Erzgebirger nose, over the Czech border, up from Cheb to Falkenov on the Karlsbad road. It had to blast out a persistent succession of 88's and anti-tank guns supporting Nazi infantry remnants still fighting hard.

Last Laughs

For sheer Satanic ingenuity, few madcaps have matched the last will and testament of David Burget. The Toronto financier left the sum of $50,000 for the erection of an apartment-house for fat girls.

* * *

Then there's the case of Madame de la Bresse, public-spirited Parisian widow. Her will, executed in 1876, provided 125,000 francs "for the sake of decency." This sum, she directed, should be used to buy clothing for snowmen made by children.

The Canadian who left $500,000 to be awarded the woman who should bear the most children in a given length of time was not exactly in a class all by himself. Dr. F. A. Caillet, of Nice, France, thoughtfully left his fortune to establish an annual prize for some lucky local citizen. The winner, he stipulated, would be that person who had the straightest nose, largest hands and smallest wrists. Oh, yes, and in order to qualify, he must have red hair, black eyebrows.

—by Webb Garrison

May 8, 1945, and another dawn in the tiny village of Elbogen. With the dawning came surrender—the German 12th Army Group laid its arms down to the 1st Division.

"Cease Fire!"

The artillerymen secured their pieces. World War II was ended for Alexander Hamilton's New York Colony Artillery Company.

The hot war is over; the cold war on. Today across Western Germany, Uncle Sam's outpost line is garrisoned. Among those units, in a little medieval town of Württemberg-Baden, the howitzers of Hamilton's Battery are parked. Perhaps—who knows?—sometimes at night a slim spirit passes along that line "with a cocked hat pulled down over his eyes, apparently lost in thought, with his hand resting upon a cannon and every now and then patting it, as if it were a favorite horse or plaything."

Winter, with Fritz on the high ground and Axis planes dominating the air.

Snake River Jim

THE crowd was beginning to drift away now, their hands weighted with the bottles of Elixir of Life, their wallets a bit flatter; and Snake River Jim capped the last of the coal-oil torches, a hint of weariness in his easy movements.

But he whistled as he worked to close the medicine show for the night. Times were good, and his pockets bulged with hard cash and folding money brought in by the panacea he sold.

About him now was the country town of Wheatford, and here were friends he had known for years. Here were companionship and gossip and hot meals; here was something that even the lure of the war horizon did not give a man.

And so he whistled and rolled the great canvas banners of red lettering on a golden background. *"Elixir of Life,"* the words stood forth. *"Good for man or beast. A secret compound of the herbs and snake oils of the mighty redskins of the Far Northwest. Cures warts, carbuncles, falling hair, whimsy, bunions, barber's itch—when rubbed externally. Taken internally, Elixir of Life stops belching, tones up the liver and spleen, cures hives, erases*

Builds a Hospital

OUR RAPSCALLION SALESMAN BRINGS HIS MEDICINE SHOW BACK TO FAMILIAR HAUNTS AND FINDS HIS OLD FRIENDS THE DOCTOR AND THE EDITOR FIGHTING A TOUGH PROBLEM.

by WILBUR S. PEACOCK

pain, stops toothaches, and is generally beneficial to all the agonies and aches of mortal man."

Snake River grinned, reading the words. The statements were not quite as flamboyant as on other banners, but they sufficed. And with a combination of rich oratory and flashing showmanship—well, the Elixir moved at so fast a rate that he was hard put to keep it supplied from the alcohol and coloring liquid and flavoring and well water which had to be mixed and bottled and labeled each night after the show had closed.

He went from the let-down side of the medicine wagon, which was the stage, into the wagon, and racked the rolled banners. Coffee steeped on a small coal-oil stove, and he poured a cup, lacing it liberally with Elixir. He sat and drank, his piratical mustaches flaring white, long hair brushing the collar of his shirt. He drank and sighed, and the rattlesnake buttons of his snakeskin vest chittered companionably. His boots were cocked on the edge of his bunk, bold stitching white against black leather. His breeches and shirt were gray, as was the Stetson which hung on a deerhorn rack.

He was home, and he sighed contentedly, refilling the cup again. Let other men have their houses fastened to the land. He wanted nothing more than to see the horizon across the backs of Maude and Susie, his team, and to hear the creaking of the lurching wagon and the whine of wheels turning. He was a man with an itch grown into his foot, and it was difficult to remember a time when he had not been on the move. Another few days, and he would move again—whither, he had not decided. The country was big, and civilization had missed many spots with its smoke and steam and noise. He'd wander on, selling his Elixir—seeing old friends, making new ones, and if opportunity arose, garnering a few illegal dollars on the way.

HE chuckled at the thought, and flexed long fingers. It had been long since he'd riffled a deck of cards or matched wits with another. And somehow, without that fillip to his existence, he knew life wouldn't be the same.

That was the trouble with Wheatford even now. Fifteen, even ten, years before, it had been a town with life. Herds came through here from Texas, the cowboys wild and uncurried, making the nights bright with sound and the days lonely when they were gone. But now Wheatford was just a small town, farms stretching farther into the range every year. The railroad had done that, planting its station at Cairo thirty miles away.

Now the drives of cattle went there, and about the only excitement in Wheatford lay in the Annual Fair or the few dances, or even the drummers who came and stayed at the Traveler's Rest Hotel, sporting fancy clothes and racy stories and selling the fancy doodads from back East.

Yes, Snake River Jim thought, the town was nice and the people friendly, but the old eagerness was gone from it. It was growing middle-aged and respectable and stodgy; and so he knew he must move on.

He finished the coffee, and rinsed and dried the cup. The wagon creaked under the weight of someone at the door, and he turned slowly, a wide smile spreading his generous mouth.

"Why, you old catamount!" he said, and caught the newcomer's hand. "I figured they'd planted you long ago!"

The man was a head shorter than Snake River, but his grin was as wide. He came into the wagon, still shaking hands, and his free hand clapped Snake River's shoulder with a blow which would have dropped a lesser man.

"You old horsethief," he boomed affectionately, "I figured that you'd stretched a rope long before this."

They grinned then in a friendship born of fifty years of knowing each other. Once they had ridden side by side, holsters thonged to heavy thighs, brought together by the common need for companionship after the War between the States. Their paths had shifted apart and recrossed again and again; but memory served, and each owed the other many intangibles, and they were friends.

Lafe Galloway ran his eyes about the interior of the wagon, and he nodded, seeing the banjo and the bottle racks and rolled posters.

"Ten years," he said, "and not a thing changed."

"Not a thing," Snake River admitted. "But sit down and take the weight off your feet. We've got a lot of talking to do."

While the level in a bottle of bourbon dropped to the receding tide of thirst, memories came alive of people long gone, and they relived their youth and middle age, and the night was warm and friendly. But at last Galloway pulled out a turnip watch and whistled when he saw the time.

"Got to get going," he said. "Got to go out and see Doc Bender."

"Doc?" Snake River smiled, finishing his drink. "How is the old coot?"

Seriousness came to Galloway's face. "Dying," he said bluntly. "He knows it, and the town knows it; but he won't admit it."

Snake River Jim shook his head. Doc Bender was a friend too, maybe not as close as Galloway, but close enough. He had forgotten the man lived here; and now to hear that he was dying—well, it came as an icy shock.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

Lafe Galloway shrugged. "Just worn out," he said. "Lord, there ain't a baby born around here, or a sniffly nose, or a broken leg, but what Doc is called in. He's killed himself just making others well. Damned shame, too, considering his hospital could have saved a lot of work."

"Hospital?" Snake River's memory ran over the town. "I didn't know Wheatford had a hospital."

"It hasn't, and that's the hell of it," Galloway said heavily. "Lord knows, I write enough editorials for the *Tribune;* and me and the Doc and Kathie have stumped for it long enough. But raising thirty thousand dollars in this country is easier said than done."

"Thirty thousand?" Snake River asked.

"At least." Galloway glanced at the bourbon, then poured a neat two fingers into his glass. "That isn't much, considering the people here: and anyway, the place wouldn't be much bigger than about seven or eight beds." Anger tightened heavy ink-stained fingers around his glass. "We need a place like that. The nearest hospital is Cairo, and I've seen men and women, and children too, die before they could be taken there."

Snake River lighted a long black stogie at the lamp chimney, then settled back, keen eyes studying the man across from him. That Wheatford hadn't a hospital didn't surprise him much, for he'd been in many towns like Wheatford where the only medical service was a doctor with his black bag, and where the operating-table was a kitchen table covered for the emergency.

"Why not a hospital?" he asked finally. "Surely the town is big enough to afford one, and plenty of the farmers hereabouts could use such a place."

Lafe Galloway glowered into his newly-emptied glass. "It's the Widow Calkins and Shad Turnbull. They own mighty near everything in town, and they figure that taxes might go up, or that they might get special assessments, or something. They have no families, and each doesn't care much about the town, except as a source of profit."

Snake River Jim rolled his cigar thoughtfully. "And they're making a fight over the hospital?" he asked.

Galloway blew his breath in a sigh. "Not openly," he admitted. "The Widow claims she's almost broke, and Turnbull just more or less ignores requests for a donation. Anyway, they won't help voluntarily; and we've sort

of lost hope, for they set a certain pattern around here for people to follow." He scowled. "The blasted tight-fisted hypocrites!"

"Is this Turnbull any relation to Oscar?" Snake River asked.

"His son, and as mean a young pup as you'll find anywhere. Kathie gave him the air a couple of months ago, when young Doc came to town, and he isn't the forgiving type."

"Young Doc?"

Galloway grinned. "Young Bob Randle. Cocky young squirt, but a fine doctor. Stupid, though. He could be making a lot of money back East, but he's just dumb enough to want to settle here."

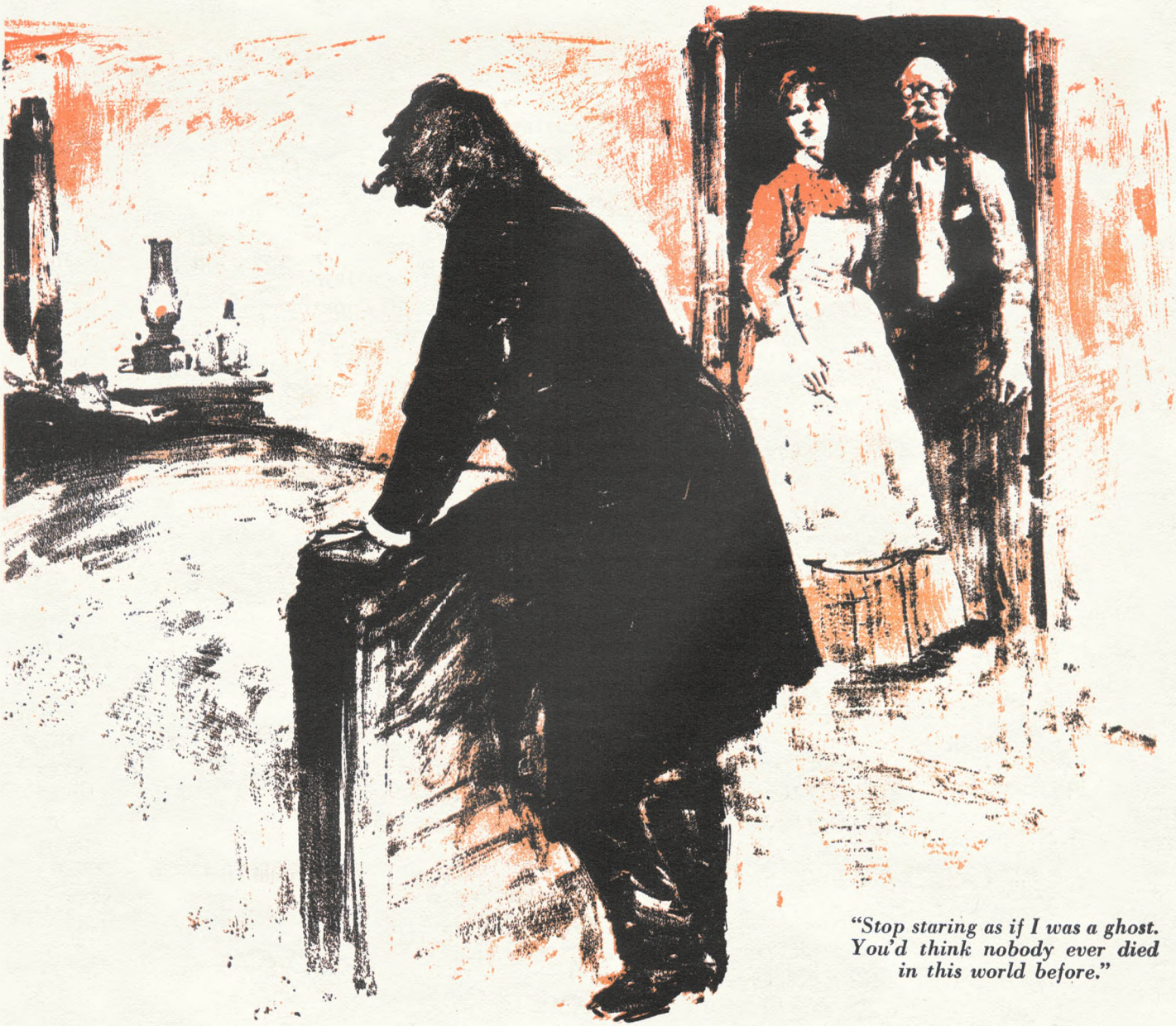
Snake River flicked ashes, reading the liking in the other's voice, liking and admiration.

"Kathie feel the same way?" he asked.

"Bah!" Galloway snorted. "She's just like her mother was, not a lick of sense in her head. Why, Martha married me when I owned practically nothing but the clothes on my back. Kathie's got her cap set for Doc."

He came slowly to his feet, the fringe of white hair tousled about his broad pink scalp.

"Got to move on," he said. "Want to see Doc Bender, and then have to get down to the office and see if the paper's still there." He set the empty glass aside. "Being a newspaper man's a chore—never figured it as such work.



"Stop staring as if I was a ghost. You'd think nobody ever died in this world before."

Better'n six hundred subscribers now. Figure maybe next year, or the year after, might be able to put it out twice a week instead of just once."

"You're too respectable for me," Snake River grinned. "But maybe if we walk down dark alleys nobody'll know I'm with you."

He blew out the lantern, and they stepped from the wagon, oddly silent now, content to be together. Night air flowed soft and warm, and somewhere a windmill creaked sleepily. A cat watched from a fence, its lambent eyes eerie; then it faded into nothingness.

They walked slowly. The evening was late, and windows were dark in most of the houses. A late-going team went by, giggles coming from the canopied rig; and Snake River Jim smiled, youth still eternal and sympathetic in him. They crossed the town and went along a side-street. One house still held light, and they went up the steps onto the porch, and Galloway opened the door.

"I'll be double danged if I will," a voice said querulously.

"Doc," Galloway said, and shook his head. "The old fool won't take the stuff he's been prescribing for everybody else for forty years."

Snake River nodded, understanding. Then they were inside and could hear the soft murmur of voices in a back room. Then Doc Bender exploded again.

"Why, you young squirt, I was practicing medicine when you were wearing three-cornered pants! Get out of here before I stuff that sheep-dip down your throat."

"Wait here a minute," Galloway said, and went down the short hall.

Snake River Jim nodded silently, his eyes roving about the living-room. Poverty was here, clean and proud, making things do longer than they should have lasted. The rug was thin, and the sofa-cover darned. Curtains were crisp, but mended, and faded from the sunlight. The chairs looked comfortable but worn, and the walls needed another coat of paint. This house was Doc Bender's home and office, and somehow it reflected a way of living which was not right for a man who had dedicated his life to others.

Then there was no more time for observation, for quick young steps sounded behind him; and when he turned, the girl was in his arms.

"Snake River, you old darling!" Kathie cried, and kissed him twice before standing back and holding him at arms'-length. "Why, you haven't changed a bit."

"Kathie!" Snake River Jim said, and a lump was in his throat.

For this wasn't the child he remembered. This was a woman, grown and curved, her hair as yellow as ripe wheat, the nose a bit upturned, her lips soft and red. This was Martha, come alive again in her daughter; and

to remember her was a wonderful thing.

"Daddy said you were here," Kathie said, and her eyes were fond. "Oh, it's so good to see you again!"

"Really just passing through," Snake River smiled. "Be here a few more days."

"Kathie!" a voice broke in at the doorway.

"Oh, Bob," Kathie swung about, "this is Snake River Jim, an old, old friend. When I was eight," she added with a *gamine* smile, "he promised to wait to marry until I grew up."

They stood and measured each other for a moment. Snake River was the taller, but his back was no straighter and his eyes no keener. The younger man was dark and close-shaven, and the jut of his jaw was a challenge to the world.

Liking what they saw, they smiled and shook hands.

"So you're my competition, eh?" the Doctor said. "I passed your show tonight, but didn't have time to stay." He grinned. "How's business?"

"Tolerable," Snake River Jim admitted, then nodded toward the sound of Doc Bender's lifted voice. "How's old Doc coming along?"

The Doctor shook his head. "Not too well," he admitted reluctantly, while Kathie's eyes filled with unshed tears. "He knows it, too. He's losing the will to live—that's the real trouble. He figures his useful days are gone; and thinking that, no medicine in the world will help him."

Snake River felt the weight of the money belt at his waist. "If it's a question of cost," he began, "I've got enough to—"

"It isn't that," the young physician said wearily.

And then Doc Bender's voice rang through the house. "Snake River—you dirty old crook—come in here!"

Snake River Jim grinned despite himself.

"In a minute, Doc," he called back.

"Damn it, Snake River," Doc Bender cried, "you come here or I come out there!"

"He'll do it, too," Kathie said. "He's the worst patient I ever saw."

Snake River Jim shrugged and went past the young people and into the hall. Lafe Galloway was at the bedroom door, and lamplight was yellow on the floor. The old showman put a cheerful smile on his face, flirted his piratical mustache back with practiced fingers, then went into the bedroom.

"Hello, Doc," he said. "What's all the yelling about?"

"I'm a trouble-maker," Doc Bender grinned from the bed. "And that quack of a doctor doesn't know a clavicle from a corn."

Despite his control, Snake River felt a strange sickness in his heart when he looked at his old friend. Never big, Doc Bender looked even smaller propped in the pillows, with the plaid comforter drawn about him. His hands were thin and veined, his cheeks hollow. Only his eyes were really alive.

"Well," Doc Bender snapped weakly, "stop staring as if I was a ghost. You'd think nobody ever died in this world before." His gaze flicked to the door, and his voice lowered conspiratorially. "Got a drink of good bourbon on you—like the stuff I smelled on Lafe?"

Snake River Jim chuckled. "Not a bit *on* me," he admitted. "Anyway, you've got no business taking any."

"He most certainly hasn't," Kathie said from the doorway. "What he needs is soup and milk and—"

"When I want advice, I'll ask for it," Doc Bender said, glowering at the girl. Then he smiled, shrugging. "Oh, well, it won't be the first drink I've missed. Now sit down, Snake River, and tell me what you've been doing these past years."

Snake River Jim sat and talked. His words were bright and cheerful and alive with reminiscences, and for a moment the taint of death left the room. Doc Bender laughed, and Lafe Galloway smiled, and the young Doc and Kathie stood in the doorway, tension easing for a time.

An hour passed, and part of a second; and then Doc Bender slept, wizened and shrunken against the pillows, his old lips curved in a smile. These were his last few days on earth, and there was no fear in him, as there had been none in his lifetime of waging battle with death as a doctor. He was small-boned, almost delicate, and yet even now there was a dignity in him, a lasting strength which came not from his body but from within.

Snake River shook his head slightly, then came from the chair and left the room, the others following, Kathie softly closing the bedroom door.

"I'll drop in again tomorrow," Snake River said, and Lafe Galloway nodded.

"Come by the paper tomorrow," he said. "We'll chew the rag a bit, and then both of us will come by."

"Good night," the old showman said, and tipped his gray Stetson.

Then he was outside, walking through the moonlit night, going toward his medicine wagon. He looked about and saw the sleeping town. People were born here, and lived and died. This was their world; it encompassed them and their lives. It might never be greater than now; but even so, it was full and complete.

And, Snake River Jim thought, men like old Doc Bender had helped build such towns as this. They gave unstintingly, loyally, asking and receiving little. And their reward? He chuckled ruefully. A lonely bed in a poverty-stricken home. A few friends to mourn—

"Hell!" said Snake River wrathfully, and walked with a faster pace.

The night was gone, and half the morning, and Snake River Jim, resplendent in his gray outfit, finished the last of his coffee at the small café and wandered toward the door. He paid the waiter, then stepped to the street and went toward the swinging sign which marked the office of Lafe Galloway's *Tribune*.

He was at peace with the world, and his smile touched everything and everybody. A smudge-faced boy popped out of nowhere and stared in wonder; Snake River found a nickel as though conjuring it from thin air and flipped it in a spinning arc.

"Licorice or anything you want," he said, and the boy grinned and vanished into the General Store.

The street was not long, only a couple of blocks; then it petered out into areas of scattered houses. A dog panted lazily in the sunlight, too somnolent to search for shade. Wagons were hitched at racks, and a couple of riding-horses switched tails in boredom before the blacksmith shop.

There was a bank and a general store, a hay-and-feed barn, and a stable liberally plastered with cut-plug signs. A Paris Dress Shoppe flanked the Traveler's Rest Hotel, and steam emerged softly from the open windows of the Chinese laundry. Snake River Jim looked about. This was like a hundred other towns where he had set up his show. It was neither good nor bad, but a mixture of both, born of cattle and now a farming town, the single church only a block from the swinging doors of the saloon.

The old showman lit a stogie and paced along the board walk, stopping at the *Tribune* office and palming open the door.

"—and to hell with you, you young squirt!" Galloway's voice pounded at him. "I got along without your advertising for years, and I guess I can do it again."

They stood at the counter of the cluttered room; anger was there, and tension. The man facing Galloway was young, but he was solid and broad, and his fists were clenched at his sides, his face mottled with rage.

"I've taken a lot from you, Galloway, because of Kathie," he said viciously, "but I don't propose to take much more. You've blown this situation out of all proportion with your infernal editorials; you've made me a whipping boy, and I won't take it any longer."

Lafe Galloway pressed ink-stained hands on the counter. "All right," he said, "what do you propose, Mr. Turnbull?"

Shad Turnbull gathered his dignity like a cloak. "I will donate a hundred dollars to the fund," he said; and now the anger was gone, replaced by a secret amusement.

"A hundred dollars!" Galloway said in brief contempt. "Why, if the wealthiest man in the county gave so little, what do you think the others would give?"

Shad Turnbull dusted his hands. "That is not my concern," he said virtuously. Then his voice roughened. "But take it or leave it, you'll stop those blackmailing editorials in the *Tribune.*"

He swung about, brushing past Snake River Jim, and stalked out. The old showman grinned, seeing the anger in the editor's face.

"Easy," he said. "Take it easy, Lafe."

"I should have smacked him!" Galloway roared.

Snake River shrugged. "And what would that have accomplished?" he asked. "Anyway, now you have a start for your fund."

"Start!" Galloway snorted in vast contempt. "A hundred dollars! The fund will start and end right there. You know how people are."

Snake River nodded. He knew only too well. With a wealthy man giving a puny hundred dollars, the other donations would be dimes and quarters. No, there would be no fund large enough for a hospital.

"Damn!" Lafe Galloway swore explosively.

Snake River Jim ignored Lafe for a moment, turning slowly to inspect the room. It was small and cramped for working space. Paper was stacked in a rear corner. The type fonts were banked against a wall, and a huge hand press dominated everything. There was a cluttered desk and a battered chair, and a brass cuspidor leaned drunkenly to one side by the wastebasket.

PRINTING samples were tacked to walls, ranked by half a dozen calendars. Wall spindles held strips of printed copy, and a stuffed owl presided dustily on a narrow shelf. A huge black-and-white tomcat blinked yellow eyes at the showman, then dozed again atop the cold pot-bellied stove.

"How do you get around in here?" Snake River asked amusedly. "You haven't room to swing that cat by its tail."

Lafe Galloway grinned. "It is a bit cluttered," he admitted. "But then, not many of us work here. Kathie helps by gathering news and gossip. Pete, the hired man, uses the press and cleans up, while I set type and do most of the real work." His hand circled in a deprecatory possessive gesture. "Eight years of work."

Snake River Jim nodded, unfolding a paper on the counter. He smiled, reading the bits of gossip which passed for news in a small town. Even his name was there. Then he saw the editorial on the front page, and a slight frown tightened his eyes.

"Kind of tough on everybody, aren't you?" he said. "After all, it is just a hospital, and there is one at Cairo."

"Snake River," Galloway said seriously, "do you know why Martha died? No? Well, Doc Bender had to operate the way he always does, and she died of blood poisoning. It wasn't Doc's fault; it was the fault of a town which doesn't care enough about itself to take care of its very life."

He came about the counter and stood for a quiet moment at the street window. Snake River was silent, waiting, sensing the turmoil within the man.

"I could name a dozen people," Galloway continued then, "who should be alive today, but aren't, because the wagon trip to Cairo killed them." He turned, and there was a brooding obstinacy in his face. "I'm going to see a hospital here if I have to build it myself. I'm going to build it for Martha and Doc and a lot of people still not born. I'll keep the issue alive in the paper as long as I can set a stick of type."

"You may not have a newspaper," the old showman observed. "You can't keep antagonizing people."

"Well, as long as I have a paper, I'll print anything I damned well please!" Galloway glared at the huge hand press. "I only wish I had one of those big city typesetters and power presses. I'd flood this blasted country with the *Tribune.*" He shrugged. "Oh, well, I'll hand set and hand print; after all, a six-hundred-copy paper can't afford such gadgets."

"And meanwhile?" Snake River Jim prompted.

"Meanwhile," Galloway said, reaching for his battered hat, "we'll have a talk with the Widow Calkins."

"Why?" Snake River answered.

GALLOWAY smiled grimly. "One last effort," he said harshly. "Maybe if she knows Doc Bender is dying, she'll help out on a hospital." His jaw jutted. "Lord knows, she owes him enough, for he saved her life once, and he delivered her children and took care of her family for years."

"Mrs. Calkins, I thought you might not have heard of Doc Bender's sickness."

There in faded ink was the record of thousands of dollars owed.

He opened the door and waved the showman through. Snake River stepped into the sunlight again, mildly amused that the editor did not bother to lock the door. Together, they strode along the walk, neither speaking.

Minutes later, they paused before the stoop of the largest house in Wheatford. It was old but well-kept, gingerbread molding bright with paint, the windows hung with stiff white curtains. A Negro worked lackadaisically on the lawn.

"I'll talk," Galloway said, as they went up the steps, and knocked with the cloven-hoof knocker.

The Widow Calkins was a formidable barrier, when the door finally opened. She wore her hair in a double bun, and it was streaked with gray. She was more masculine than feminine, her face a broad expanse of hard flesh, and her eyes cold and unfriendly.

"Well?" she said uncompromisingly.

"Mrs. Calkins," Lafe Galloway said, "I thought you might not have heard of Doc Bender's sickness."

"I heard," the widow said, and she might have been discussing the price of wheat.

"He's dying, you know?" Galloway persisted.

Frost was in her eyes. "We've all got to go," she said.

Snake River Jim listened, and his anger rose in a slow tide. Somehow the absolute cold-bloodedness of this woman and Shad Turnbull shocked him. He knew Doc Bender, and he knew the debt such people as these owed the old man; yet that this attitude should exist touched him and rankled, and tightened the friendly lines of his mouth.

"We were thinking," Galloway persisted, "that maybe you had reconsidered on the hospital. It should be a good thing; the town needs it; and with your support, it would come to pass. And it would be a monument to Doc Bender."

"Mr. Galloway," the Widow Calkins loomed another inch, "I am not concerned with you or Doc Bender or the hospital. I am building no memorials to him or anybody else. I am a poor widow, barely managing my own affairs. If Doc Bender had been a good business man, he would not be begging charity for a pack of nonsense. There is a hospital at Cairo, and that will be sufficient for both Cairo and Wheatford.

"But—" Galloway began, and she cut him short.

"I will not discuss the subject with you any further. Let me tell you something, Mr. Galloway: You are a newcomer here, and so you have been tolerated. My family settled this land when it was a prairie. Give me any more trouble, and we shall see the last of you."

She slammed the door, and Lafe Galloway swore with a liquid brilliance which brought a smile to Snake River Jim's face.

"The old witch!" Galloway finished. "Riding on her family reputation. How I'd like to take her down a peg." He shrugged. "Well, come on. We'll go by Doc's and see how he is."

They walked again, and thoughts whirled in Snake River's mind. He fought for a solution, but for once his agile mind found nothing concrete. Frustration rode him, and he scowled, biting the end of his stogie into pulp before discarding it.

"Forget it," Lafe Galloway advised at last. "It isn't your problem, and—

well, the world won't end if the hospital isn't built."

"I guess you're right," the old showman admitted.

They came to Doc Bender's home, and in the sunlight Snake River saw even more clearly the poverty of the place. He felt a sense of shame for a town which would permit such a thing to happen.

Kathie met them at the door, a finger on her lips. "He's asleep," she said. "You'll have to wait until he wakes."

"Rustle up some coffee," Galloway said to his daughter. "I just had a run-in with Turnbull and the Widow Calkins, and I need something to wash the taste of them out of my mouth."

Snake River watched the girl turn toward the kitchen, then wandered into the room Doc Bender used for consultations. Implements gleamed in a wall case, and the Doctor's battered bag rested on a chair below a racked coat and hat. Dusty medical volumes were on a shelf, and jars of pills and liquids and powders were in a locked glass cabinet.

Galloway had disappeared with his daughter, and Snake River sat on a worn overstuffed chair. He relaxed a bit, but with anger still slumbering when he recalled Galloway's scenes with Shad Turnbull and the widow. Reaching out idly, he pulled a heavy account book from a bottom shelf and fingered through it.

He shook his head, reading the stories of past years. Children were born, and diseases were treated, and people died. And written in Doc Bender's neat script was the record of a town growing from a prairie wilderness.

This was his epitaph, and it was a selfless one, born of good and bad times. It was the record of a gentle uncomplaining man, of his services. And it was the record of the ingratitude which a people could show for one whom the Widow Calkins dismissed as not being a "good business man."

For there in faded ink was the record of thousands of dollars owed by the people of Wheatford and the surrounding country. Shad Turnbull was there, as was his family. And the Widow Calkins' account went back for years. There were Jensens and Stevens and Monellis and Carews. There were hundreds of names, some bearing the grim word, *"Deceased;"* but there were many names which Snake River recognized.

The old showman frowned, and fingered his flowing mustache. The snakeskin vest creaked, and the rattlesnake buttons chittered ominously, as though sensing the temper of his thoughts. He read for minutes; and when at last he closed the book, a glow was in his eyes, to match the glimmer of an idea growing in his mind.

Lafe Galloway came in with coffee in a heavy cup; and seeing the book in the showman's hand, shook his head.

"Forget it," he advised. "I thought of trying to collect those old bills, but had no luck. Doc won't sue, and the people won't pay—that is, except for a dib here and a dab there."

Snake River Jim's hand tightened into a fist on the book. "There is enough money owed here to build two hospitals," he said slowly.

Galloway drank coffee. "It doesn't matter," he said. "When Doc dies, the accounts die, too. He hasn't any heirs. Come on, have some coffee. Doc will be waking any minute."

Echoing his words came the voice of Doc Bender. "Damn the bath!" he roared. "No female is going to give me a bath like a baby. Get out of here before I take the back of my hand to you."

"He's awake," Snake River Jim said, grinning.

They went into the bedroom where old Doc Bender had his bedclothes about his throat like an outraged maiden, while Kathie fought to keep laughter from spoiling the severity of her frown.

"Dang it, Lafe, get that female out of here!" Doc Bender pleaded.

"Oh, men!" Kathie said in vast contempt. "Babies, all of you!"

She flounced out of the room, leaving the washbowl, and Doc Bender grinned in triumph.

"Got any liquor on you?" he asked. "For forty years I've been wanting to lie in bed and get roaring drunk—but trouble was, I had work to do. In fact," he confided to Snake River, "I've never been drunk a day in my life."

"No liquor," Galloway said shortly. "Kathie will bring breakfast in a minute."

"Mush!" Doc Bender snorted. "I wouldn't feed it to a pig." He saw the account book in Snake River's hand. "What are you doing with that?" he finished suspiciously.

"Just looking it over," Snake River admitted.

"I'm going to burn it," Doc Bender said.

Snake River leaned against the wall, lifting the book. "You're canceling out the debts?" he asked.

"Hell, yes!" Doc Bender answered. "Some can't pay, and some won't—so when I go, it might as well go too."

Snake River began to smile, conscious that the two men stared. Wickedness danced in his eyes, and suddenly he felt young and free. This was the situation he had been searching for, the thing which added spice to the monotony of existence.

"What you cooking up?" Lafe Galloway asked. "Last time I saw you look like that, we ran that tinhorn out of Elk City on a rail."

Snake River glanced at the ancient dresser, seeing the ink and paper and pen there, flanking a book on anatomy.

Crossing, he picked up paper and pen, and then returned to the bed, where he handed all to Doc Bender. He uncorked the ink and held it out for the Doctor's use.

"You're sure you want those bills canceled?" he asked.

"Of course," Doc Bender answered.

"Good!" Snake River grinned. "Then you just write what I say."

"Huh!" Doc Bender said.

"Write it, you danged old fool!" Lafe Galloway said, but puzzlement was in his eyes.

"'I, the undersigned, in the presence of witnesses,'" Snake River dictated, *"'do hereby cancel any and all debts owed me by present and former patients and their families.'"*

Doc Bender's pen scratched dutifully.

"Now date and sign it," Snake River said. "Lafe and I will sign as witnesses."

He took the paper and watched as Galloway signed, then added his name. He waved the paper cheerfully in the air to dry the ink, his smile beaming contentedly.

"All right, I wrote it," Doc Bender said at last. "Now, tell me what this is all about."

"Yeah," Lafe Galloway said harshly, "what sort of a hootenanny are you pulling, Snake River?"

The old showman shrugged. "Just wanted to make certain there wouldn't be any trouble about old bills," he said. He looked at Doc Bender again. "Now, Doc," he finished, "you've got some more writing to do."

"More?" Doc Bender said wonderingly.

"What now?" Galloway asked suspiciously.

Snake River beamed like a genial pirate, his mustaches flaring, the snakeskin vest creaking with a friendly sound.

"Your will!" he said.

"Will!" Doc Bender sat up in astonishment. "What the devil have I got to leave, except this house and a handful of personal stuff?"

Lafe Galloway blinked at the old showman. "I've heard some crazy deals," he said, "but this takes the cake. Snake River, are you sure you're sober?"

Snake River Jim grinned, and his vest creaked companionably, rattlesnake buttons chittering.

"Now date and sign it," Snake River said. "Lafe and I will sign as witnesses."

"Write as I dictate," he ordered. "*'I, the undersigned, being of sound mind—'*"

Doc Bender groaned. "The thing is crazy and illegal," he roared. "First, I've got nothing to leave, and secondly, I'm crazy as a coot to even write the thing."

"Shut up, Doc," Snake River Jim said amiably, "and start writing."

He began dictating, and as he gave each sentence, as he disposed of thousands of dollars in various bequests, his smile grew broader. Somehow, the incongruity of everything happening here amused him; and because there was more than a hint of larceny in his mind, he enjoyed the situation.

And then, when the will was written, and Galloway and Kathie had signed as witnesses, the old showman blew his breath in a deep sigh. He folded the papers and tucked them into his pocket.

"Come on, Lafe," he said. "We've got work to do."

"Work!" Galloway answered.

"Sure!" Snake River answered, and suddenly his gray eyes were keen and cold. "For the first time in the history of Wheatford and the *Tribune,* there's going to be a special edition of the paper printed."

"Special edition?" Galloway asked.

"Special edition," the showman answered. "We're going to let the world know just how generous Doc Bender was with the last of his worldly possessions."

"Damn it, Snake River—" Doc Bender began worriedly.

"Good-by, Doc," Snake River said. "Go ahead and kick off, if you want to." He hesitated, kindness deep in his eyes. "But Doc, if I were you, I'd stick around and watch a hospital being built."

He was chuckling softly to himself as he left the house and heard Doc Bender sputtering behind. . . .

It was early morning, and the printshop of the *Tribune* was hot and stifling. Snake River Jim sat at the desk, finishing the last of the copy he handed to Lafe Galloway for setting into type.

Pete, the hired man, sagged against the press, a battered cup clutched in one ink-stained fist, weariness in every muscle. The odor of hot coffee permeated everything, from a pot bubbling softly on the pot-bellied stove.

"Here, Lafe," Snake River said finally, and handed the last of his copy to the newspaper man. "This is the last."

LAFE stretched out his hand for the paper, then clipped the page above the type-rack. Hours before, he had ceased his questioning of the old showman, for Snake River had only grinned at the questions and given no answers. Almost casually now, he lifted a type stick and began fingering type into place. This was habit, more than thought, and he worked with a precise speed. He filled the stick, then

transferred the type to a form on the table and began setting another line.

Pete drank his coffee, and Snake River watched the small metal slugs being fitted into place. Galloway finished the copy, then locked the form and drew a galley proof. He checked it for errors, then fitted the form into the one remaining space on the press bed.

"Let's go, Peter," Lafe said; and while the handy man operated the press, the editor inked the type and pulled the pages. Wheatford's first newspaper extra was being born.

Minutes passed, and the stack of papers grew. Then an hour was gone and almost a second, and sunlight barred straight into the window, turning the lamplight dimly yellow. The tomcat came in through its special hole in the rear door, prowled hopefully for a moment, then departed in obvious disgust. Snake River drank coffee and perused a copy of the *Tribune* special, one which had been pulled from the press when all the type had not been locked in place. Half of the page was black with printing, while the lower half was virgin white.

Finally Lafe Galloway, wiping perspiration from his face with a stained rag, came to Snake River's side.

"Finished," he said.

"Good!" Snake River Jim looked at Pete. "Now, I want you to do this. Go to the Widow Calkins and give her this paper. Tell her I shall expect her here within fifteen minutes. Understand?"

"Sure," Pete said, and took the paper. Seconds later, he was gone.

Lafe Galloway found a cup and poured coffee. Then he laid a fresh copy of the *Tribune* on the counter.

"All right," he said, "I'm dumb. So I set Doc Bender's last will and testament into type. I set his cancellation of all debts into type. I set his making of you his executor into type. I set out enough names and numbers to cover everybody in the country. I've done my share; now will you tell me what's going on?"

"Lafe," Snake River Jim said evenly, "the trouble with you is that you've grown old and honest. Now that is fine for you, but would be the death of me. I'm a crook, and I admit it, and so I can figure a few things which get past you and your conscience. You just find a back corner and be still. I'll do the talking."

Frustrated, Lafe Galloway took his coffee to the rear, where he sat on a box and scowled blankly at the old showman's serene face.

THEN the doorway was blocked, and the Widow Calkins entered, masculine and forbidding, and yet with a hint of insecurity in her eyes.

"What is this, Galloway?" she snapped, ignoring the amenities and slamming down on the counter the paper she carried.

"You will speak to me, madam," Snake River Jim said courteously. "It was I who had the paper printed and who summoned you here. I shall be more than glad to explain."

"You!" The Widow Calkins' hard eyes ran in vast contempt over the dapper showman. "You're the medical faker."

"I am," Snake River said quietly, but his eyes narrowed a bit. He lifted his gaze to Pete, who stood in the doorway. "Pete," he finished, "you will please bring Shad Turnbull here as soon as possible."

"Sure," Pete said, but there was regret in his eyes that he could not stay.

"Now," Snake River Jim said to the hulking woman, "let me explain."

"Explain! Ha!" And the widow laughed harshly. "It is clear enough. Doc Bender has been milking his patients with exorbitant fees. He has been crying about his poverty, and in reality he has been hoarding everything he got from people."

Snake River nodded. "He left quite a bit," he admitted.

"All right," the Widow Calkins said, "so now the hospital will be built. So how does that concern me?"

Snake River Jim spread the paper she had brought, his lean finger passing from sentence to sentence. There was a deceptive mildness in his tone.

"As you notice," he said, "the will is very specific as to its bequests. And you will notice further that I am the executor, to serve without bond, and with the right reserved to delegate all of my duties to anyone I think capable of handling them."

"I read that," the widow said belligerently.

"You will notice that all past bills have been canceled."

"And high time, too, what with his hoarding so much money," the Widow Calkins said. "Heaven knows, I'd not pay a dime, knowing how much he has."

"That's the way he wants it," Snake River said gently, and reached for the last copy of the *Tribune* to be printed. He found a single line of type. "I see that your account with Doc Bender extends over a period of some thirty-five years, and that the aggregate sum owed is more than three thousand dollars."

"But—" the widow began, and Snake River cut her short.

"But the debt is canceled," he said softly, too softly, a hint of steel and anger underneath his words. "Doc Bender said so in a note witnessed by Lafe Galloway and myself."

"Good!" the Widow Calkins said, and triumph was in her eyes.

"But there is one little thing in this paper which you have not seen," the showman said.

"What?"

"This line," Snake River folded the paper so that the bottom half could not be read. "The line which says, *'The following is a list of my debtors, the amounts owed and the lengths of time the bills have been due.'* "

The Widow Calkins' face went white. "You mean my name is there?" she gasped.

"Madam," Snake River Jim assured her grimly, "it is there."

Her heavy hands reached for the paper, and he drew it away. "You mean," she asked in a panic-stricken voice, "that you are going to publish my name there?"

"Yours and a great many others." Snake River Jim smiled without humor. "Doc Bender is a vain man; he wants everyone to know how generous he is."

"But people will read—"

"Exactly!" said Snake River Jim.

"But people will know—I'll see my lawyer—you can't—"

"Madam," Snake River Jim said coldly, "if your account was paid in full, there would naturally be no mention of your name in this paper."

Fury held the woman, held her in thrall, for now she knew the trap into which she had been thrust.

"You—you—this is blackmail!" she cried.

SNAKE RIVER JIM was hard then, hard in a way which she had not thought possible. He stared at her from eyes like polished steel.

"It most assuredly is," he said quietly. "But more than that, it is justice. You, in your greed and ignorance, exploited a fine man. You probably have killed him with overwork and no pay. But he, in his gentleness, did nothing about it. May I assure you that I, being the medical faker and implied crook, which you labeled me, am not so soft." He leaned forward, hard and uncompromising. "Mrs. Calkins," he finished, "you are a wealthy woman, despite your whinings. You have exactly twenty-four hours in which to pay your account to Doc Bender. After that, if the amount due him is not paid, copies of this paper will be mailed everywhere." His eyes were icy. "Do I make myself clear?"

"You dirty crook!" the Widow Calkins shouted.

"But a debt-paying one," Snake River Jim answered coldly, and bowed. "Good day, madam."

For one moment the Widow Calkins stood irresolutely. Then she whirled and stalked from the office, throwing one last threat in her wake.

"I'll see my lawyer about this blackmail," she snapped.

Snake River Jim blew his breath in a loud sigh; and behind him, Lafe Galloway laughed softly and long.

"I can die happily now," he said at last. "I never thought I'd live to see the day when something like this would happen."

"I'm glad she didn't have a gun handy," Snake River said, grinning.

Seriousness came to Lafe Galloway. "I don't think it will work, Snake River," he said. "Lord knows, I'm all for it, but it just won't work."

"Why not?" the old showman asked comfortably.

"There are laws against this thing. It's straight blackmail."

"No!" Snake River shook his head. "Not a legal blackmail, at all. Some, like the widow and Shad Turnbull, will have to be whipped into line through fear of exposure of their cheapness and cheating. Others will pay out of sheer shame, for most people are decent, only careless and thoughtless. Some will not be able to pay, and those we shall forget." His smile broke. "But so help me, there's going to be a hospital!"

"She'll see her lawyer," Galloway said, "and so will the others."

Snake River shook his head. "No one will see a lawyer," he said. "Going to the courts to keep from paying a debt to a dying man just isn't done—not even when there is the provocation I've given."

"But—"

"Lafe, you're old and honest," Snake River said gently. His hand touched the blackmailing paper. "This is window dressing; there'll be no papers mailed, whether or not bills are paid."

They laughed then, long and loudly, stopping only at the sound of footsteps at the door. Shad Turnbull was there, his broad face suspicious and unfriendly.

"Pete said you wanted to see me about something important," he said.

Snake River Jim smiled; and somehow, the devil in him showed in his face. He waved his hand graciously, and his voice was warm.

"Come in, Mr. Turnbull," he said genially. "I want to tell you of Doc Bender's last will and testament, and of the bequests he made relative to the building of a hospital." He chuckled softly. "I think you will be interested in the financing arrangements I have drawn up."

Behind him, Lafe Galloway choked over his coffee. And then Shad Turnbull was at the counter, suspicious eyes staring at the top half of a folded *Tribune,* while the piratical old showman began his spiel.

IT was another day, another week, and now Maude and Susie stood hitched to the medicine wagon, eager to hit the road again. Morning sunlight was warm, and close at hand were workmen, clearing and leveling the land where a new hospital would soon rise.

Snake River Jim stood beside the front wheel of the gold-and-red wagon, and there was a peace in him born of the past few days. Already were the plans for the hospital drawn, and orders had gone East for the equipment and supplies which it would need.

At first there had been resentment and pleas and threats. And then, as he had known there would be, there had come a revulsion of feeling. Blackmail had started the hospital; but when it was finished; the people would see that it remained. It would serve rich and poor alike, and its worth could never be measured.

Snake River lit a stogie; and then, hearing the people walking toward him, he turned. Lafe Galloway was there, and Kathie, her hand slipped into the arm of the young doctor who would run this new hospital. And coming at their side, still feeble, but with the will to live within his heart again, was old Doc Bender.

"Damn it, Snake River," Doc Bender called, "you can't run out on us now, just when we're getting started."

"Of course not," Kathie said, running to the showman's side.

"Stick around," Galloway said. "With Kathie marrying the Doc, my house is going to be plenty lonely."

Snake River Jim blinked, swearing silently at the sunlight which seemed to be making his eyes water. He cleared his throat, then beamed at the group.

"Me settle down, and turn old and honest!" he said mockingly. "Bah! I'm heading for Colorado and a couple of those new mining camps."

"But Snake River—" the young Doc began, and the old showman cut him short.

"Bob," he said, "you seem like a nice fellow. You treat Kathie right, and you do as good a job here as Doc Bender has done. I'll drop back one of these days and check up on you. Let me down, and maybe I'll be gunning for you. *Comprende?*"

"I understand," the young doctor said, and his hand was hard in Snake River's. "Good luck—and sell a lot of Elixir."

"Oh, Snake River, I'll miss you so," Kathie said, and kissed him.

THE old showman blushed and turned to the wheel. He climbed to the wagon seat and untied the reins. His smile reached down and touched them all.

"Do a good job," he said.

"Damn it, Snake River—" Doc Bender began.

The showman's hand found a thick roll of bills in his pocket, and he flipped it to Doc Bender.

"Buy a good horse and buggy for Bob," he said. "Sometimes those country calls are kind of important."

One last look he had of his friends. Then he flicked the reins, and Maude and Susie settled into the harness. The medicine van began to move, glass clinking brightly and musically, wheels beginning to whine. Ahead was the horizon; he was on his way.

Suddenly he swore and reached for a bottle of Elixir. Must be catching a cold, he thought, else he wouldn't be so choked up.

He drank, then blew his nose thunderously. Behind, the cries of his friends faded away, and ahead was the open road. A meadowlark sang gloriously in the field, and he captured the melody in a trilling whistle.

Maude cocked long ears back, and Susie settled into her solid stride. The wagon creaked gently, and in the future were endless miles and countless adventures.

"Hup, Maude, git along, Susie!" Snake River Jim cried.

After a time, he began to sing.

Fabulous Felines

by FAIRFAX DOWNEY

Throughout history the harmless necessary cat has played its minor but interesting part. The author of "Dogs of Destiny" starts his chronicle with the sacred cat of Egypt.

JEWELS gleaming in her pointed ears, and an ornate golden necklace glistening upon the striped, short-haired fur of her sleek coat, Mau stared down from the temple wall. Below in the streets of the ancient Egyptian city of Bubastis, built upon an island in the lower Nile, a dreadful, stricken silence had fallen.

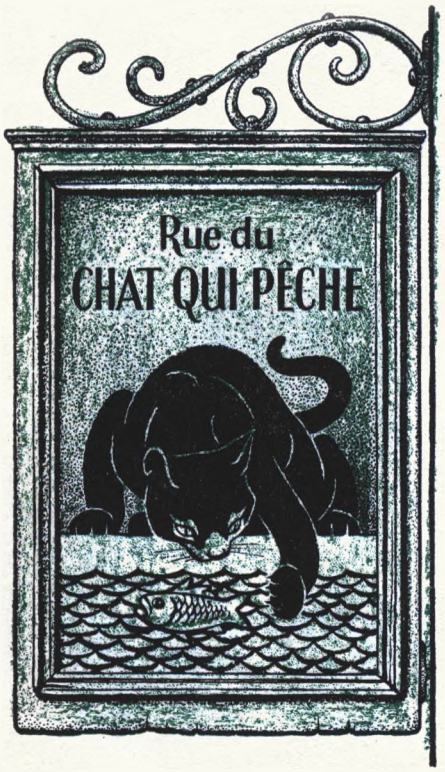
Mau's topaz eyes saw that one of her own kind, a cat of the city, had been killed. Some foreigner—a prince or wealthy nobleman, from his splendid raiment—had driven his chariot over the animal. Suddenly the silence was shattered by an angry roar from a thousand throats. Soldiers, priests, shopkeepers, and even slaves rushed in to surround the chariot and the limp body behind it. Mau watched the foreign man's gestures, first calm, then alarmed, explaining the killing as an accident—caught sight of the shining coins he offered in recompense. Not all the gold in his realm nor his rank could save him from the consequences of his impious deed. He had slain a cat, and it did not matter that his victim was a family pet and no temple cat like Mau. All cats were sacred in mighty Egypt.

Inscrutable, tail twitching slightly, Mau saw the mob close in with clubs and stones and clutching hands. Once only the foreigner shrieked; then he was battered and crushed and torn limb from limb. Owners of the dead cat carried it tenderly home, shaving their eyebrows in token of mourning and giving the body to be mummified and buried in the cemetery of cats.

Mau descended from the wall to stroll through the temple. Priests and attendants made way for her, as would the Pharaoh himself, for the name she bore, along with the other holy cats of the shrine, signified a seer—one who could pierce the veil of the future. Graven images hewn in her likeness sat at the feet of statues of Bast, the cat-headed goddess of this temple—Bast, the moon deity who held the sun in her eyes at night as cats do. Cat-headed, too, was Sekhet, fierce goddess of war, and though the face of the Sphinx was human, its body was that of the great cat, the lion.

Mau in her lithe beauty trod with a lordly tread as if she realized her divinity, ranking with that of other sacred animals of Egypt: the bull, the ram, the ibis, the crocodile, and the hawk. So through centuries following cats would bear themselves on occasion — mysterious, untouchable, aloof. Mau's life was all veneration and dignified luxury, with priests ministering to her every want, feeding her choice fish and bread soaked in milk. But in the stillness of night she put aside the mantle of her sanctity and, motionless and stealthy, she crouched in wait within the temple granary beside other cats of Bast. When hungry rats and mice ventured from their holes, the cats pounced and slew. Thus they fulfilled the immemorial function which had made the cat first precious, then holy in Egypt, granary of the ancient world. Modern scientists have estimated that one pair of rats in three years can multiply into six hundred thousand and that such a horde can devour as much food as sixty-four thousand men. Had it not been for Mau and her tribe, rodents would have consumed much of the rich harvest of the Nile Delta, and famine have raged oftener in the land of the Pharaohs.

Dwelling in temples like Mau, in palaces, houses and huts, the cats of Egypt lived out their lives, worshiped and beloved. If fire broke out in a home, they were rescued first. Kept from harm, most of them died natural deaths and were interred with ceremony in vast cat burial-grounds such as Beni-Hassan where one day the mummies of one hundred and eighty thousand would be excavated. For Mau and other temple or royal cats like her, only a funeral of magnificence was suitable. Skillful embalmers preserved her body with all the care given persons of high prestige. They wound strips of fine linen about her, layer upon layer. Her mummy was coated and gilded, and eyes of alabaster were inset before it was sealed in a bronze case, cast in her shape. Placed about it in the tomb for the sustenance of her *Ka*—her spirit—in the hereafter were mummies of mice.



THE FISHING CAT

THE big cat scampered for safety, as the Seine roared through Paris. Swollen by spring freshets of the year 1658, the river changed from a stream meandering peacefully through the city into a raging torrent. It flooded islands in its course and burst its bank to sweep flimsy, medieval dwellings from their foundations.

After the flood subsided, the cat, houseless and hungry like many Parisians, wandered back to the Left Bank where his home had stood. No one fed him, and the rats and mice had been drowned.

Idly at first, then intently, he watched men gather around the open cellars with poles and lines. Seine fishermen were a familiar sight, but these anglers ignored the river to cast into the water-filled cellars. Hardly had they dropped hooks when sinkers bobbed under, and poles were jerked up to land silvery fish, flashing in the sun. The flood had turned each excavation into a splendid fishing preserve.

The cat sniffed hungrily and mewed. Fish were fine eating. When nobody offered him a share, he stole up the edge of a cellar. Fishermen glanced up with interest at this cat which, unlike most of his kind, seemed unafraid of water. A swift, clawed paw flashed downward to scoop up a fish, then another. The meal problem was neatly solved.

Day after day the cat joined the human anglers. Word spread, and people thronged to watch the clever feline fisher. Perhaps he dived in at times for his catch, for some cats are good swimmers. So great an impression did he make that a street of the vicinity was named for him. It had first been *Ruelle des Etuves*—Alley of the Ovens—then *Rue du Renard*—Street of the Fox; but now it became *Rue du Chat Qui Pêche*—Street of the Fishing Cat. A sign, depicting the cat in action, long swung from one of the rebuilt houses.

Through three centuries the street has borne its name. Jutting out to the Seine and connecting *Quai Saint-Michel* with *Rue de la Huchette*, it is one of the narrowest and shortest of streets—thirty paces long by two wide—but the tiny thoroughfare is famous. Many a visitor to the Left Bank is attracted by its quaint name, commemorating the prowess of the fishing cat.

More celebrity still came to the cat and his street when it was made the title of a novel by Jolan Földes, published in 1937. The story's heroine, like many a tourist in Paris today, was fascinated by the *Rue du Chat Qui Pêche*. "When Anna was young, she often wove fancies about its name," Földes wrote. "An old, fat tomcat, with a big mustache like those of the other anglers who sit two paces from each other on the square stones of the Seine banks, their legs hanging down and reflected in the river. There the old tomcat sits, with his big mustache and a pair of spectacles on his nose, a cap on his head, holding the rod gravely and dropping the line into the water."

NAPOLEON — THE WEATHER PROPHET

FOR more than forty days and forty nights it had not rained. Baltimore, parched and suffering in that long drought of 1930, envied Noah. The Weather Bureau promised no relief. *"Continued Dry"* was still the bitter forecast.

In the office of the Baltimore *Sun* a telephone rang, and a woman's voice announced there would be rain within twenty-four hours. How did she know, tolerantly demanded a desk man. Why, Napoleon had foretold it, and he never failed, confidently stated Mrs. Fannie de Shields. No, she had not been in touch with the late Emperor of France *via* the spirit world. Napoleon was her cat, a beautiful pure-white, part-Persian. She had found him in his predicting position: crouched on his stomach with his head down between his front paws as if he were bothered with a headache. When Nappy took that pose, it meant a change of weather, and you could count on it always.

The newspaper man, member of a skeptical profession used to crackpots, muttered thanks and rang off. But before the twenty-four hours were up, the drought was broken. It rained buckets. It rained as the saying goes, cats and dogs, especially cats—to give Napoleon due credit.

Napoleon's reputation was made. Reporters and photographers flocked to his home. Mrs. De Shields had to chase, catch and hold him for pictures and interviews, since Napoleon disliked men, and unless his publicity came through newspaper women, he could do without it. Speaking for him, his proud mistress related that Nappy had possessed his prophetic

powers since kittenhood. When he reclined on his side, as cats usually do, the weather would remain as it was; but when he assumed his predicting position, bottom dollars or last dimes could be bet on some change short of a complete shift of climate.

Moved to predict, up would spring Napoleon to the top of a white marble table in the hall. Down went head between front paws. There the cat would stay, glancing up now and then to see whether he was observed by the family. It might be hours, but he would not budge until he was certain that his posture had been checked and his duty as a seer performed.

OTHER cats have been noticed to foretell weather changes by their actions, but Napoleon was Old Reliable in the rôle. Except when he needed teeth pulled or was otherwise out of sorts, he never missed. More than a few times he flatly contradicted the officials of the Weather Bureau and turned their faces red, while his serene and whiskered countenance remained white. "Tell the Government to buy that cat and get rid of the weather forecaster," urged one of Nap's fans.

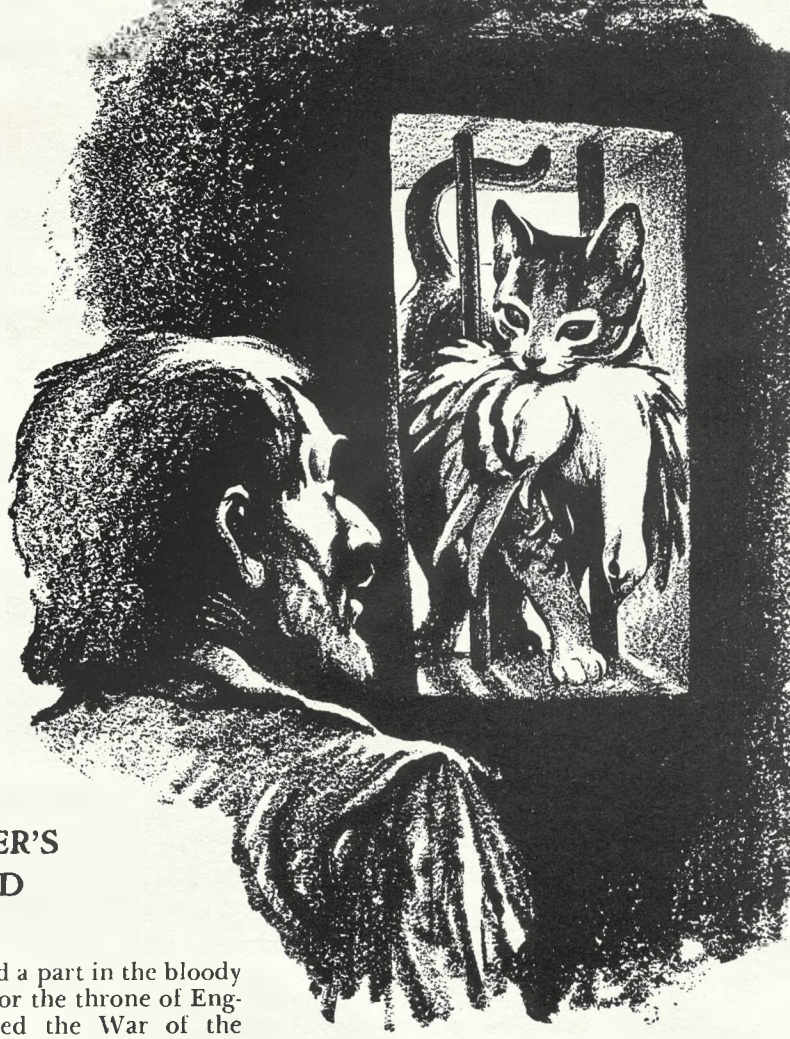
"I'd rather lose my right eye. He's not for sale," declared Mrs. de Shields, refusing all offers.

Napoleon was rewarded with an extra saucer of milk for each successful prediction. His public frequently telephoned for his advice—farmers wanting rain for crops, picnickers not wanting it to spoil their holiday. Nopoleon obliged with twenty-four-hour advance notice of any change. Disdaining the groundhog, coming out of his burrow annually to see or miss his shadow, Nappy worked full time all the year around. Never has a cat made the headlines so often. "Feline Forecaster Felicitated," praised the *Sun*, beaming on its favorite.

The weather-wise Napoleon never met his Waterloo. By 1936 he was hailed throughout the State of Maryland and beyond its borders. Nappy, folks maintained in a phrase of the day, was "the cats." He was close to his nineteenth year, a ripe old age, when death took him, and the *Sun* sadly headlined his obituary: "Napoleon, the Weather Cat, Has Forecast Last Storm."

"Nappy always liked blue," Mrs. de Shields told a reporter, "so when I saw the end was near, I brought my blue blankets and laid them around him. He died quietly and peacefully, without a meow."

He was buried in a pet cemetery beneath a stone inscribed: "NAPOLEON, THE WEATHER PROPHET, 1917-1936." Other cats succeeded him, but none supplanted him in the family's affections, and none possessed his powers of prediction.



THE PRISONER'S FRIEND

A CAT played a part in the bloody struggle for the throne of England called the War of the Roses. Her name has not survived but the memory of her deeds was preserved by the grateful knight whose life she saved.

Sir Henry Wyatt chose the white rose, the badge of Lancaster, against the red of York—and grievously suffered for his choice. York prevailed, and the crown fell to Richard III. That ruthless monarch sought to seduce Sir Henry to his service. Failing, the King flung the loyal Lancastrian into the grim Tower of London.

Wyatt was tortured on the rack, and mustard was forced down his throat, yet he would not yield. He might well then have been slain, for in that very prison Richard had murdered his predecessor, King Henry VI, and ordered the slaughter of two boy princes who stood in his path. Instead of a quick death, Sir Henry was left to freeze in a cold, narrow, bedless cell. Prison fare was so scant he was slowly starving.

One day a cat crept through the grating into his dungeon. A lonely stray, she craved human companionship, and the prisoner found as much comfort in her company as she in his. "He was glad of her, laid her in his bosom to warm him, and by making much of her, won her love," an old chronicle declares.

Thereafter the cat came to visit him several times a day. Sensing his hunger, she brought him a pigeon she had caught in a neighboring dovecote. The thin and wasted knight hid the bird and summoned the keeper to complain again of his meager rations. He begged that in God's mercy he be granted a little meat to keep him alive.

"I durst not do better," the jailor protested.

"But if I can provide any, will you promise to dress it for me?" Sir Henry asked.

"I may well enough. You are safe in that matter," the keeper answered. He kept his word when given the pigeon; he plucked and cooked it for his charge.

Again and again the cat brought fat pigeons to her friend, saving him from the starvation which otherwise would have been his lot.

The prisoner was released when King Richard, crushed by revolt, was killed in battle. Wyatt, in the succeeding reigns of King Henry VII and Henry VIII, rose to high posts, but he never forgot the faithful cat nor her kind. People noticed that he would make as much of cats as other men of their spaniels and hounds. Portraits of him picture a cat beside him, a pigeon under her paw. And a line of the nobleman's epitaph reads: *"Imprisoned and tortured in the Tower in the reign of Richard III, and fed and preserved by a cat."*

The Black Days

THE barber made a few professional passes at the leather strop, then leaned over me, holding the razor within an inch of my throat. Reflected light from the chandelier danced from the blade in glittering points of flame.

Subconsciously I held my breath. My hands clenched the arms of the big chair and I turned my eyes so I could appraise any change of expression in the face of the little man who held me so completely in his power. Then the razor moved gently along my neck, and slowly I began to relax.

The scene was Tokyo's Imperial Hotel. The time was December, 1945; and for four years I had been engaged, ashore and afloat, in bringing death to the countrymen of my little yellow barber. The sudden realization that it was a Jap who flourished that wicked blade as though seeking, with surgical exactness, for the precise line of my jugular vein, brought an instant of panic that came close to making me bolt from the chair and dash to the street.

A pretty spectacle indeed, I thought to myself, as the cool steel moved easily over my face, and I wondered how the little barber and I would have reacted to one another if, by some bit of yogism, the calendar on the wall could be set back to a December morning four years earlier.

No doubt the barber was where he stood now, but shaving a military man of his own country, or the heavy-jowled face of one of the late Mr. Hitler's blond Nordics, instead of a Captain in the American Navy. And no doubt, as Radio Tokyo brought the word of Pearl Harbor, the barber shop echoed with happy Nipponese hisses and shrill cries of Banzai, with frequent low bows towards the moated wall down the street, where the Son of Heaven kept his mysterious abode.

Yes, that would have been a time of gloating cheer in the Imperial Hotel's barber shop, and through the towns and villages of the Empire; for the plans that shrewd, able Isoroku Yamamoto had made so many months before were beginning to click, on schedule. "Banzai for the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere! Asia for the Asiatics! Down with the United States! *Banzai!*"

For my part, I wasn't in the cheering section on the morning of December 8th, 1941, when the war came to us in the Far East. Nor was I in a barber's chair, though we worked up a pretty good lather in the pale green waters of the Sulu Sea, and received our share of close shaves without benefit of hot towels.

Aboard the cruiser *Boise* my title was Damage Control Officer and First Lieutenant, which is an elaborate way of saying that I was janitor and ship's husband. It was my job to see that the ship was clean from keel to truck and from stem to gudgeon; to be on the forecastle, standing by anchors or mooring lines at the appointed times; to supervise the recovery of our aircraft (usually in a driving rain); to inject so much realism into unglamorous damage-control drills that my nine hundred and fifty shipmates would, in time of actual combat, perform their duties instinctively in repairing damage and keeping the ship afloat. If you happened in the galley a half-hour before a meal, or in the scullery a half hour after, I was the guy on his knees on deck, peering with a flashlight under electric range or washing machine, checking up on dust, dirt or food particles.

A grand job, First Lieutenant. You are such a popular fellow! To the sailor, you're the two-and-a-half-striper whose X-ray eyes can spot the soiled dungarees that have been so carefully hidden under a bunk mattress. To the Division petty officers, you are that hot breath on the back of the neck, followed by acid inquiry as to when the blankety-blank are you going to get this compartment cleaned up. To the junior officers you are a snarling voice in the early morning, urging them, loudly, to get out on deck with their Divisions and supervise the routine of washing the ship's face. To the gunnery officer and the chief engineer, you are a brother officer and fellow Head of Department who can't seem to understand that men are sometimes needed for gun-drills or engine-repair, instead of being employed perpetually at scrubbing paintwork, splicing wire, renewing rigging, scraping and painting boats, or doing some silly thing you've cooked up in Damage Control. To the Captain and the Exec you are the person to whom pointed remarks are addressed regarding the appearance of the quarterdeck, the presence of oil spots on the ship's side, or the leaky shower head in the Admiral's bathroom.

To be a good first lieutenant of a ship one must have the patience of Job, the hide of an elephant, the curiosity of a cat, the eye of an— But why go on? Whoever heard of a good first lieutenant, anyway? No matter how competent he may be, or how vast his professional experience, he is constantly in the position of having all his troubles before him, as the sailor said when he approached the Thanksgiving turkey with an ax.

ANYWAY, that was my job aboard the *Boise*, and at dawn on Monday the 8th of December, I rolled over in my cot on the forecastle, opened my eyes to a fine large Philippine morning, and wondered why the advance guard of the sun should be showing on the starboard side. Why should we be headed north? Our bow—and come to think of it, I mustn't forget to have some paint slapped along the cutwater as soon as we anchored—ought to be pointed east, toward Cebu, where we would arrive before noon.

Pondering on the vagaries of sunrise in the Far East, I arose, pulled on a bathrobe, and headed for the wardroom, a cup of coffee and a copy of the morning *Press News*. Later I would seek out the navigator and direct his attention to a phenomenon that caused the sun to come up in the south, a peculiarity of nature that possibly accounted for other reverse actions in these parts, such as the Chinese habit of shaking hands with oneself, and the Japanese custom of removing the shoes before entering a house, hotel or theater.

At the door of the wardroom I was met by a marine who held out a clipboard with a single dispatch for me to initial. It was from the Commander in Chief, U.S. Asiatic Fleet, and it read: *"Japan has commenced hostilities. Govern yourselves accordingly."*

Lest we forget. . . . Here Admiral Bell recalls the anxious weeks aboard the Boise in the Sulu Sea at the start of the war.

by REAR ADMIRAL FREDERICK BELL U.S.N., RET.

I made a mental note to ask the sun's pardon for doubting its reputation for infallibility. *We* were the ones that had changed. We were headed north, toward Manila.

We had sailed from Manila two days earlier. The evening before we left, I dined at the Army-Navy Club with Froggy Pound, whose destroyer, the *Pillsbury*, was being repaired at the Navy Yard, Cavite, and Freddy Warder, whose sub was undergoing overhaul. With the exception of the *Boise*, these were the only combatant ships in the Manila Area, for Admiral Hart, sensing the imminence of war, had disposed his fleet at sea, in spots where it could damage the enemy and be immune from surprise attack. The atmosphere around his headquarters was that of a boxing ring where a tense fighter awaits a blow that could come from any direction and at any instant.

The Admiral cleared us out next morning, but held us under his operational control by sending us to Cebu, in his domain, instead of returning us to Pearl Harbor in accordance with schedule after we had delivered five merchant ships to the Philippines that we had escorted from our Hawaiian Base.

Now, with the war only a few hours old, we cheered ourselves with the thought that Army aircraft in the Manila area would be over Formosa, giving the Japs an honorable hot kimono. The Japs thought so too, especially when weather conditions prevented their own aircraft from taking off. At all installations on Formosa they manned their battle stations, and put on gas masks—expecting that the United States might wage that kind of war.

But no American aircraft appeared. As soon as visibility permitted, the Jap planes took off. Arriving over Manila at about noon, they were delighted and astonished to find our aircraft in neat formation, on the ground. It was a field day for the Jap aviators; and when they had finished, there was little left of American Army air power around Manila.

INCIDENTALLY, that is one episode I have never seen satisfactorily explained. Current rumors had it that General MacArthur was reluctant to allow General Brereton's bombers to take off until official notice of a declaration of war had been received from Washington. That sounds silly, and I hope it's wrong. But so far, I have heard no logical reason for what amounted to *hara-kiri* among our own aircraft. . . .

Not a great deal has been written regarding Japanese planning for the war: a subject that should be of interest in helping to disclose the success our enemy achieved, and how this very success nurtured an ambition that grew too large to be attained.

Illustrated by John McDermott

It read: "Japan has commenced hostilities. Govern yourselves accordingly."

Captured documents, and lengthy interrogations of high officials of the Japanese government (who were amiably free of any reticence in their talks) have given us rather full information of enemy war plans and objectives.

The basic plan for the Greater East Asia war consisted of three phases:

(1) The capture of the East Indies; the attack on Pearl Harbor; and the establishment of a perimeter included within a line joining the Kuriles, Marshalls, Bismarcks, Timor, Java, Sumatra, Malaya and Burma.

(2) The consolidation of this perimeter, and

(3) The interception and destruction of any enemy force which threatened the area within the perimeter.

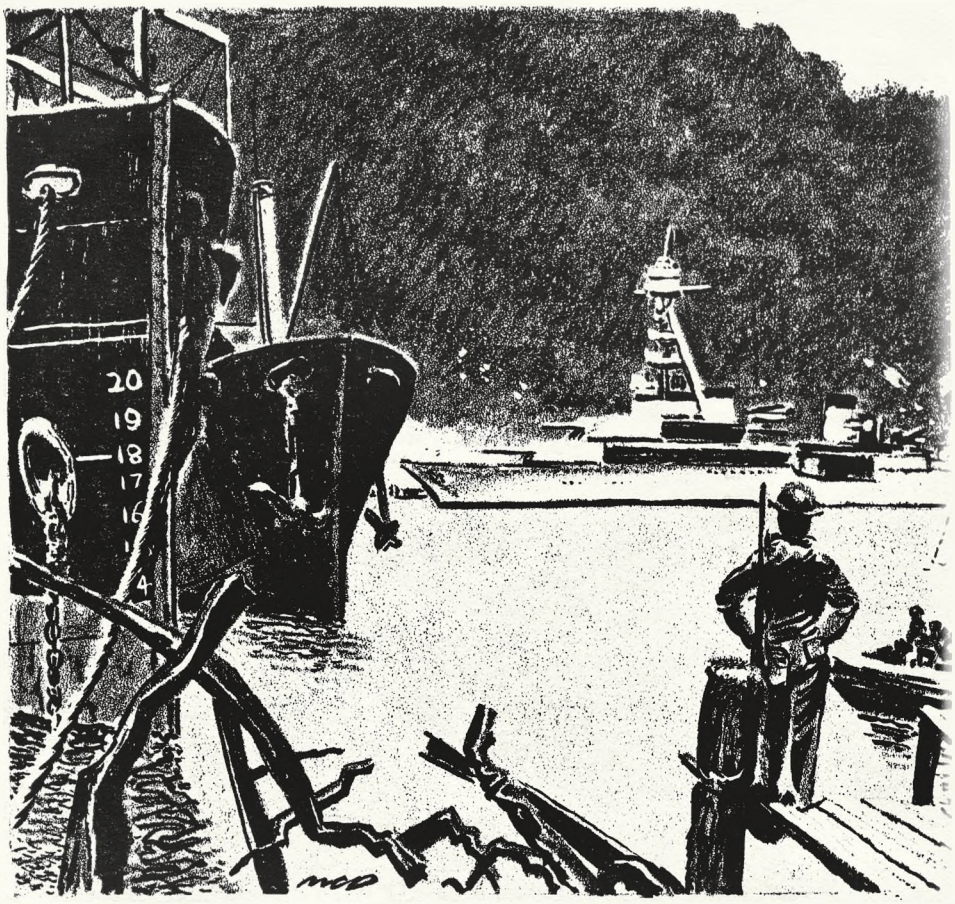
Concurrently, plans were begun to destroy the United States' will to fight.

Within the broad geographical limits of the perimeter, Japan would strengthen and consolidate the "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere" that would insure her economic growth.

Because the first phase of the overall plan was completed with such ease, the Japanese extended their perimeter and made ready for further expansion. The new plans provided for the capture of Port Moresby in New Guinea, Midway, New Caledonia, Fiji and Samoa, and an invasion of the Western Aleutians. This "improved" plan was scheduled for completion by March, 1943.

As early as January, 1941, preliminary studies of a surprise attack on Pearl Harbor were being made on the basis of a proposal by Admiral Yama-

A large number of merchant ships, too, we escorted to relative safety, through the kindness of our enemy.



moto, CinC of the Japanese Combined Fleet. On November 5th the Chief of the Naval General Staff advised the commanders of the Combined Fleet and the China Fleet that preparations for war operations were to be completed by early December as, "It is felt that war has become unavoidable with the United States, Great Britain and the Netherlands."

On November 25th the CinC Combined Fleet sent the following dispatch to the Pearl Harbor attack force (First Air Fleet):

> The Task Force, keeping its movements strictly secret, and maintaining close guard against submarines and aircraft, shall advance into Hawaiian waters, and upon the very opening of hostilities shall attack the main force of the United States Fleet in Hawaii and deal it a mortal blow. The first air raid is planned for the dawn of X-Day (exact date to be given later).
>
> Upon completion of the air raid, the Task Force, keeping close coördination and guard against the enemy's counterattack, shall speedily leave the enemy waters and then return to Japan.
>
> Should the negotiations with the United States prove successful, the Task Force shall hold itself in readiness forthwith to return and reassemble.

A dispatch of December 2nd informed the CinC Combined Fleet that December 8th (Tokyo date) had been chosen for the commencement of hostilities.

To carry out their blow against Pearl Harbor, the Japanese sent six carriers screened by one light cruiser and nine destroyers, with a support force of battleships and cruisers. Submarines were stationed near the entrance to Pearl Harbor and northeast of Oahu.

Holding a course well above 40 degrees north latitude, taking advantage of unfavorable weather, the Carrier Attack Force moved to the east. Early on the morning of Sunday, December 7th (Honolulu time) aircraft were launched from a position two hundred miles north of Oahu. At 07:55 the first dive-bomber peeled off over Wheeler Feld. Two minutes later, torpedo planes were swooping in on Pearl Harbor.

From the point of view of the Nips, the Pearl Harbor attack was well conceived and well executed. We know it, now, though for a long time, and for obvious reasons, the full effect of the raid was held back from the people at home—held back, too, from all of us who were not there. It was not until the following April, when the *Boise* entered the harbor of Fremantle, Australia, and we fell in with our sister ship, the *Phoenix*, that we learned any more than we had read in the papers. It was not until then, either, that we had any news of our families, most of whom had been at Pearl Harbor or Honolulu on that December Sunday.

It was a blow below the belt, all right. And it hurt. Admiral Yamamoto had every reason to be pleased, every reason to be well satisfied when his carriers recovered their aircraft and his force retired to the west at high speed. Going below to his cabin, he removed his cap, drew back the curtain that concealed Hirohito's picture, bowed three times toward the bespectacled Sun God, drawing in his breath with a sharp hiss as he made each obeisance. With reverent hand he covered the picture again, then sent for his staff and a bottle of sake.

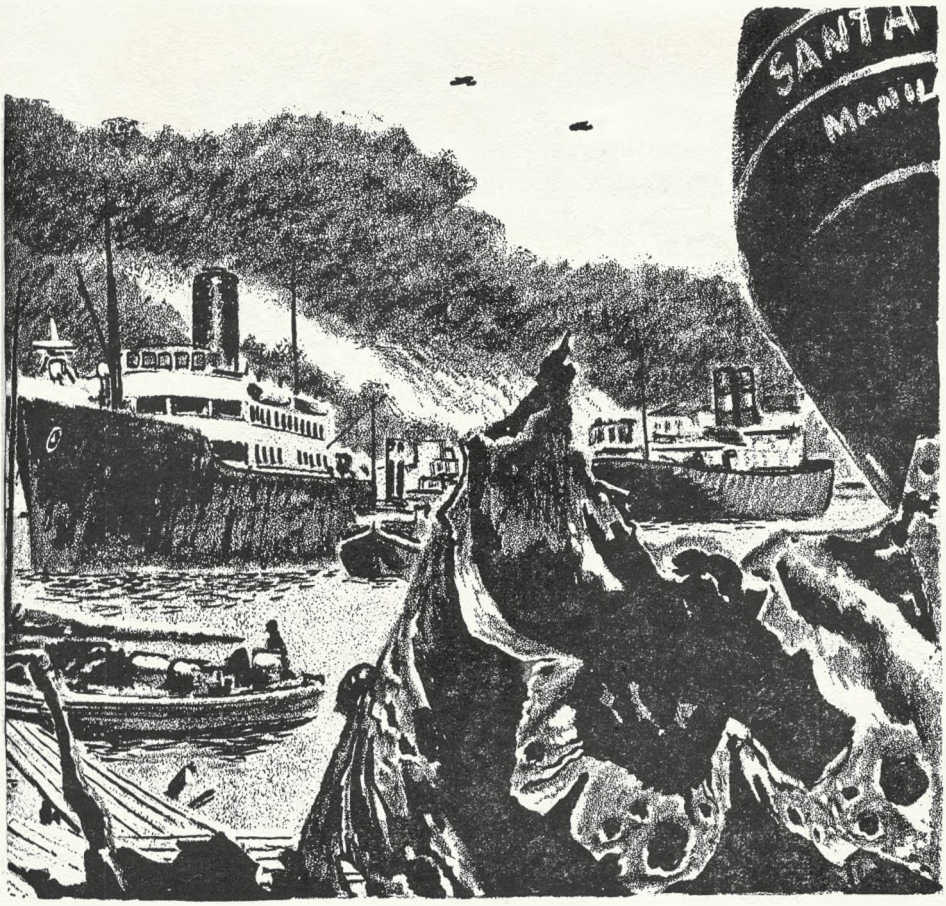
In a moment we're going back to the *Boise*, still churning north, toward Manila, with extra lookouts scanning the skies for aircraft with poached eggs on the wings, and itchy-fingered youngsters at all guns. But before we do, there's one more word about Pearl Harbor I'd like to say, as indication that the Fleet was not just sitting there fat, dumb and happy, waiting for the toothy men to hit.

Almost ten months earlier, on February 15, 1941, Admiral Kimmel issued a Pacific Fleet Letter on the subject of security. It stated that the security of the Fleet based in the Hawaiian Area could rest on two assumptions: first, that there was danger of sabotage and mines; second, "That a declaration of war might be preceded by:

(1) A surprise attack on ships in Pearl Harbor.
(2) A surprise submarine attack on ships in operating areas.
(3) A combination of these two."

The order went on to describe security measures for the Fleet, both at anchor and under way in the Operating Area. At sea and in port, live ammunition was ordered to be carried in ready boxes at each anti-aircraft gun. In Pearl Harbor each berth and mooring was assigned a sector within compass bearings to be covered in the event of air attack.

The ships of the Fleet were ready for war, or as ready as ships can be when they are undergoing repair and overhaul in what is presumed to be a shore-defended base. Remember that a condition precedent to maintaining an effective air patrol around an ocean island is that you possess aircraft in sufficient quantity and of suitable characteristics to do the job. Remem-



ber, too, that neither Admiral Kimmel nor General Short has been tried by the General Court-martial that each of them sought.

But to return to the *Boise,* and that message from Admiral Hart that the marine orderly was holding out to me in the wardroom. I crossed over to my room to get on some clothes, and found my two principal assistants waiting—Chips and Boats. Chips was Chief Carpenter Harold Thomas, a quiet Oklahoman. Boats was Boatswain Frank O'Neill, from California. They were able craftsmen, splendid officers and gentlemen, and the finest shipmates any man could want. Boats was to meet his death aboard an LST off the Normandy beaches; Chips would be killed at his battle station on a black night off Guadalcanal.

Just now they were smiling, and their eyes were dancing. "Well," said Chips, "what do we do now?"

Boats broke in with: "I've been going over my check-off lists, and I'll be doggoned if I can find anything we've forgotten."

I pushed the pantry bell to order coffee all around. Chips, in dungarees, placed his cap and ever-present flashlight on deck and sat down on the doorway coaming. Boats, in white uniform, pulled himself up on my bunk while I hurriedly began to shave and wash.

"How about it, Chips?" I asked. "Anything on your mind?"

Harold Thomas shook his head slowly.

"Tell you what we might do," I said. "Most of our hand tools, flashlights, rescue breathing outfits, asbestos gloves, and so on, are concentrated at the three damage-control stations, and for good reason—because we didn't want them to get adrift. We'd better break 'em out right after breakfast, and distribute them at all the sub-stations throughout the ship."

Boats said: "And the first time I catch some monkey using any of our equipment when the ship isn't at general quarters, I'll run him up the mast."

Chips said: "What about all those acetylene bottles I've got around the shipfitter's shop? If they caught a shell hit, we'd have a mess on our hands."

"How about sticking them up in the sand locker," Boats suggested. "That way they'd be below decks and in the eyes of the ship where they couldn't do any damage."

I nodded. "Do it. . . . That's about all I can think of, except that I'll have the doctor issue morphine syrettes to all officers and leading petty officers. . . . And listen," I called, as my assistants got up to leave, "double check the people at the guns to see that their trousers are stuffed in their socks and their sleeves rolled down." These were precautions against flash burns, and they were precautions almost impossible to enforce in tropical waters—until our men saw some burns, and realized the protection afforded by even a thin cotton shirt. After that we had no trouble.

No, there wasn't much in the way of last-minute action for us to take care of. We'd been on an all-out war footing for months. There was no cheering, no back-slapping, when the news came that we were at war. There were a few wisecracks, but the most noticeable change was in the way that the men carried themselves. There was an air of incisive determination throughout the ship. The crew of the *Boise* were not cocky, but they were confident. They showed it by a crisp precision in their drills and by the quiet that marks a smart warship.

But frankly, I don't know what any of us had to be confident about. To oppose the sea power of Japan we had three cruisers and a handful of destroyers and submarines. Of the cruisers, *Houston* was an eight-inch tin-clad, *Marblehead* an obsolete six-inch light cruiser approaching her twentieth birthday; the destroyers were four-stackers of World War I vintage, and most of the subs had lost the bloom of youth. The *Boise* alone, a fine new ten-thousand-ton ship with fifteen rapid-firing six-inch guns and a fair anti-aircraft battery, could stand off the rest of our little fleet in the Eastern seas.

What would you do if you commanded such a force against tremendous odds? Would you go out, hell-for-leather, and seek the Japanese Navy so you could put on a slugging match? Or would you seek to whittle down the enemy by hit-and-run tactics, play a delaying game, punch him when you could, lean to his punches if you had to?

Those alternatives were faced by ABDACom, the mixed High Command of American, British, Dutch and Australian officers that set up headquarters on Java. National interests clashed at once. The British thought of Singapore, Malaya, the Straits Settlement. They wanted warships as escorts for transports and supply ships in their beleaguered possessions. The Dutch thought of the wealth and importance of the Netherlands East Indies. They wanted to slug it out with the Japs, if necessary, in order to hold Java. Our Admiral believed in attrition tactics—hit and run, stab fast and get out, then come back when you weren't expected and stab again—that was the sort of thing that our small but fast ships could do best. Eventually the Dutch point of view prevailed, but before that hap-

pened, some of our ships had an inning of hit and run.

The first job was to get our tenders and tankers, our valuable noncombatants, out of Manila. Some of them had a top speed of nine knots. We loved them, because they carried the spare torpedoes, war-heads and ammunition for the rest of us, but how glad we were to park them in a port and get out again where we could use some speed! The trouble with that was that the Japs kept interfering with the parking problem. We took our slow old boys first to Macassar, then to Balikpapan, in Borneo, then Surabaya, in Java. Each move was only a few days before the Japs arrived. It was an interesting game of checkers, but without any noticeable future as far as we were concerned.

Also in Manila were a large number of merchant ships. These, too, we brought out to comparative safety, through the kindness of our enemy. After the war we asked a great many questions of the Japanese High Command. One question had to do with why the Japs allowed two hundred thousand tons of Allied shipping to escape from Manila. Vice Admiral Shiraichi replied: For three reasons. (1) The duty of the airplanes was to attack American planes. (2) Poor intelligence with regard to the shipping that was there. (3) The attack was not in the plans.

The Admiral's third reason illustrates a trait of Japanese character that we met throughout the whole course of the war. Time and again fat and juicy targets—transports loaded with men or supplies, tankers filled with oil or aviation gasoline, sitting ducks, whose loss to us would have carried grave consequences—were allowed to proceed in peace because to attack them was "not in the plans."

The Jap steam-roller moved south. Transports began to collect near Balikpapan. We sent four destroyers to make a night attack. They caught the Nips napping and sank four transports. That was action, at any rate, and we wanted more. The *Boise* sat around at Macassar for a few days, "awaiting developments." We coined a new verse to the old Navy song about the armored cruiser squadron.

> We fought the war in Macassar Bay
> We held a conference every day
> There was never anything to say
> But we held a conference anyway.

The *Boise* became a flagship when Admiral Glassford and his staff moved aboard. Another Jap move was in progress. We collected the *Marblehead* and some destroyers and started north, a bone in our teeth, loaded and ready to take on the twelve cruisers and destroyers and the thirty transports that were reported off Macassar.

Early on the morning of January 21st we headed through a narrow strip of water called the Sapi Strait. There was a four- to six-knot current running, but that didn't bother us. The chart showed a minimum depth of twenty-six fathoms—156 feet. The chart was wrong, for at seven minutes past eight the *Boise* struck a coral pinnacle, bounced along for a minute —and water came pouring up onto the second deck.

The repair parties manned their stations on the double; we took soundings throughout the ship; and it was soon obvious that the good ship *Boise* was badly damaged. Later we found that she was wide open along the keel for a distance of ninety-six feet.

The immediate question—where could we go to get ourselves patched up? There was a dock at Surabaya, but the Japs were about ready to use it. There was a small floating dock at Tjilatjap, on the south coast of Java —much too small an affair for our 624 feet of hull.

There was a dock at Colombo, Ceylon (Singapore, of course, was out of the question) but when we got there, we found that we were about twelve on the list. Eventually we went to India, to Bombay, where the ship's force of the *Boise,* with very little outside assistance, patched our bottom and allowed us to go back to a California navy yard.

The *Marblehead* was banged up in a bombing attack. She too got clear of the area and came home. Otherwise, I feel confident, both ships would be now with the *Houston,* the *Perth,* the Dutch cruisers *De Ruyter* and *Java,* the thirteen Allied destroyers whose hulls now rest on the sands of the Indian Ocean and the Java Sea.

Froggy Pound and his *Pillsbury* are there. Chaplain Rentz of the *Houston,* an old shipmate of mine from battleship days, is there, because he took off his life jacket on a black night in the Sunda Strait and gave it to a fellow-survivor of the *Houston,* a young seaman who was not a strong swimmer. Hundreds and hundreds of American and British and Dutch and Australian sailors are there to remind us, among other things, of a campaign that was as notable for valor as it was hollow of victory. They fought valiantly but they did not stop the Japs.

Just now the warriors of Nippon, grinning happy, toothy smiles, swarmed over the beaches. The first phase of their Greater East Asia Campaign was an unqualified success.

Did they learn any lesson from their victories that was of value to them in future operations? The question was asked of Captain Ihara, who served throughout the campaign in the Indies. He replied: "No. The opposition was so light that the Japanese forces were not put to a severe test, and consequently they concluded that the equipment available and the tactics used were satisfactory for future operations. It would have been better for the Japanese if they had encountered more opposition."

If Captain Ihara of the Imperial Japanese Navy had been asking the question of *us* (as he might well have if the war, during the next three years, had adhered to the pattern of the first four months) we might have given him, as the lessons learned:

(1) It's hard to fight a two-ocean war with a one-ocean Navy.
(2) We needed many more carriers.
(3) We needed nearby bases.
(4) Our Allies and ourselves should have made better and earlier plans for joint operations.
(5) Democracies get under way slowly when squalls appear on the horizon.

Those were some of the things that hurt us. There were two things that helped. Both of them, oddly enough, were provided by our enemy. The surprise attack on Pearl Harbor welded the will of the American people as perhaps nothing else could have done, and the easy Japanese success in the East Indies gave them a false sense of security, a confidence that was without true foundation, and a light-

hearted contempt in high places for the industrial and war-making potential of America.

So, as a thumbnail summary of the first half year of the Pacific War, it may be stated that:

Pearl Harbor aroused the fighting spirit of America.
Their easy victories in the East Indies deluded the Japs.
The Battle of the Coral Sea caused our enemy to revise his plan of expansion.
The Battle of Midway broke the back of Japan's carrier strength.

Two days out of San Francisco a dispatch came to the *Boise* ordering me to take command of the destroyer *Grayson*. It was May, 1942. When we docked at the Mare Island Navy Yard we found the *Grayson* just ahead of us—a slender new streamlined beauty, with ten torpedoes to back up her 5-inch guns and smaller weapons.

Boats O'Neill and Chips Thomas were among other *Boise* shipmates who came to look over my new command and express the hope that we would find ourselves working together. We would, soon, in a group of far-away islands called the Solomons. I took the *Grayson* to Pearl Harbor, and on a sunny morning in July, I crossed the harbor in my gig, past the capsized *Oklahoma* and the protruding masts of the *Arizona,* to the carrier *Enterprise,* where a conference of commanding officers had been called, a conference where we were given bulky packages containing information about places called Tulagi, Gavutu, Tanambogo — and Guadalcanal. It began to look as though we were going to move, though by devious route, toward the Land of the Rising Sun.

How long ago this seemed! How very long ago, since that quiet morning aboard the *Enterprise,* listening to Admiral Kinkaid's instructions.

Just now a low voice was murmuring in my ear. There was a little hiss of intaken breath, and the voice said: "You like haircut now, sir?"

I lay there in the barber's chair for a moment without answering, while the memories of war years swept like a torrent from my mind, and in their place I heard the harsh clack of wooden *getas,* the soft slapping sound of straw slippers, the rusty squeak of horse-drawn carts, as the people of a defeated nation moved slowly through the streets of their bomb-torn capital.

The little barber hovered at my elbow, his body bent in a slight bow, his thin hands stretched along the seams of his worn cotton trousers. "Haircut?" I answered. "Sure! Shampoo, too. Shoot the works!"

Tales of the Town—I

His Master's Voice

A taxicab driver shares in many curious episodes; and Reuben Hecht—who wrote "From a Rearview Mirror" in the June *Reader's Digest*—has the gift of recording them vividly. This first of a forthcoming group deals with a plot among the drivers.

by REUBEN HECHT

ANY time you walk into the hash joint just around the corner from the garage, you're likely to find a lot of cab drivers hanging around drinking coffee and beating their gums. Most of the chit-chat's about personal troubles, baseball, horses, women, and naturally, about the characters you meet pushing a hack. Also there's a lot of kidding going around. The drivers kid each other, they kid the waitress, and by the way some of them talk they do a good job of kidding themselves.

This guy Vincent, he's the greatest kidder of all. Sometime ago he saw an ad in one of those cheesecake magazines he's always reading, about how to become a ventriloquist in ten easy lessons, money back if not satisfied. So he sent away and got the lessons. You have to hand it to him; after a while he got pretty good at it. He oughta—he practiced enough on the rest of us.

Whenever a new hackie comes into the garage, Vincent slips us the wink and goes to work on him. There's cats meowing in his jacket pocket, babies crying in the back of his cab, or a dog barking in the trunk compartment—and the new guy goes nuts trying to figure out what's wrong. When Vincent's sitting in the greasy-spoon I was telling you about, drivers find themselves whistling at the waitress, trying to date her up, ordering all kinds of junk they don't want to eat.

Vincent's always got a new story about the gags he pulls on his passengers. One night he tells us about an Italian couple that gets into his cab. The guy tells him to "drive-a like hell to da hospital." They're nearly there when Vincent begins to make like a baby crying. The guy gets excited, grabs him by the shoulder and yells: "Stop, stop da automobile! It's too late! Da *bambino,* he come!"

Yeah, Vincent's funny—funny like a crutch. Come to think of it, it's a wonder he stays out of trouble as long as he does.

Two, three weeks after this gag, we're all sitting around the hash-house chewing the fat as usual, when he walks in. For once he ain't chipper; in fact, he looks kinda sick. Someone asks him what's the matter, and he busts out with the story:

He's just pulled out of the garage when this nice-looking couple hails him. The dame's carrying one of these Pekinese dogs wearing a red sweater. It's a long haul, and after they're riding awhile quietly, Vincent figures it's time to have some fun. So he begins to meow, throwing his voice into the back of the cab. The Pekinese sitting on the lady's lap perks up its ears, growls, lets out a yelp, jumps down and begins to tear up and down the back of the cab like crazy, looking for the kitten. There's a spitting noise like a cat with its back up, and the dog really goes wild. The woman pulls her legs up on the seat looking

all over for the cat, the guy is cussing at the dog jumping all over his feet; it's a madhouse. Vincent slows down and innocently asks what's the matter.

The dame yells the cab is haunted. He's got to stop—she wants him to look in the trunk right away and see if maybe a cat got locked up there. He pulls up to the curb and does an act of looking in the rear compartment, and of course there's nothing there. By this time they get Fido under control, but the guy's still muttering to himself. Vincent just shakes his head like he can't understand what the fuss is about, gets back in the seat and they start rolling again. Better let well enough alone, he decides, grinning to himself.

He's driving along the Concourse, and just as he reaches 165th Street, there's a blood-curdling scream right in front of the cab. He jams on the brakes, almost throwing himself right through the windshield. All along the line in back of him there's a shriek of tires on the pavement as the drivers brake and pull out to avoid hitting him. It's a miracle nobody piles into him.

The cop on the corner's blowing his whistle frantic, motioning cars around the cab stalled right in the middle of the crossing. He comes over to the cab and booms at Vincent: "What's the big idea?"

Before Vincent can even catch his breath, he hears himself saying to the cop: "Mind your own business, ya big baboon!"

The cop gets so red it looks like he'll bust. "Baboon, am I!" he explodes, and reaches for the door. The guy on the rear seat butts in.

"Officer," he says, "this man is the most careless driver I've ridden with. This is the third time he's stopped the cab so suddenly he threw us out of our seats."

The dame pipes up: "He must be drunk! He's scared poor Fido half to death!"

By this time Vincent's speechless. Well, almost speechless. Because he hears himself saying to the lady: "Aw, go fly a kite!"

"Pull over to the curb," the cop orders him, a mean look on his mug. "Come on, get that junk heap outa the middle of the road."

In a daze Vincent pulls up to the curb. The gent opens the door and helps the lady out, she still clutching precious Fido in her arms. "We had enough," the guy snaps. "You'll hear from me again." He flips his card at Vincent, and they walk away.

The cop's too busy blowing off steam to even ask them for their names. Vincent's trying to explain what happened, but he could see the cop ain't buying the yarn. It's no use arguing with a cop. When he finishes, he gives the cabbie a ticket for reckless driving.

Vincent's a block or so away before he thinks to look at the card the angry passenger gave him. Then he nearly passes through the floorboards. On the card is written:

Professor Zippe, Ventriloquist

The story's got everybody in the joint, including the waitress and the counter man, in stitches.

"You just got a dose of your own medicine," we tell him. "How do you like it?"

Vincent don't give us no trouble no more. But it was pretty expensive medicine—for us. You see, it cost a lot of us ten bucks a head to hire the Professor to give Vincent the works.

Illustrated by John McDermott

Vincent hears himself saying: "Mind your own business, ya big baboon!" The cop looks like he'll bust. "Baboon, am I!" he explodes.

The Brown Flash

A rambunctious wild stallion can still reign as king over the open range in Australia.

by HENRY G. LAMOND

THE westering sun picked out a bronze statue on a small plain. It was a brown stallion, one of the thousands of wild horses which ran on the Georgina River country, Western Queensland, Australia. That stallion posed while the wind played with the hair of his hide, sprayed his tail, rippled his mane, struck flames which flashed like living fire when the sun struck him.

He was a misfit, a freak. The other brumbies ran true to type: heavy-shouldered, prick-eared, coffin-headed, goose-rumped, with the unmistakable stamp of the wild horse, the black mule-stripe, down the center of the back. This stallion stood nearly sixteen hands, well-sprung ribs, a seventy-two-inch girth, flat-boned; breeding showed in every one of his lines, with length of rein, sloping shoulders, with ears as sensitive as a blind lady's finger-tips. He might have been the chance get of a thoroughbred sire from a well-bred mare which had been captured by the brumbies; he might have been an atavistic freak, a throw-back. Whatever his breeding, he showed as an aristocrat among a rabble of rubbish. He had class. He had more than that: he had quality!

The sun laved him with its beams, anxious to improve upon perfection, and it seemed to linger, some of its rays caught in his hair, as he half-turned into the shadows. The wind whistled past, poured from the south-east, and it too appeared to be delighted to play with the picture that horse made: it swept the dust from about his feet, brought him the warm scent of budding trees and ripening Mitchell grass; it eased its harshness as it played about him, spread the gritty dust on leaves which danced, fondled him with soft fingers.

The stallion pricked his ears, stared intently, watched a small clump of gidyea trees—though nothing was yet to be seen there. He turned quickly, as if an impatient spectator awaiting the rise of the curtain, and shot a glance over the fifteen to twenty mares

which formed his brood. Then, motionless, he stared again toward the gidyeas.

That brood of mares, a motley collection of indiscriminate breeding, all ages, with foals at foot and great with young, understood that glance. There may have been some telepathic message; they might have been well trained: they became motionless immediately, lifted their heads and searched in the direction their lord was looking.

The expected something—which could not have announced its approach by sense known to man—broke through the fringe of gidyeas and stepped out on the plain. It was a mare—a chestnut mare of some quality—coming back to the mob after her annual visit to her own maternity home beside a broken gully in the shelter of some whitewood trees. A spider-legged baby, a day-old mite of horseflesh, walked beside her, hugged her flank, leaned on her for sympathy, gathered moral courage by the fact she was there. It was brown, all brown, with not a white hair, like its sire: brown with darker points which appeared to be black.

The stallion neighed, tossed his head, switched his tail, stepped down off the imaginary pedestal on which he had posed and trotted to meet the mare—evidently one of his favorites. He whinnyed as he neared her, his neck arched, his tail streaming in the wind. He might have been expressing his pleasure at her return; he may have been complying with custom and equine etiquette.

The mare allowed him to touch her nostrils with his but remained unresponsive, checking further advances by brushing her admirer aside; she squealed her dissent, switched her tail and lifted her hindlegs suggestively in readiness to kick.

Brown Flash stopped with his mares around him. He raised his head,

The stallion watched that mare enter the brood with her foal. He saw without interest how the little thing was shy, timorous of the other foals which gathered about it. He saw the newcomer spread its baby legs wide, lop its ears, roll the whites of its eyes, draw back its small lips till its tiny teeth were exposed. Then, in what the infant doubtless thought was a fearsome pose, it chawed its mouth open and shut with clockwork action.

All those things were routine among wild horses. The only aged member which took any notice was the foal's mother: she hovered about, anxious for her child, ready to go to its assistance. She probably understood it was merely an introductory measure; in an hour or less, that new foal would be accepted by the others, romp and play with them like children at school. Like a new pupil at a school, it had to go through the measures before being accepted. . . .

The stallion, in the manner of a wild thing, took his brood of mares to a waterhole in the river during the night. That night-drinking was an instinctive caution with them. Domestic animals watered during the day; wild things under cover of darkness.

The stallion, the lord of the mob, always led his brood to water. He, the protector, had to go first: there might be dangers; in the long ago, predatory beasts lurked at waterholes; though the predatories had gone, the instinct remained—the stallions led to water. Two local rules also governed that law: the stallions knew there was no danger of a mare's leaving the mob when going to water—the drive of thirst would make them follow; another mob might be met, and the stallion in charge of that mob might cut off a wing to add to his own brood. The stallions always led.

They went to water, drifting like dark shapes from shadow to shadow, noiseless, with increased stealth as they neared the waterhole. The stallion sensed every whiff of wind, tested every sound and smell. Prick-eared, eyes luminous, on edge, alert and taut-muscled, he came in to water, drifted over the bank, gulped great swallows that seemed to impinge a trigger in his ears, which twitched to each lump as it went down his throat.

After they had all drunk, no danger present, they played: they pawed that water till mud splashed with the spume; they lay in it, rolled and wallowed. They rose to their feet, spread their legs wide, shook with a similar action to a dog, spraying water, slime and mud about them. Then, after a doze under the trees, they went back for the final drink. This time they waded in till the water was half-rib deep, till, with outstretched heads, lips just cupping the surface, the water

let the wind play with his mane and tail, and he called a challenge.

ran down their throats with a minimum of effort, without the trouble of lifting it by suction. They had to drink well. They had to take enough to suffice for twenty-four hours, on dry feed, a searing wind, under a baking sun. They waddled up the bank, bellies distended, with vulgar noises which sounded like half-empty casks being swirled.

The stallion always drove his mares ahead of him when going out from water. Protection from predatories in the rear might have been the prompting influence of that law; but with his mares ahead of him, the stallion had them under control. A mare might be inclined to stop on a choice bit of grass and feed there with her thirst appeased—there was not the urge to keep her with the mob as when going to water; a lurking stallion might cut off a wing of mares behind him if he was in front; mobs coming in to water had the stallion in the van: the fellow in charge going out would see him and be in a position to nullify his efforts. The stallions walked behind.

The next afternoon, feeding three or four miles out from the river—along which the main stock route ran—the brown stallion lifted his head, pricked his ears, listened intently. He shook his head, impatiently it seemed, and, without a signal of any sort to his mares, commenced to trot in the direction of the river, toward a big waterhole and main camping-place for travelers.

The mares had apparently received no order. They did not need one: each of them stopped feeding on the instant; some nickered to their foals; they all trotted behind their lord as he led toward the river.

Half a mile or less from the waterhole, from which there came the sounds of bells of hobbled horses, the stallion stopped abruptly. He reared, swung on his hind hoofs, sent a flashing message back to his mares, dropped to his forefeet, stood in the direction he had been going.

The mares understood: they stopped immediately; some stood head-and-tail as they swished flies from each other's eyes; some suckled their foals; others watched their lord.

He slid over the ground, soundless, merging with shadows, alert and on his toes. He reached the fringe of gidyea and stood in the shade of the last tree. He lowered his head to about knee-high, his ears pricked, his eyes staring. The wind whipped his forelock occasionally, swept clustering flies from his eyes. He was motionless as he watched.

Two men were hobbling their half dozen or more horses for the night.

One, travel-stained, with the glazed starch of dried horse-sweat on the calves of his trousers, muttered to the other: "This is the country where that Brown Flash runs, ain't it?"

The other rubbed the week-old growth on his chin, hitched his trousers, replied briefly: "Uh-huh."

"We'd better look out for our mares," the first continued. "I don't want no brumby stallion gettin' that there Lovelace. She's a mighty good mare."

"Let 'er go for a bit, Jake," the second suggested. "No stallion won't worry 'er while we're lookin'. We'll 'obble 'er before we go back to the camp."

"Then there's that other fellow, up the river," the first man added. "What's 'e like, Jim?"

"That Brown Flash works this country," Jim stated, moved to loquacity by an appeal to his greater knowledge. "He's taken a few mares from travelers what ain't careful. The other fellow, Thun'erbolt, 'e lives about twenty mile further up the river, out from Koolyane Water'ole. This 'ere Brown Flash gets 'is name on account er the way he strikes, like a streak o' lightnin'. He's about four year ol'. The other fellow's about eight year ol'. He's a 'eavy stallion, 'bout quarter draught, an' 'e smashes in like the way they named 'im."

"Why don't someone shoot 'em?"

"What's the good?" Jim demanded. "If you shot 'em there's a thousan' more waitin' to take the places they leaves. Them big-boss 'orses keeps the others un'er control a bit. But if ever them two meet," he added in hushed awe, "then there'll be somethin' doin' what ain't wrote in copybooks!"

"We'll let 'em feed for a hour or so," Jake suggested. "Then I'll catch Lovelace an' 'obble 'er an' bring 'er to the camp. I'm not runnin' any

chances with a mare like that with this 'ere Brown Flash."

Both men turned as if jerked by elastic. "Strike me dead!" one of them ejaculated as he spun to see the cause of the thunder of galloping hoofs. They stood for a second open-mouthed, struck silent by wonder, before Jake started to run toward his mare.

Brown Flash, hidden in the shadow of the gidyea, had taken full note of the men and horses. He marked Lovelace, a black mare of undoubted breeding. He desired her. He shot from the shelter of the tree, belly-to-earth, hoofs drumming the ground, tail streaming, mane flying in the wind and head outstretched. He galloped with an easy grace which threw distance behind him, with a strength which denoted power.

The men ran, shouted, cursed; the hobbled horses huddled together in quick fear; the mare Lovelace lopped her ears, jammed her tail tight, swung to lash the wolf who charged her.

Brown Flash swept in, stuttered in his stride as he collected the mare with the action of a swooping hawk taking a quail on the wing: two quick chops with his teeth, a squeal, and Lovelace was galloping across the small plain, driven by a demon in brown who steered her in the direction he wished to go, chopped her rump with teeth which lifted ribbons of hair when he urged her to added pace, with his head flung high to evade retaliatory kicks.

"That *was* Brown Flash, *that* was!" Jim muttered laconically.

The men made their plans, liberally interspersed with profanity, about recapturing the mare and dealing with Brown Flash. But as it was no use hunting in the dark, they decided to wait till the morrow.

Brown Flash drove Lovelace ahead of him. Before she reached the edge of the timbered country, less than a couple of hundred yards distant, she seemed to be completely under his control, guided by his will, driven where he wished to go. The sweat poured from her, ran down her ribs, dripped from her flanks, sprayed the stallion behind her. She rolled as she raced; but she did not slacken her speed.

The waiting mares quivered to the shock as she crashed into them. They did not wait: they knew what to do—they turned as one mare, galloped away as a mob.

Brown Flash raced to the lead of the mob about three miles on—he sped through them like a falcon through a flock of finches. He reared, squealed, struck blindly at nothing.

The mares understood that order: they stopped, stood about their lord to await his further orders. Lovelace was bathed in sweat, wild-eyed with fear, a flaccid thing so weak with terror she could not, even had she willed it, resist the advances made her by her captor. She was one of the mob!

Halfway through the following afternoon Jim and Jake, mounted on their best horses, found the mob about eight miles out from the river, feeding on a plain. They made their dispositions, generals that they were in the ways of horses.

Brown Flash threw up his head, snorted and stamped as soon as the men rode through the fringe of trees.

The mares snapped to attention, gazed, turned as one individual, controlled by one master-mind, raced for the timbered country. Lovelace was one of them—a wild thing, a brumby at heart, her generations of training shed overnight.

The timber was the best part of a mile away. Brown Flash raced behind his mob, used his teeth to urge laggards to added efforts. The leaders had disappeared in the timber, with Brown Flash still at the tail of the mob, when the blatant yell of a stallion told of a horse eager for conquest.

Brown Flash stretched out, released links of hidden speed, raced through his mob as a meteor cuts through still stars. No wandering stallion dare make approaches to *his* mares!

The two-day-old foal from the chestnut mare began to fail. That mare, fearful of the men, torn by mother-love, hesitated at the edge of the timber. She called to her foal; she stamped impatiently. Then, great in her courage, she returned to the aid of her baby! The men were closing in on the thing, intentions unknown: as they had lost Lovelace, they might have decided to take the foal in an effort to capture its mother. The mare, dripping sweat from the sudden rush of fear, came back to her baby, nuzzled it, snorted in weak defiance at the men.

While those men were edging their mounts toward the mare, in efforts to drive her back to their horses on the river, Brown Flash burst through the fringe of trees at the edge of the timber. He had ousted the presumptuous upstart who would court his mares; he steadied them in the safety of the shelter of the timber; he noted one of his favorites, the chestnut, was missing. The Law stated distinctly: *A stallion which owns a mob must at any time, under any conditions, be prepared to protect his mares!*

The foal, in the manner of the very young, silly with exhaustion, went to the nearest horse to it. That was a bay mare ridden by Jake. It followed that ridden horse when she turned. The chestnut mare, the mother, hovered about in a fever of uncertainty. The foal ignored her calls, continued to follow the ridden mare, and Jim, on his mount, closed in behind her in an effort to induce her to follow.

Brown Flash burst through the trees. The earth shook under him as he thundered over it; his mane flew in the wind, his tail streamed; his head was outstretched, ears lopped, teeth gleaming; and his eyes blazed no brighter than the flame of brown fire which was his coat! He charged straight at Jim, and man and horse cringed as they cowered from the fury which swept at them. He reared and smashed as a shutter clicks—and Jim's mount crumpled at the knees and fell, while the man spat gravel and curses from his lips as he staggered to his feet. Brown Flash gathered the chestnut mare and her foal in his stride; swept them before him as he chopped wildly at Jake's mount, lashed as he passed it. He shepherded that mare and foal till they were hidden in the timber, drove them before him till they were safe; turned and neighed his defiance at the men on the plain—one man mounted, one on foot, both disconsolate.

A couple of days later Brown Flash was imbued with a new idea. He seemed to count his mares, compare them with the numbers of other broods of which he may have heard. Judged by his later actions, almost it would appear he had heard of Thunderbolt and the mares of his brood. Brown Flash was about four years old, at the apex of his powers: what were a mere twenty-odd mares to a horse like him! He shook his head in the manner of one coming to a decision; he started at a steady trot, covering about eight miles an hour, running a line parallel with the river, heading northerly. Definitely, he knew where he was going, what he was going to do, and the mares stringing out behind him never questioned his authority.

He arrived at the spot at which he was aiming—went as straight as if directed by finger-posts on a line specially marked for him. It was at the edge of a little sand-hill, bauhinia and dead-finish trees scattered through the gidyea; radiating pads and heaps of dried manure told it was a favored camp of horses; the sun was about half-sky high, and the eternal winds from the southeast whistled as they waved the grasses before them.

Brown Flash stopped, while his mares spread in a semicircle behind him. He raised his head, let the wind play with his mane and tail, and he called a challenge. He added to his spoken words by his actions: he raked the earth with his fore-hoofs, threw streams of dust over his shoulders—

They closed again—closed in a fury of death-laden lashes, of smashing strikes, of teeth clashing.

which was the acknowledged challenge of any wild thing.

There was movement among the mares clustered in the shades of bauhinias and bloodwoods: they were shouldered aside as a bay stallion pushed his way through them.

He was a massive bay horse, heavy with a dash of draught blood; he was big without being ponderous, lithe in spite of his muscular development, masterful in his masculinity; he was a proven fighter by the scars on his ribs, by the number of his mares—about forty. He was heavy-headed, coarse, stiff-eared, and the wind which played about his legs rippled his feathering there as if to taunt him with his base breeding. That was Thunderbolt!

The mares dribbled out of the shadows like water draining through a colander. They stood prick-eared, eyes shining, waiting to see their lord assert his superiority again. Some looked past Thunderbolt to the stallion opposite; perhaps, in the feminine manner, some hearts might have flickered in admiration of the horse posed there. Others casually, disinterestedly, regarded Brown Flash's brood of mares—as if sizing up their style.

The two stallions stood clear of their mares, about twenty yards apart, and they went through the preliminaries of battle as ordained by etiquette. Each knew a deliberate challenge had been given and accepted; they knew there were no rules to govern the combat; they were aware death danced about them, rode on their withers; they also knew the prizes—death or mutilation for one; both broods of mares for the other.

They stood there, while the sun danced on them and the wind whisked about them, and their pounding hoofs lifted clouds of dust which the busy wind picked up and dispersed. Each chanced a quick back-look over his mares; then their eyes held without flinching. They were ready for battle.

Brown Flash picked up a pebble with his lips, played with it between his teeth, and tossed it aside with a flick of his head. He watched while Thunderbolt took a dry twig between his teeth, snapped it, spat it out.

They advanced. They came with mincing steps, necks arched, tails sweeping, flanks drawn as they breathed in great gusts; each horse tightened his muscles, kept his feet under him in perfect balance. Each advanced nostrils to smell the other—stertorous gasps which were a challenge in themselves. They reared, yelled, struck with stabbing teeth, smashed blindly with their forehoofs, wheeled on their hind-hoofs, dropped to the ground, swung and

Brown Flash turned, smelled his rival—from his quivering body to

lashed with an energy which cracked joints and strained muscles—did it all so fast one action was the continuation of the last, all complete in one comprehensive operation.

That completed the preliminaries. They had to be observed. With that observance the decks were cleared for action; the fight was on, no holds were barred, no action was too mean, death the determining factor.

Brown Flash struck—he licked in like a flame, rearing as he attacked. His breed, the thoroughbred, preferred that style of fighting—to stab and strike from above.

Thunderbolt, with an action so fast it belied his heavy build, dropped to his chest, his forelegs drawn back, his head weaving like a snake about to strike. The draught blood fought low, chest down, driving forward with weight.

Brown Flash struck, and the sound of his hoofs was like the muffled beating of a drum. He pirouetted on his hind toes, danced lightly, stabbed with his teeth at the bay fellow's withers. But as his teeth gripped the skin, before one outside hair was crushed, he felt Thunderbolt's teeth feeling for his stifle! He danced free, and a bare streak showed where the hair had been shaven from his stifle-joint.

Thunderbolt bored in with determination, using his weight, driving for the stifle—a hold which had given him many victories, brought death to several of his opponents. If he could get his teeth on that, a mighty wrench of his jaws, a twist with his massive head, would tear that stifle out—the equivalent of a kneecap in the body of a man.

The horses stood back and looked at each other. That first round had been strenuous. Thunderbolt shuffled his hoofs; Brown Flash danced on impatient feet. The sweat poured from them as it flowed in waves down their ribs, trickled from their flanks. A scarlet jet pulsed from a tear on Brown Flash's shoulder. Blood flowed sluggishly, mixed with the sweat and dripped a pink stream to the ground from Thunderbolt's ribs.

They closed again—closed in a fury of death-laden lashes, of smashing strikes, of teeth clashing like the sound of gigantic billiard-balls in action as a vicious stab was met by a stronger counter. They strained as they wrestled; a pink cloud of diffused blood and an acrid aura of sweat sprayed above them; the grass was chopped to chaff, the ground torn to dust beneath them.

They broke and stood back. Thunderbolt had a wound which gibbered horribly when he moved: a torn triangle of skin hung from his ribs, with live nerves writhing in agony as they twisted. Brown Flash limped noticeably on his off hindleg; a gash below his stifle told of a near miss; the stream which had jetted had eased its pulsations and was clotted in a mass of dried blood mixed with dust, to form a layer of mud.

the dark blood which oozed from him. He knew the job was done.

The mares quivered with excitement. They may have known they were spoils to the victor. They might have considered the victor of a combat such as this would be a worthy owner. Occasional ones indulged in squealing skirmishes when carried away by ardor and enthusiasm; most of them watched, heads low, ears pricked, eyes shining, motionless but for swinging tails to brush off flies.

A couple of crows perched on near trees and cawed their encouragement. Some hidden sense let those scavengers know death rode the air. They were ready to do their part after the combatants had finished. One crow cocked his head aside, noted the dark specks circling on high, which were eagles, and he may have gauged his chances of getting a quick fill from the corpse before the eagles came down to it. They cawed applause.

The wind held its breath in awe as it tried to linger to view the spectacle. Then, mindful of its duty, it bustled like a busy housewife: it brushed the dust from the arena, swept a litter of leaves ahead of its broom. More crows gathered on the trees, jeering raucously; the eagles dropped to lower levels in their mile-wide sweeps.

Several more rounds were fought. Thunderbolt was slowing. He fought on a full belly; Brown Flash had the morning run to put him in condition. Thunderbolt did not appreciate the lightning swiftness, the endless pounding, the determination with which the smaller horse lay up on him, struck with precision and skill.

The mares overflowed their mobs, mingled with others of the opposite brood. They watched intently.

Another round commenced. When the dust cleared from that hideous battle Thunderbolt had gone into the human equivalent of a double smother: he had his rump hard up against Brown Flash's chest, his tail under the neck. He, Thunderbolt, was too close to kick with effect at that distance—his lash would be nullified before it started. Brown Flash could not disengage for a vital stroke—to draw back laid him open to Thunderbolt's heels. It might not have been an acknowledgment of defeat; it was at least an admission he was sparring for time. That smother laid him open to a light attack—Brown Flash raked with his teeth, lifted ribbons of hair and skin.

There was a blur—literally, a flash of brown—as Brown Flash disengaged, sprang forward, gripped Thunderbolt at the nape of the neck, just in front of the withers.

Thunderbolt utilized the only counter to that numbing hold on his nerve-center: he spread his legs and stood still, though the water ran from him in his dread of defeat.

Brown Flash stood, braced himself and gripped. He shook as a dog might worry a rat. He was powerless while the other horse stood still. He realized his impotence. Fine general that he was, he loosed his grip, jumped back, turned to the mares—all in one action.

Thunderbolt knew how close he had been to death. As soon as that numbing grip was released he shot forward, doubled as his hoofs gripped the earth, lumbered slightly as he galloped away. His base breeding would not stand the strain; he knew of other mobs he could conquer; in his exhausted state mares did not enter his consideration. He fled.

But he had not taken two paces before Brown Flash wheeled, ranged up beside him and struck with certainty at the neck!

Thunderbolt was in action: that grip was effective! He stumbled as the pressure was applied, buckled at the knees as his sinews were numbed, and, with a crash and a belch of wind, he toppled over and smashed to the ground! He lay there, his breath coming in strangling sobs, his ribs rising and falling as he pumped air to his heated lungs.

Brown Flash screamed his triumph. He struck at the body on the ground, and the crack of breaking ribs echoed the thud of his fore-hoofs. He wheeled, measured his distance, and, whether by accident or design, sent two grass-skimming kicks laden with death toward his opponent. One landed on Thunderbolt's doubled neck; the other cracked like a pistol shot as it smashed in the center of the horse's forehead.

Brown Flash turned, smelled his rival over—from his quivering body to the dark blood which oozed from his nostrils and open mouth. He knew the job was done!

Brown Flash neighed his triumph—a blatant call of conquest. He brushed past Lovelace; she extended her nostrils to his, her eyes great with the glory of admiration. He had work to do. He could attend to minor matters at any time.

He swept round those two mobs of mares, merged them into one body, and in his pride he hid his limp as best he could. He stalked through them, his head high, his tail arched. He hunted those which did not find favor in his sight—drove them with chopping bites which plainly told his meaning.

Then, his mob tidied to his satisfaction, he thought of himself. He was wounded, sore, bruised, bleeding, disheveled. Mainly, he was thirsty. He limped noticeably as he strode from the mob, not one glance behind him, sure in the knowledge they would follow, as he started toward the waterholes in the river. He would go to the fringe of the gidyeas, rest there till it was dark enough for him to slake the frightful thirst which tortured him.

MERCHANT FROM

THE river Peneus was a lovely, stately stream here, close to the Aegean Sea. And although its current might grow brawling in its higher reaches, it was navigable well into the broad Thessalian plain, so Yason said. Here, with the masses of Pelion and Ossa on the left, Olympus on the right, the broad-beamed, shallow-drafted Cretan ship rode safely, high on the freely flowing water.

The trader Karneos stared eagerly at the shores, his brown eyes alight with interest under the heavy brows. Lush with spring grasses, dotted with nodding flowers, this vale of Tempe was a spot of loveliness indeed. But the swarthy brow knit into a scowl; they had not sailed and rowed all the way from Crete to Thessaly to look at flowers. Karneos turned abruptly to the slave Yason.

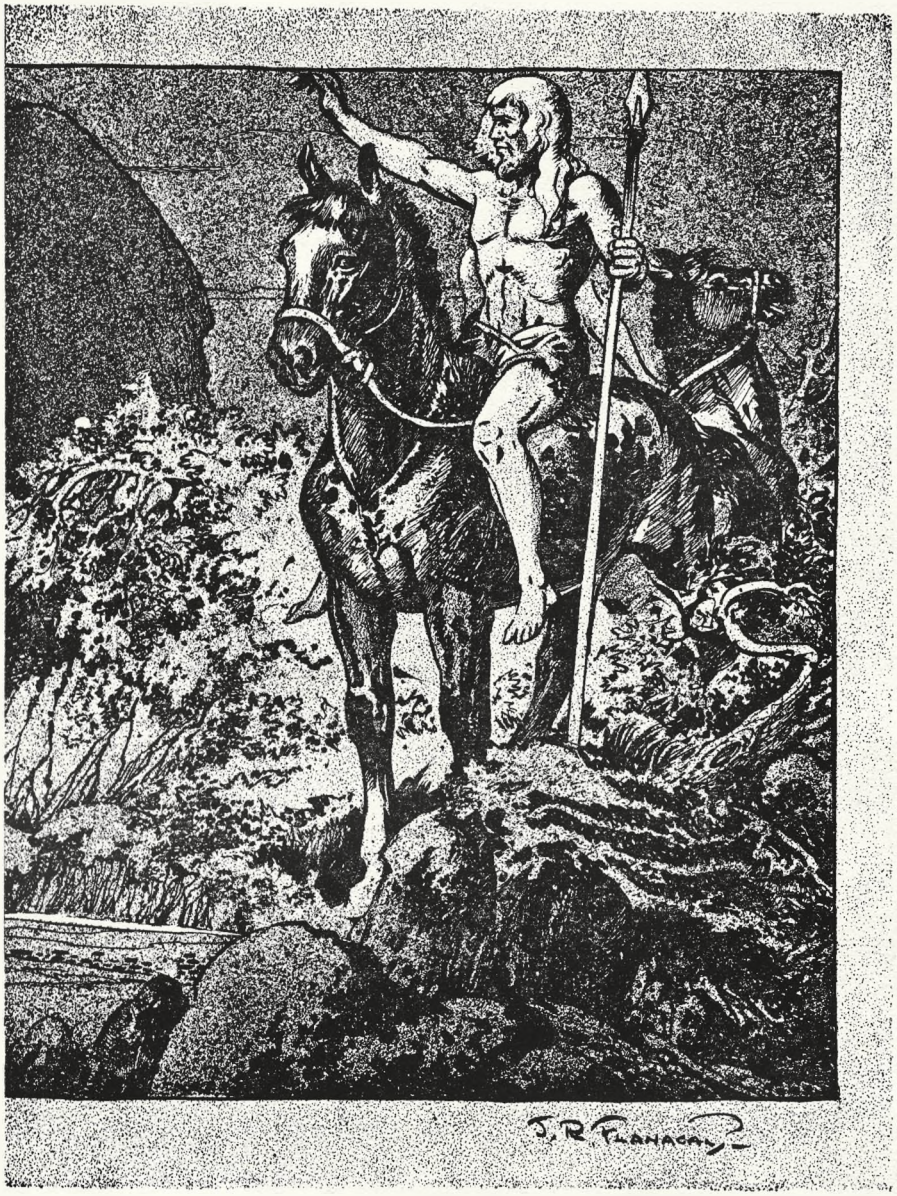
"Hey, fellow," asked the swart Minoan, "are there no people in all this vale? I've seen neither village nor inhabitant."

Yason shook back his mop of yellow hair from his wide, pale forehead. He looked at the shore, his gray eyes pensive with hidden worry. "My people lived here once," he said forlornly. "What has happened in the six years since I was captured and sold, I know not. Still, we are scarce within the coastal range of hills that ring the vale and the plains of Thessaly."

"That mountain there," inquired Karneos, pointing with his chin in Minoan fashion, "what's its name?" His hand rested lightly on the hilt of the great bronze sword in the arms-rack at the bow, as he looked at the distant mass off their larboard bow.

"Pelion," said Yason. "The nearer, Ossa. On the other side of us, Olympus, where the gods dwell."

"Blasphemy!" ejaculated the startled merchant. "The gods dwell not on a mount in far barbaric Thessaly; Ida is their home!"



A STIRRING DRAMA OF CONFLICT BETWEEN TWO FINE ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS.

CRETE

Illustrated by JOHN RICHARD FLANAGAN

by KENNETH CASSENS

"Have you seen them there?" asked the slave, the words bordering on impudence.

The squat, tough-muscled trader glared up at the four-cubit height of his slave. "Did I not need your tongue here," rasped Karneos, "I'd see if a dozen lashes would curb it! I've a mind to mutilate you, that you may be rendered more obedient!"

The slave's gray eyes glowed with a light that was close to feral for a moment. But the stoop of his head and shoulders was obedient, to outward sight. "I'll agree that your gods of bull and serpent dwell on Ida," said Yason pacifically. "But ours, bright-ness-dwelling Zeus and ox-eyed Hera, wise Athene, thunder-forging Hephæstus and swift Hermes, these and their companions dwell on Mount Olympus, in a wondrous palace far above the snows."

"They were born on Ida, at least," grumbled the trader. "Or so I've heard, of this Zeus of yours."

The merchant turned his gaze again to the loveliness of the shore. Then his jaw dropped, the wispy beard wagging, his eyes half-started from his head. A horse was galloping swiftly past, a naked man growing out of the white-spotted red back. A second like animal cantered easily behind, his human growth easing to the pace, yelling while the horse part of the animal neighed challenge to the strange craft surging over the bright water of the river.

Yason was calling now, waving his light-skinned arms widely, his voice carrying above the chuckle of waves against the loose shale of the shore. The horses wheeled sharply, and stood still, outlined against the forest at their backs. Their spear-carrying naked riders watched the ship, while the Minoan trader stood with bulging eyes, too startled to speak a word.

Now the human figures were shouting in their turn.

"They are of my people!" cried Yason in Minoan. "Put in to shore, quickly, Kar—my master."

"I give the orders here," said Karneos curtly, recovering somewhat from his surprise. "But—you told me not that your people were half horse, half man. You yourself, Yason, seem fully human."

"They are, likewise," replied Yason, his lip curling slightly. "They but ride the horses. I'd forgotten that I'd seen horses used as draft animals only, in Sidon and on Crete. We mount their backs here, letting them bear us swiftly in the chase or in war."

"And the horses do not fling them from their backs?" asked Karneos.

"Not once they learn their riders' persistence, and their will," said Yason. "They lift their hands in sign of peace, if you wish to put in to shore."

"Put in, men," directed the trader, clipping the words as the helmsman swung his ready oar.

The grateful quartet of oarsmen strained at the sweeps, glad to see surcease so close at hand. Lampos, smith as well as oarsman, turned his hook-nosed countenance to look curiously at the shore, missing never a stroke as the bow surged up to grate on the shingle of a small beach, nestled between ledges surmounted by grassy banks. Another oarsman, Hiketaon, leaped ashore with a rope, making it fast to a small tree.

The curious riders, their faces pallid in comparison to the swarthy Minoans, were at the shore now. They exchanged eager questions and answers with the slave Yason, the blurred syllables liquid as the water rippling past. Karneos saw the bright-skinned

Thessalians glaring at him for a moment, and stood closer to the bows racked forward of the mast and the furled sail. But after much shaking and nodding, the knit brows smoothed again; and Karneos saw that the strange riders intended him and his craft no immediate harm.

"I told them," explained Yason, "that you are here to trade with them, with much fine merchandise and many new weapons. I told them also that I was your slave; but that you had treated me fairly, with good food and few beatings and threats. They proffered rescue—remember, my master, I need not have told you this; but I told them you had bought me out of hopelessness among the Phœnicians, and that I wished no wrong to be done you. But they will redeem me with gold or other merchandise ere you leave this shore."

"You have me in the smith's tongs, and they heated," said the trader sourly. "Gold will buy many slaves; but few of your speech and nation. I searched for years, wishing long to trade with Thessaly, ere I purchased you from Sidon's slave mart."

"I am grateful for that purchase," answered Yason simply. "For it meant that I could once more see my homeland. It is for that that I bade them spare you. There are twenty horsemen, spear-armed, ready for attack, hid by that coppice on the hill's brow, there."

Karneos shrugged a wool-clad shoulder. "I've walked close to death's jaws before," he said. "It's all in the day's work for a trader in far places, like me. A merchant's life is peaceful in some city mart, barring a brawl now and then to keep him from growing too fat. But a wandering trader like me prefers a full life to a long one. Will they trade with us?"

Yason spoke rapidly, and at some length. A few of the words were familiar; and Karneos had the feeling that with enough of listening, he would be able to fathom the barbarous words of their tongue, and understand what they said. It was neither Pelasgian nor Attic Greek, but it had the same ring to it, barring a few strange syllables.

"If you will it," said Yason finally, "they will gather the tribe beyond the meadow nearby to see your stock in trade. I've told them already you have many wonders in your hold."

"Bid them come," acquiesced the trader. "What have they to offer us?"

"Cured skins of beasts; gold from the mountain streams; horses," replied Yason. "If you wish it, they'll raid a Macedonian village for captives, that you may have slaves for the market at Knossos."

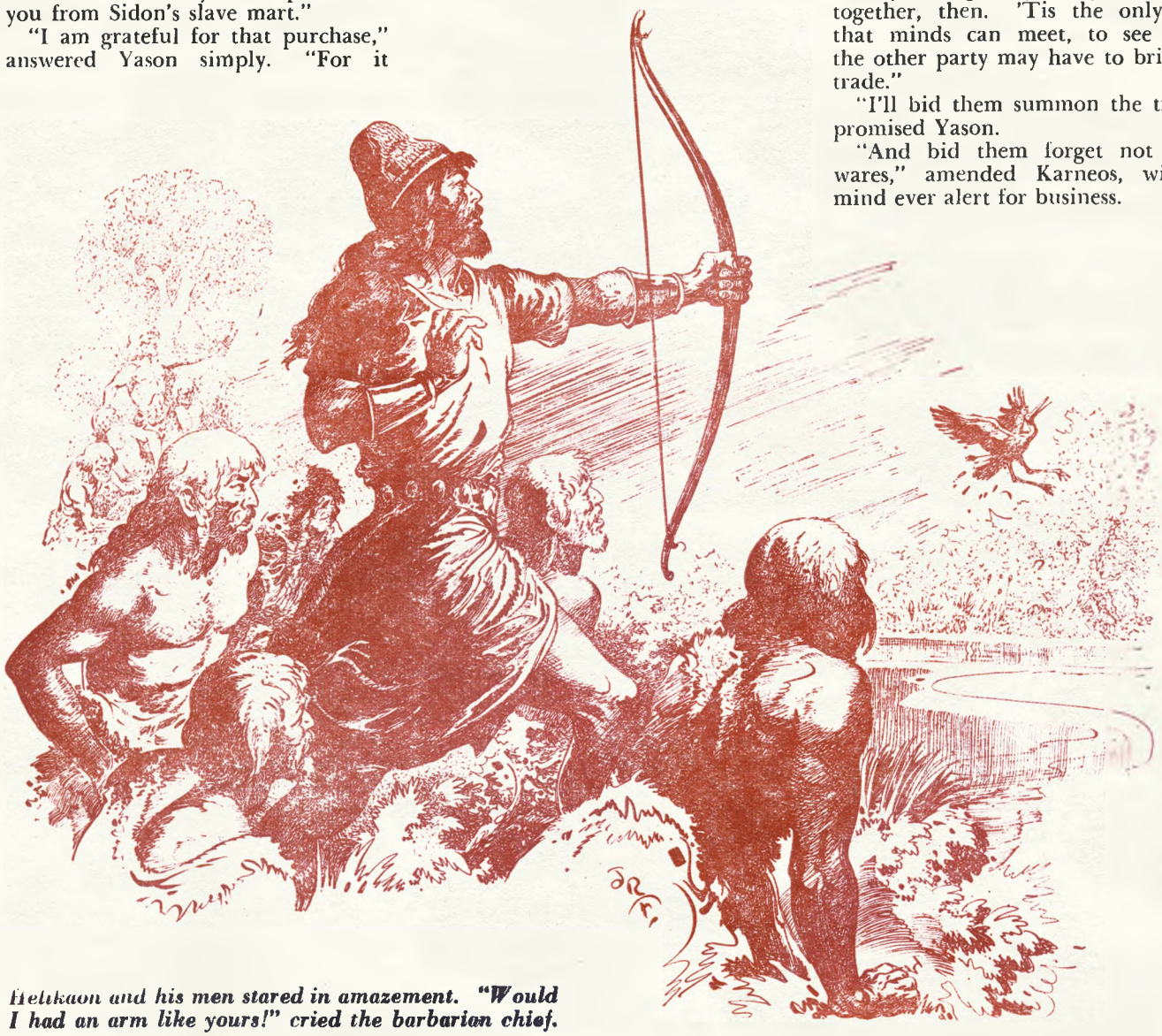
"No tin?" asked the trader sharply, mindful of the tin-hunger of Minoa, dependent on bronze for weapons and for all objects demanding hard metal. "I want no merchandise I have to feed; never mind the horses or slaves."

"My people know nothing of tin, or of mining," replied the Thessalian slave. "I myself knew nothing of it until Lampos, here, showed me its nature and use. There may be pebbles of tin in the streams, or lodes like those of Attica in the mountains that ring us in; but we know little of metals, and nothing of the arts of mining."

"I see," answered Karneos. "Eh, well, you've gold, you say. Bring us together, then. 'Tis the only way that minds can meet, to see what the other party may have to bring in trade."

"I'll bid them summon the tribe," promised Yason.

"And bid them forget not their wares," amended Karneos, with a mind ever alert for business.



Heltkaon and his men stared in amazement. "Would I had an arm like yours!" cried the barbarian chief.

The meadow was wide, its soil moist with many seeping springs in the waving lush grass that covered it. But at its edge was firmer ground, cleared by nature or by forgotten men to form a fairly large amphitheater, covering perhaps two acres of sod-soft ground. Tongues of forest jutted into its circumference here and there: birch or oak or darker fir and pine. It was here the barbarians pitched their village, half in and half out of the woods. The skilled fingers of the women wove wattle-and-daub huts quickly, rising as if they grew from invisible roots. Muddy children grubbed for clay beneath the red soil, stripping the sod away and leaving waist-deep pits here and there to trap unwary strollers. They carried lumps of it to their hut-building mothers, with nothing but mud to cover their nudity.

The men of the tribe were little better off; they had skins of animals to serve for breech-clouts, but only hardened calluses protected their feet from the occasionally rocky ground of the hillslopes at their backs. The women wore skins likewise, but carelessly, so that their breasts were often half or entirely exposed. This was no matter for shock of comment to the Minoans; Cretan fashions left their women's breasts, if pleasing, entirely bare.

Only some wrinkled beldame made any shift to cover herself in that springtime of the race of men. The white skins of the tribe, however, were a novelty to the Cretans; these pallid folk seemed close to wraithlike in dusk or gloom. But they were solid enough, with a rugged health that belied the pallor of their skins. Eh, well, the world had many stocks, reflected Karneos. Likely the gods placed such people in the far northern forests to counterbalance the grossly black-skinned inhabitants of Africa.

As for himself, he liked better the Cretan women, with their skins of dark olive, their large and expressive eyes of brown, and their glossy raven-wing blue-black hair. Here most of the women had hair of spun gold or of autumn-leaf brown; interesting, but not the stuff to trap a man's heart like a spider-web a fly.

The chief of the tribe he discovered to be one Helikaon, a massive, good-natured fellow; red of hair and beard, glowing like a frost-smitten tree when the sunlight touched him. The chieftain's shoulders hulked broad, and his powerful arms could fling a javelin half again as far as the best man of the tribe. Nor were their javelins, stone-tipped, as light as the Cretans' metal-tipped weapons.

The men of the tribe were forever at their sports of arms or hunting, while the women built the huts, prepared the meals, attended to the pelts of trapped or spear-killed animals, and did all the basic labor of the camp. Karneos tried some of their sports; but even his gymnast's training, common to all Minoans, left him like a child in comparison with their excellence. Some of his weapons and knowledge, however, the trader kept in reserve against the time of bargaining.

One fellow in the camp took no part in all their sport. He was the only man of the tribe bigger than the chief; a giant of a man who squatted always by the same tree, nearly naked, piling pebbles or twigs endlessly on one another. His back was broad and strong; his legs writhed with muscles; his long arms were like tree-limbs, tipped with clutching fingers that bore nails grotesquely long. But almost invisible eyes peered from under ape-like brows, with no sign of intelligence on the sullen face with its matted beard of amber brown.

"Who is that fellow, Yason?" asked the Cretan. "Why does he squat there

"This is my brother Diklaos! . . . Speak to me, Diklaos!"

While the giant's arms were flung wide in utter surprise, Karneos laid a stinging blow on the madman's head.

always, engaging in neither sport nor labor?"

The Thessalian's rippling question brought quick answer.

"He's Kous the madman," reported Yason. "He's the champion of the tribe in battle, but takes no other interest in life. A tree fell on him in childhood, and he's been like this for all his days, ever since."

"How can he fight, with his mind blank?" asked the wondering trader.

"Once a club is in his hands, the frenzy takes him," explained the slave. "Then no man is safe who dares face him, not even his friends, until the mad fit passes. He has fought the champions of many tribes, killing them all, and sparing this tribe much battle by his prowess. No man has chased him yet, or laced him and lived."

"I see," commented Karneos indifferently. "When shall we begin our trading, Yason?"

"Soon, now. With tomorrow's sun, the tribe will have an hour of games. Then Helikaon and the other men will be ready for dickering."

Busy indeed was the remainder of the afternoon, and even Karneos himself bore burdens of pottery, weapons and gewgaws of many kinds to the booth erected for him at the field of trading. There was no pilferage; the Thessalian folk were thoroughly honest, a trait common to many primitive folk. For this, Karneos was thankful: he had seen many more civilized nations whose men and boys would steal hot bronze from a smith's forge, and carry it off in their mouths, if necessary, for the sheer delight of larceny.

During the day words grew familiar to his ears. Disjointed syllables were becoming meaningful words; and words were joined into phrases. The strange terms resolved to similarity to more familiar Hellenic tongues, and

simple phrases became intelligible to the trader. . . .

At last the dawn came, and the games began. There were many horse races, with much shouting and flung clods from the flying hoofs; javelin throwing, wrestling, and similar sports. There was likewise a sort of punching with fists that could never be termed boxing. Each contestant was concerned only with maiming his opponent, reckoning defence a waste of blows and energy. Indeed, a great deal of it was a mere trading of buffets, one man knocking his fellow down, and being smitten in his turn until one could no longer rise from the ground. Karneos wrinkled his dark nose at their lack of science, but the Thessalians whooped with delight at this exhibition of completely unskilled strength.

At the second casting of javelins, Karneos unlimbered one of his reserved secrets. He stepped behind a fabric curtain that divided his booth, and brought out one of the stocky, powerful Cretan bows. A score or more of others reposed out of sight under the fabric, ready for later trading. He watched the men of the tribe hurl their stone-tipped javelins, one by one, with varying luck and skill.

Then Helikaon stepped up to the toe-drawn line, and with a whirl and a grunt, sent his weapon flinging out across the marshy meadow. It struck the ground far beyond the best previous cast; and a heron squawked, then fluttered a score of cubits beyond the still vibrating shaft.

Karneos was ready now. He bent the stout wood of his bow, slipping the string's loop into the ready notch. Then he wound light tapes of leather about his left wrist, and tested the bow's pull, finding it even and good. He eyed his arrow's length; it was straight, well-fletched, and balanced for true and accurate flight. Fitting the notch to the waxed cord, he drew back steadily, squinting past the arrow to the bobbing long neck and awkward walk of the disturbed heron. Then, with a sweet, sharp twang, the bowstring slapped at his left wrist, the arrow sailing straight and true in its soaring flight.

The heron jerked suddenly into the air, and fell in a squirming heap, transfixed by the flying bolt. Helikaon and his men stared in blank amazement at the result, jaws sagging at the length of the cast and the death of the luckless waterfowl.

"*Hei,*" cried the barbarian chief, "would I had an arm like yours!"

"'Tis in my arm's extension that the strength is found," admitted the Cretan trader. Then he explained the nature and function of the bow. His command of Thessalian proved halting, yet; and he had to resort to Yason's interpreting to get his meaning across.

"Could I try this wondrous weapon?" asked Helikaon, his face eager.

Karneos grinned; sales were sure now. He fitted the tapelike thongs to Helikaon's stout wrist; and the chief, under the Minoan's tutelage, bent a bow for the first time. His arrow skittered weakly through the grass of the meadow. But the chief laughed in triumph, and bent the bow again, intent on mastering the new weapon.

Never a man to let interest lag, Karneos left his assistants to handle the suddenly brisk trade in bows and gay quivers and arrows that were, truth to tell, neither so straight nor so well-fletched as those the trader had chosen for his own use. The villagers brought in exchange fine pelts of animals, well tanned, including even a few of the precious ermine, the fur of kings. Nuggets of gold from hillslope streams came in by ones and twos, and some sphalerite, an ore of zinc, was proffered—but refused by the smith Lampos, who did not know or recognize the stuff as metal of any value. Rough necklaces of gold from the necks of men and women were proffered and accepted too; and only the entire lack of tin was a disappointment. But the trip was by no means profitless, even at this stage of the chaffering.

Karneos, after polishing it highly with a rag of linen, came out with a bronze mirror, intent on catching the interest of the women of the tribe.

"Yason," he called.

"Sir?" The term the lad used was no longer "master"; it was plain he savored his incipient freedom.

"Which of these ladies is the queen—wife to the chieftain—Yason?" asked the trader. "Or his principal wife, if the fellow has many."

"We are monogamous," replied Yason, scanning the crowd. "Come," he said.

He led the merchant to a mature, alert-eyed woman who might have served as a sculptor's model of a goddess of lusty, busty, full-fashioned health.

"Leukippa," said Yason, "my master, Karneos, seeks you with a gift."

Karneos held up a hand when Yason would have interpreted. "I understand the words," he said, "though my tongue is still clumsy."

He held out the tiny mirror to the queen, who looked curiously at the highly polished three-inch oval surface. Then Leukippa screamed, flinging the bit of metal from her, and putting her hands over her startled blue eyes.

"It is my mother!" she cried. "Dead these fifteen years!"

Karneos, bewildered at the turn of events, stooped for the mirror. As he plucked it from the sod, the woman drew back in fear. Helikaon, hearing her cry, came striding across the greensward.

"What cry was that?" he demanded.

"The trader is a wizard," sobbed Leukippa. "He showed me a piece of metal, and it bore the image of my mother, long dead."

Karneos, wary and disturbed, yet unable to avoid passing the mirror to the chief, placed it in the barbarian's extended hand.

"Fool!" blurted Helikaon at a first glimpse of his own red-bearded face in the tiny mirror. "This is not your mother; it is my brother Diklaos, whom I haven't seen since we jointly raided the Macedonians three springs ago. Speak to me, Diklaos, that I may know it is well with thee! Wizard, cause my brother to speak, since you caused him to appear."

"*Hei,*" sighed Karneos. "Who knows what may rise in a day's trading? Yason—be my lips and tongue, and tell the chief that he sees not his brother, but the reflection of his own face."

"Aho! So you've trapped my shadow in your magic plate, eh?" cried the incensed chieftain. "Let my shadow go at once, wizard—or have you bereft me of it forever?"

"I can't!" mourned Karneos, too filled with surprise for his wits to work quickly.

"If he's a wizard, let him fight Kous," cried a voice from the crowd.

"He must be a wizard," insisted another. "Did he not make a heron fly onto the end of his arrow, when I can scarcely hit the marsh with the confounded things?"

The men were crowding thickly now, as much for the sport of baiting the stranger as in any real belief in his powers, for if they had really believed their own accusation, they would have feared him and fled.

"Fight Kous, wizard, and let us see whether you have power against our champion!" jeered another voice.

"Kous! Aye, let him fight Kous!" came repeated demands.

The madman lifted his shaggy, apelike head. Hearing the repeated calling of his name, he came shambling toward the trading site, his face and naked torso reddened with excitement. Thick veins stood gorged over his reddened temples.

It was a chant, now. "Kous! Give the madman a club! Fight Kous! Fight Kous! Fight Kous!"

"Eh, well," said Karneos philosophically, "better for my bones to lie in this distant land than to have seen nothing but the slopes of Ida. Lampos, fetch me the great sword!"

The smith trotted out obediently with a long stout-bladed sword. The groove down the blade's center bore wondrous pictures of lions and struggling men, of gold and silver and the alloy of both called electrum, plated to the bronze of the massive blade. Karneos quickly fitted sponge-pads to his head, and drew on a gleaming bronze helmet that curved down to his neck in back, and ended in a short nose-protecting frontlet between his dark, fiercely glowing eyes. He rejected a targe of bronze, choosing a lighter one of tough bull-hide.

Back the crowd pressed, leaving a cleared space in their middle. The madman, a great club in his hands, yelled horribly. He dashed his club against the ground, peering from under lowered brows to find his enemy.

"Yason, did you twist my words to work this treachery?" gritted the merchant. "An I live, I'll have your heart for this!"

"Nay," cried the slave. "Run—I'll cover your retreat. I know the use of arrows."

"Run, and have Minoa shamed?" shouted the trader. "Never! Bull and Serpent, *no!*" And Karneos ran into the cleared space, his targe high, watching the giant lumber toward him. The madman's face was working fiercely, and great muscles rippled under his white skin.

The club whistled at the trader's head, and Karneos ducked under the blow, leaning almost to the ground, like a stand of scythe-smitten rye. Then he was upright again, flailing at the mad giant's club-hand, even as he avoided the clutching fingers of the other.

Missing, Karneos leaped back, the madman peering about for him in rage and bafflement. *Hei*, these barbarian adult children fought as they boxed: with many a whistling blow, but intent only on giving damage, with no science, and no recking of defense or avoiding damage in their turn. The trader's grim snarl relaxed, to become replaced with the beginnings of a confident smile.

Karneos knew the secret of victory now, and reckoned the battle already half won. He went in quickly, and the child-minded madman swung a club-blow that would have felled an oak, had it landed. Instead, the Cretan swayed back, letting the swinging club pass him, missing by a palm-breadth. Then, as the giant swung off balance, the trader skipped deftly to his side and walloped the madman's back mightily with the flat of his great sword.

Kous yelled as if a hot bolt from the forge of Hephæstus had taken him, flaying his back. He swung toward his tormentor, foam flecking his writhing lips. Karneos voided the spot where he stood, slamming home with a mighty blow at the giant's buttocks as the massive madman plunged on past. The flat of the sword set up a clapping of echoes among the trees, and Kous plunged toward the crowd like an avalanche.

The crowd ran wildly, clearing a lane for the ineffective charge. Kous went through the trader's booth as if it were twigs, and not tough wattle, scattering goods and assistants in every direction. Heels lifted nimbly as Cretans and Thessalians alike ran from before the wildly flailing club. They peered apprehensively from sheltering boles of the nearby trees.

The trader, angered at the destruction, yelled in his turn. "Run, madman," he cried, "or I hew instead of smiting with the flat!"

But he still smote with the flat of the blade, his blows slapping like a hundred flails on the giant's now bloody back, driving him like an ox ahead of him. But Kous turned in spite of the blows, and Karneos slipped away, narrowly avoiding a slime-pit from which clay had been taken to daub the wattle huts.

A sudden thought took form; and Karneos yelled defiance, brandishing his sword from the far side of the mire-pit, now more than half-filled with water from seepage. Kous ran toward him blindly, shouting unintelligible gibberish in his foaming rage—and plunged waist-deep into the slippery pit, his feet held fast by the plunge into the mire.

While the giant's arms were flung wide in utter surprise, Karneos stepped in blithely. Dropping his shield, he laid a stinging two-handed blow of the sword on the madman's head. The ground beneath his feet shook with the fellow's fall. The snag-toothed mouth gaped foolishly; the eyes rolled back into the madman's head, showing only the blood-shot whites.

The Cretan caught at the unconscious man, holding his head above the pit's water, until the great hands began to clutch weakly and the head to bob again. Then he stepped back, kicking the great club out of his victim's reach. A great shout welled up from the watching barbarians—a shout with praise for the Cretan conqueror in it, and no venom.

"A champion indeed," they cried. "He beat Kous, which no man ever did before!" "Aye, and spared his life, though he might have slain him a dozen times!"

The women prepared a garland of shrub leaves, which Helikaon pressed on the bronze helmet. But the Cretan did not relax his gaze from the recovering giant. The blue eyes had opened, but their fixed and blood-shot feral glare had changed. A great bewilderment was there in their stead.

"Mother—sent me for—clay to daub her hut—the tree," he was gasping. "The tree—falling—run—where am I? What has happened?"

"The dark man beat you, Kous," cried an impudent youngster, flinging mud into the defeated giant's face.

"Let be!" thundered Karneos. "Mock him not! Something has happened."

The giant Kous was pulling himself out of the slime now. "You—you hit me, and the light came back into my heart," he marveled. "I—you are a great wizard: I will always be your willing slave. You brought back the light." And he flung himself at the trader's feet.

The barbarians were crowding about now, proffering skins and golden nuggets for even the fragments of his stock. Bronze swords and spear-points followed the bows in fantastically hurried trading. His victory over Kous had made the Cretan a great man, and the Thessalians proffered him all they had.

Then Yason came, his palms weighted down by nuggets of massy gold. "My ransom, master," he said simply. A great light was in his eyes.

"Keep back the half," directed Karneos. "And let us part as friends, not as master and ex-slave."

Yason's hand was out, in the Hellenic fashion, and they gripped gladly.

The squat Cretan ship was laden indeed as she slipped down the wide waters of the Peneus toward the gulf and the open sea. Kous, refusing to remain behind, hunkered happily in the bow, a gay loincloth—not the black of a slave—wrapped about him. He steadily refused to wear a robe.

Ossa slipped past, and Olympus; and the sea-waves lifted the blunt bow. The rowers shipped oars, and hoisted the many-colored sail. It bellied away from the mast, and the water hissed astern under the impulse of a following wind, standing fair for Crete.

"*Hei*," said Lampos, looking up from a game played with the other rowers with stones on a geometrical figure, "we've a king's ransom in her; goods to grant us a year of ease and luxury!"

"Aye," answered Karneos. "If I seek to put out again in a month, you'll not be with me, eh?"

"And miss another such adventure as we had in Thessaly? Leave me behind if you dare!" cried Lampos, incensed at the thought.

Karneos grinned. "Adventure? Why, that was merely part of the day's work." His eyes were twinkling.

The trader's heart was well content; serene with the thought of summer days and widening seas ahead.

Illustrated by William Heaslip

Flat Spin

An aircraft factory is the scene of this unusual mystery by the author of "Bright Scarlet."

by GRANGE LEWIS

OUR little needle-nosed XF made one pass at the field, swept by us with a rumbling hiss, then darted skyward as though it were homesick for the moon. Fine—that was the way we'd planned for it to behave. I know that as I watched the performance, I was feeling happy and exhilarated, just like a proud father seeing his son run off his fifth touchdown against Notre Dame. Then, at about five thousand feet, the plane faltered, went into a hammerhead stall, and after that, proceeded to stagger all over the sky!

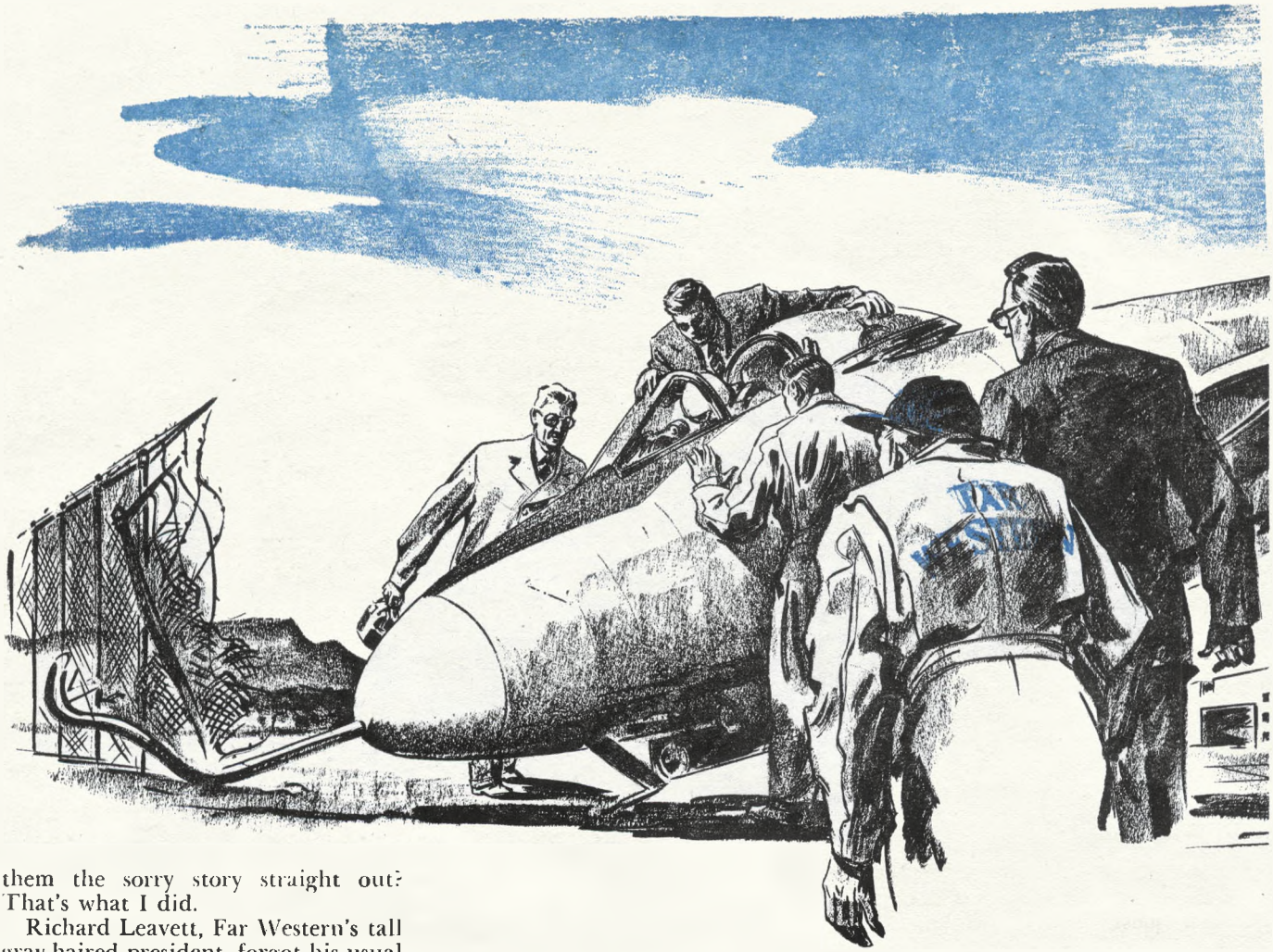
That moment was bad. It came with sudden, frightening shock. As the hairs on the back of my neck stood up, and my chest became stuffed with cotton waste, I grabbed for the control-tower microphone. I found myself shouting. The answering roar which came in over my earphones nearly deafened me.

"What in the name of the seven devils did you think you were using for a hydraulic system on this plane?" The voice belonged to Bob Hughson, our chief test pilot, who was flying the XF. "The aileron booster is frozen, the dive flaps won't work, and the hydraulic pressure is dancing from two hundred pounds to twelve hundred. Correction: it just dropped to zero."

I stood there in Far Western Aviation's control-tower, and my mind stopped working. My lips began to grow numb the way they do when I'm under extreme tension, and I bit them hard in the hope that a little pain would jolt my brain back into activity. "Bob, use the emergency hand-pump," I managed to say. "Drop the landing-gear and come back in as fast as you can make it."

After a long silence, I heard bitter, agonized profanity. "The handle of this damned hand-pump is fully extended. I'm shoving on it with everything I've got. I could move a fence-post set in concrete just about as easily. . . . Spence," he said, "there is not a single hydraulic line on this ship that isn't partly or wholly plugged up. I've never handled a sabotaged ship before, but man, have I got one on my hands now!"

There was a chair behind me and I sat down hard. My knees had become too limp to hold me up any longer. The realization came that I, Spence Hurley, was responsible for the fix Bob Hughson was in, for as head of engineering flight, I'd been in charge of the final phase of preparing his ship for the air. I was further conscious that the room behind me was filled with engineers and executives, men who had labored in the development of the XF for five long years. What could I do but give



them the sorry story straight out? That's what I did.

Richard Leavett, Far Western's tall gray-haired president, forgot his usual sardonic humor now. He—in fact, all of us there—knew that if the XF didn't pan out, it meant the end for our company. There'd be no other contracts for us. That is why my admiration for Leavett was never greater than when he gave his order:

"Tell Hughson not to risk his neck if the XF is going to pieces. Tell him to use his 'chute and let the plane go."

A grim silence filled the room, but there was no audible protest from the men.

When I relayed the message to Bob Hughson, however, all I drew was a defiant grunt. At last he said, "Be damned if I'm going to let this baby crash. It's our bread-and-butter ship!"

I fought against the rise of an impossible hope. "Jump!" I said.

"Tell Mr. Leavett to give me half an hour. I've got about enough fuel to last me that long, and the engine's still turning over. Look, I'll give you the facts. The hydraulic pump is completely burned out, but I'm working on the hand-pump. Sometimes it binds so I can hardly move it, and then it frees for about eight or ten good strokes before it freezes up again. The gear's down slightly. If it'll lower all the way in half an hour, I'll land. If it won't, I'll jump. But I'm staying up until the last cat is hung. Get it?"

"What's the difference? You still won't have any flaps—and no brakes either. The field won't be long enough for you."

"Maybe—maybe not. If I run out of field, that lower fence will always stop me. It's good stout steel mesh. Anyway, I'm not hitting the silk now, orders or no orders!"

When I told Mr. Leavett what Bob had said, he swung into action in characteristic fashion. "All right," he snapped; "Hughson asks for half an hour. We'll give it to him, and in the meantime, we'll do all we can to improve his chances. I want a roadblock thrown across the highway below the field, in order to stop all auto traffic. If Hughson can manage a forty-five-degree turn down the highway, it might serve as an auxiliary strip for him."

"How is he going to pry his way through the steel fence?"

"Rush a maintenance crew down there with their heaviest cutters. I want that fence down. Get a load of acetylene, and pull out all the boys in the welding department with their cutting torches. This leaves us the ditch alongside the road to fill up. Call that sand-and-gravel company across the way to start some trucks of heavy gravel rolling—and within five minutes, too. Somebody inform Bob Hughson of what we're doing."

Some of us grabbed phones, and the rest of us sprinted for the end of the runway. In a couple of minutes, the company trucks started to disgorge their crews. Our little XF had seized everybody's imagination to such a degree that when the boys learned that it was up to them to help save Hughson and the ship, they went to work with frenzied eagerness.

The first gravel truck didn't show up for fifteen minutes. At that, I suppose you could call it fast action. And after that first truck had swung about, backed up, dumped its load, and moved out of the way, my heart dropped clear down to the pit of my stomach. The gravel made no apparent difference in the depth of the ditch.

Perhaps ten feet across, the ditch was eight feet deep, and muddy. It looked to me as though twenty-five loads of gravel would be the minimum to form a narrow bridge between field and highway. There just wasn't enough time!

But all of us had tools in our hands, and were feverishly raking and tamping. Although the trucks, once started, kept coming, there were ex-

I pulled my head abruptly out of the cockpit. "Doctor!" I cried.

asperating waits while they maneuvered into position for unloading. By the time the steel fence went down, a half-hour after the start of our effort, we still had a fourth of the ditch to fill in.

A loud shout stopped us. "He's coming in!"

Glancing up, I could see a little flyspeck hovering over the far end of the runway.

"Get those trucks out of here, and down the highway!" Mr. Leavett shouted. "Everybody out of the way!"

The XF changed from a flyspeck to a mosquito, then to a full-sized plane, all in the matter of seconds. Veering wildly from left to right, it swung down toward us. In an effort to cut down his speed, Bob Hughson was fishtailing like mad.

"Oh, God, stop him short of the ditch!" I prayed.

As Bob came on, though, it became obvious that the field was indeed going to be too short for him. The jet was just too hot. It hit the hole in the fence dead-center, at about fifty miles an hour. Fascinated, I watched Bob take the ditch, which was more like a shallow dip than anything else. It acted like a catapult.

The XF flipped about ten feet into the air, came down on its right wheel, then spun in a complete arc, with the right wing-tip dragging the pavement. That was it. The plane, right-side-up and all in one piece, came to a grinding stop.

Along with a hundred other men, I found myself racing with the crash truck and the ambulance toward the plane. Outside of the right wing-tip, the XF showed no major damage. We stood around for a few moments, waiting for Bob to climb out of the cockpit. But no movement came from his direction.

Getting a boost, I clambered up on the wing, reached up and hurriedly ran back the Plexiglas canopy. Bob sat there, held in place by his safety-belt, his head resting on the wheel, his arms dangling at his sides.

As my heart turned over sickeningly, I tried to find a pulse in his throat. I couldn't seem to locate it. When I felt his wrist, I couldn't find any pulse there, either.

I pulled my head abruptly out of the cockpit. "Doctor!" I cried.

A white-coated man was handed up, followed by an assistant. I slipped off the wing and down to the ground again. There wasn't a sound. Nobody moved. The whole atmosphere was filled with that deadly suspense which comes when a large group of men silently sense the worst, and are waiting only for the confirmation.

We didn't have long to wait. The Doctor turned, looked down at us, and said in a toneless voice, "When the plane bounced into the air, it apparently snapped his neck. He's dead. I suppose you'll want to get him out of here now?"

Mr. Leavett passed a shaking hand over his forehead. "I'd like to. But the FBI must give the word. They'll take charge, of course. In the meantime, plant protection will guard the plane. You men who were with me in the control-tower, come to my office."

It was a long walk back. When we were finally gathered with Mr. Leavett, he turned his back on us and stared out the window facing the airport for perhaps five minutes. He was fighting for control of his emotions, and we all knew it, and sympathized with him. When he eventually turned around, his face was taut and strained.

"Gentlemen, the events of this morning add up to a vicious blow to us all." Though level, Mr. Leavett's voice held the quality of chilly hardness in it. "The fact that our hopes in the XF aren't smashed altogether is due solely to Bob Hughson. He saved our ship, but he couldn't save himself. Now, I've always been contemptuous of anyone bearing grudges, but I tell you that I hold a grudge right now. No, it's more than that, it's a terrible, overpowering hatred. I hate the man or men responsible for Hughson's death. I hope and think that you do too."

With one voice, we growled our answer. A look at our angry faces must have satisfied him.

"All right, men," he said; "it won't be necessary for me to urge you to cooperate in the crash investigation. Return to your offices. When the FBI gets on the scene, they'll no doubt call on all of you for help. Give it to them!"

From ten in the morning until two-fifteen in the afternoon, I waited for orders. Just a little over four hours—but they seemed like sixty. At last Stan Murphy, the XF project engineer, called me to his office to meet Joe Robb, FBI man in charge of the investigation. Robb turned out to be a short, dark, efficient-looking man, whose steady brown eyes went over me keenly as we shook hands.

"Before you individual engineers give us your opinions, which naturally will be extremely valuable to us," Robb said to me, "we must get certain facts. In short, what went wrong with the XF? You will take charge of a service crew now waiting for you at the experimental hangar, Mr. Hurley, and pull every last pump, cylinder, valve, filter and tube, or anything else connected with hydraulics, out of that ship, and give them to my men, who will take them to the research lab. I want every drop of oil saved for analysis. You are to stay on the job until this task is performed, after

which you can dismiss the crew and report to the lab yourself."

By their badges, I could tell that my crew came from final assembly and were not the regular experimental mechanics. The place swarmed with guards. Since this was a simple disassembly job, and my boys were good as well as plentiful, the work was accomplished inside of three hours. I dismissed the crew, per instructions, and walked over to the research lab.

The lab men already had the hydraulic pump and several valves torn down, and the hydraulic oil was about all filtered. There was foreign matter in it. When I rubbed the oil between my fingers, it was abrasive to the touch.

Joe Robb was present. He handed me an aluminum tube and a flashlight, and said, "Take a look inside."

Inside the tube, I saw several thin, spiral shavings, such as are commonly found around machine-shops, along with a dozen or so chips and flakes of metal, any one of which could be deadly to the function of a hydraulics part.

ROBB sat on a table swinging his legs, and watching me intently. "Any chance of these shavings getting into the system, either by accident or carelessness?" he asked.

I shook my head. "Not a chance. One, maybe, but not all those. They were inserted deliberately."

He nodded. "Why weren't they caught during your run-up tests? You do check a ship before you allow it to be flown, I suppose?"

"We do!" I snapped angrily. "Every item on this ship passed and repassed strict functional tests. After that, for the past two days, Bob Hughson thoroughly ground-tested the plane. He taxied all over the runways and reported no trouble. He completed his ground tests yesterday afternoon about three o'clock. . . . Hey!"

"Yes?"

"The dirty work had to take place between three o'clock yesterday afternoon, and the time the plane was flown this morning."

"It checks," Robb agreed. "Every expert says the same thing. Now that all your suspicions are alerted, can you think of any of your boys who might possibly be subversive or disloyal?"

I shook my head. "Everyone in this plant was checked by plant protection, and everyone in experimental was gone over by the FBI. So there you are."

"Yes, there I am!" he grunted. "In other words, if our bureau couldn't discover the disloyal man we want, how are *you* supposed to recognize him?"

"Exactly."

"All right, I'm through with you for now. Mr. Leavett has put his office at my disposal, so I'll use it for headquarters tomorrow. I've got a lot of work to look into now, but report to me in the morning, in Leavett's office, at nine sharp."

I took off. So far, the whole affair was a bewildering mystery—to me, anyway. But Joe Robb, in his coldly intelligent way, impressed me. I had no doubt but that he'd arrive at the truth, and in a hurry, too. His method of attack was sure and economical, with no extra motions or loose talk. Just the same, I was wishing that I owned at least one good idea as to who could have tampered with the plane.

Next morning, when I showed up at Mr. Leavett's office, I found the FBI agent seated behind a large stack of documents. He gave me his immediate attention.

"Mr. Hurley," he said, "sit down in this chair beside me. I want you at my right hand while I conduct some interviews in the next hour. With regard to the XF, I can state that sabotage has been established beyond any doubt. The only question is, *why?*"

"Why? Isn't the first thought when military equipment is sabotaged usually that foreign agents have been active?"

"It is. And if it's true, then that casts a reflection on our FBI screening activities. Another possibility is that of personal enmity to Mr. Hughson, the test pilot."

I groaned. "I've gone over it, and gone over it. Nobody could have hated Bob that bad. He was one of those men that you thought of as a friend even if he'd only spoken two words to you—one of the most affable men I ever knew."

Joe Robb tapped on his desk for a while with a yellow pencil, thinking his own thoughts. After a bit he indicated the stack of papers on his desk. "As you can see, Mr. Hurley, I have been studying the personnel records of various employees, mainly the members of the flight crew and the experimental mechanics who were the last to work on the XF. Why I've selected three of them for questioning doesn't have to interest you at this time, except that these three positively had the opportunity to sabotage the XF. I want you to listen to them closely, and afterward point out any discrepancies in their stories."

He flipped a switch on the intercom, and said, "Send in Matt Comstock."

Comstock came in at once, a prematurely gray man in his middle thirties, lean, nervous, but a crackajack mechanic to my knowledge. He was lead-man in the engineering flight line.

After the preliminaries were out of the way, Robb said, "You are familiar with the fact that metal chips, shavings, filing and whatnot were introduced into the hydraulic system of the XF?"

Comstock nodded.

"Any idea why?"

"No," Comstock said. "If there was a reason, I'm not bright enough to figure it out. Seems crazy to me."

"Have you an opinion as to how this foreign material could have been introduced?"

Comstock's pale blue eyes flickered. "I've been wondering about that. It seems to me the easiest way would have been just to've unscrewed the cap of the hydraulic reservoir and dropped the stuff in. Neat and simple."

Robb nodded, and said, "That's a possibility. We have come to the conclusion that the sabotage took place between the hours of three-thirty, Tuesday afternoon, following the XF's ground tests, and early the next morning. What time did you quit work Tuesday afternoon?"

Comstock fidgeted around on his chair, seemed to consider his reply, and then said, "Late. About a quarter to six."

Pulling a time-card out of stack of papers, Robb examined it. "Five-forty-seven, to be exact. And that was a half hour later than the other men in your crew clocked out. Why?"

"Lead-men are always the last to knock off."

JOE ROBB seemed satisfied. "A man by the name of James Bassett works under you. A good workman?"

Again Comstock's pale eyes flickered. He leaned forward, and then sat back again. "No complaints."

"How were his relations with the test pilot who was killed?"

Comstock licked his lips, as though reluctant to speak. "They never took any notice of each other, never talked. But what the bad blood was, I couldn't say."

"And Duncan Basoldi. A good man?"

"Tops; a comedian who should be on the stage, but he's a handy guy with a wrench too."

"His relations with Hughson?"

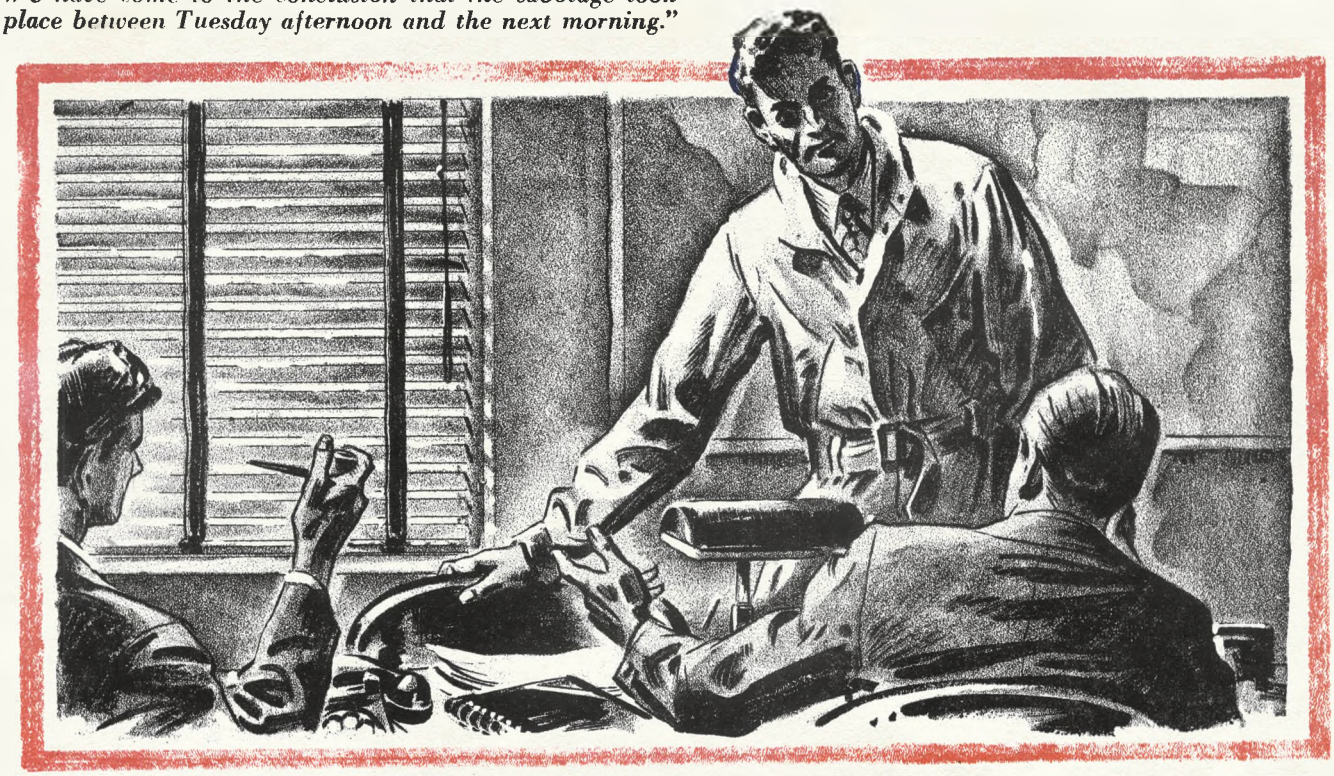
"Fine. Everybody likes Dunk."

"That will be all," Robb said.

After the lead-man had left, Robb lifted his eyebrows at me, and I stared at him, puzzled. "I don't get it," I said. "I don't get it at all. Hughson and Jim Bassett had the greatest respect for each other. In fact, I've seen them exchange ideas at least a dozen times. It was Basoldi that Hughson didn't speak to."

"Let me get this straight." The FBI man's voice was sharp. "You can

"We have come to the conclusion that the sabotage took place between Tuesday afternoon and the next morning."



state positively that it wasn't Bassett who had the cool relations with Hughson?"

"Yes. Comstock also said that the reservoir would be the easiest means for introducing those chips into the hydraulic system. We ought to check on it. If I'm not wrong, it would be the hardest way, because the reservoir is at the far side of the jet engine, and impossible to get at unless the fore and aft sections of the plane were separated."

Robb glanced at me alertly. "I wonder. Was Comstock trying to shift some sort of suspicion onto Bassett?" Again the FBI man spoke into the inter-com. "Send in Duncan Basoldi."

A leathery-faced little man with deep wrinkles around his eyes danced in, holding a half-eaten apple.

Robb smiled. "Go ahead and finish it. Basoldi, about this XF hydraulic system: have you any ideas about how or why it was sabotaged?"

"How? No theories. Why? I tell you, that XF was our baby, our sweetheart. Come right down to it, it was our pay-check. As for me, you'd have thought I was the guy who designed it. I was always very tender with the thing. It was my love, no fooling. If the guy who tried to crash it isn't a Red, then he's a crazy man. That's the only theory I got."

"What kind of a man is Matt Comstock?"

"Jittery. Oh, a good mechanic, but a mouse, a pigeon, always afraid somebody will catch him in a big mistake."

"How were his relations with the test pilot Hughson?"

"Okay, I guess. Yeah, they got along all right."

"What about Bassett?"

Duncan Basoldi wagged his head dramatically. "A fantastic character. Knows all, and says nothing, just does it. If I had half his brains, and knew half of what he knows about airplanes, I'd apply for president of this company, and I'd probably get it, too."

"How'd h get along with Hughson?"

"Pretty good, in a cold-fish sort of way. That is, they had respect for each other, without letting it turn them into pals."

"I see. And your relations with Hughson?"

"Ah-h!" Basoldi collapsed all over his chair, wrung his hands, and didn't try to hide his anguish from us. "The mercury now runs clear out the bottom of the thermometer. Tell you what, I've been bracing myself against that question. I knew you'd spring it on me. You see, Hughson was one of my neighbors. We used to be buddies, but not after I robbed his peach trees."

Robb said, "Don't stop. Go right on talking, Mr. Basoldi."

"You see, if I could stand on my flat feet inside my own yard and reach his fruit trees without straining, what was the damage? What harm done? Why be small about it? The only trouble was that Hughson didn't see it that way. He said I was a thief. So we've been giving each other the glare act. Just the same, he was a great guy, and I'm sorry he was killed."

"The peach episode was your only source of trouble?"

"So far as I'm concerned, it was."

"All right, you can go."

Basoldi blinked at the sudden dismissal, got up, and went out, shaking his head. After the door had closed behind him, Robb said, "Basoldi didn't mention that when Hughson's home workshop was robbed of some valuable machine-tools, his neighbor named him as the number-one suspect. Nothing came of it, but it certainly must have been a source of friction between the two of them."

I said, "Perhaps. I can't see Basoldi as being vindictive, however. These sketchy interviews are probably well planned. They're interesting. But just how illuminating are they?"

Robb looked at me levelly. "Pretty damned illuminating, if you must know. I'm after certain information. I'm getting it. Now comes the interview I've really been setting up. James Bassett. Frankly, I'm puzzled." He pulled out a personnel record, and studied it. "Why should a man with a B.A. from Massachusetts Tech in mechanical engineering, and an M.A. from Cal Tech in aerodynamics, and who was chief engineer of International Arco, work here as a mechanic? A fantastic character, Basoldi called him."

My jaw sagged open. "That's news to me. The man isn't directly under me, so I've never had occasion to look at his record. Why *does* he work here as a mechanic?"

"Let's find out."

James Bassett was a tall, muscular man in his mid-forties, with a massive but completely bald head and a keen pair of blue eyes, camouflaged behind heavy lids. He sat down, absolutely at ease.

"Mr. Bassett," Robb began, "we've been wondering about the means used to get those metallic particles into the hydraulic system."

"In my opinion," Bassett answered, his baritone voice measured and authoritative, "the only way was the simplest way. I think a substitute for one of the hydraulic lines was secured and filled with shavings and filings. When the time was ripe, a couple of nuts were turned, and the lines were swapped, all in the matter of a minute or two. When the hydraulic pressure was established, the flow distributed all the metal bits throughout the system."

"A reasonable theory. What do you think of the competence and loyalty of the men Comstock and Basoldi?"

"About their loyalty, I can give you no information. I know of nothing wrong there. Comstock is fairly proficient in his work, but he possesses a negative personality. Basoldi, of course, is a clown, but I don't underestimate him merely for that. He seems to have genuine enthusiasm for his job."

"And why does Comstock dislike you so thoroughly?"

"Perhaps because I'm a better man than he is, and he is afraid others will see it for themselves."

I STARED at the man, trying to catch an egotistical smirk on his face. But there was none: he was merely stating the facts.

"With your training and experience, why are you working at this plant as a mechanic?"

"Due to disgust, sir—disgust with myself. As chief engineer of an aircraft company, I made an unforgivable error in stress analysis which resulted in our going bankrupt. As a matter of fact, Bob Hughson was a CAA inspector at the time. He tested our plane, and turned in an unfavorable report. Our certificate to build was refused."

I sucked in my breath sharply. Even Robb looked startled. "You didn't have to tell me that."

"Thought I'd beat you to it," Bassett said grimly. "I want to say right now, however, that I bore Hughson no ill will for his report, inasmuch as everything he said in it was completely justified."

Robb stared at the ex-engineer speculatively for a while, gently stroking his chin. Then he suddenly extended his hand. "Thank you, Mr. Bassett, I believe I am through."

Bassett left.

"What," I demanded, "have you found out—except that Bassett can give a straight answer and the others can't? Or have you?"

Robb was already halfway to the door. "I found out the answer I was after. Now to check on it. Let's go to the research lab."

Stan Murphy was in the lab starting his report when we entered. He said, "We found that the foreign material was thirty per cent SO aluminum chips, ten per cent abrasive powder, and sixty per cent 4130-steel filings and shavings. In case you don't know it, Mr. Robb, 4130-steel is by no means a soft metal. It's pure murder to aluminum and dural. It scored the tubes, ruined all the valves in the hydraulic system, gouged poppets, and ripped the 0 rings. Besides that, all the muck clogged the oil lines tight as a tick."

Stan walked over to a pile of parts, and picked up a long straight tube. "This one here is the joker that did all the damage. It was scored and gouged more heavily than the rest of the tubes put together. We think it was filled with the destructive material and rung in on a last-minute installation."

Robb and I exchanged glances. So Bassett had hit it on the head! How'd he been so sure? I inspected the interior of the tube, and it was indeed in a sad condition. It bore a part number of the three-hundred-thousand series, with a dash-sixty-six ending. As I studied the stamped part number, I noticed a vague trace of following letters, letters which appeared to have been incompletely wiped off. Putting a magnifying glass to them, I could barely make them out. But they were unmistakable, and they said, "HA-HA."

"See what you make of this," I ejaculated. Robb and the engineer stared down through the glass at the part number, and they both drew back with the same puzzled look.

"It looks like 'HA-HA,'" Stan said.

"That's because it is 'HA-HA,'" Robb snapped. He wandered off to a desk, sat down, and put his head in his hands, doing some heavy thinking. In a few minutes he jumped to his feet, snapped his fingers, and rushed to the phone to call his downtown office.

When he got his man, he said: "Listen, I want you to pick up that copy of Mitchell's 'Studies in Abnormal Psychology' from my desk. Also, I want that heavy volume on Criminal Psychiatry. Bring them out to me. And get hold of Dr. Colin Ashcraft, the psychiatrist, and escort him out here, too."

"What has psychology got to do with it?" Stan Murphy and I demanded in the same breath.

"Basoldi was right. No sane man committed this crime," Robb said. "Paranoics, people suffering from delusions of persecution, are extremely dangerous. They're crafty, they hide their tracks, and in most ways, they appear quite normal. Hard to detect. They are also merciless."

I stepped away, trying to figure who would fit the pattern. James Bassett, with his brilliant mind? I didn't know. But I was going to be disappointed if the man were actually insane, for in the mood I was in, I wanted to see him severely punished. A thorough roughing-up before the authorities got him would be just about right. I said as much.

"I don't think it was Hughson the murderer was gunning for," Robb said. "It's hard to grasp, but actually, I believe Hughson's death was incidental. He was just the innocent bystander. And the intended victim is still walking around, with not a hair out of place."

We demanded that the FBI man explain further, but he wouldn't.

"You might be interested in the fact, Mr. Robb," Stan drawled sourly, "that hydraulic installers put white decals on their work, with their own personal stamp on the decal. It's standard practice here. This dash-sixty-six tube carried such a decal. And I'll be very much disappointed if the stamp doesn't belong to Bassett."

Stan and I goggled at the man. He was way ahead of us. We were baffled, and we didn't mind showing it.

"If you've got this thing all doped out, why don't you go ahead and fire away?" Stan growled. "Start your arrests."

"Say that I merely have an unverified theory. I need evidence, and I need to bait a trap."

AS he spoke, Joe Robb held the dash-sixty-six tube in his hand. Watching that tube suddenly fascinated me. It was the source for my brainstorm.

"Wait right here, both of you," I said, and hustled off. I left the building and headed for the stockroom. My idea was this: if the murderer had really substituted a dash-sixty-six tube full of scrap metal for the original, wasn't there a chance that he had hidden, or had thrown into a scrap bin the replaced tube? After all, we had built three sets of components for the XF and her two sister ships that were to follow. Maybe—

Sure enough, in the stock racks, there were still two sets of components right down the line. Except in the place reserved for the dash-sixty-six tube. In that section, there was only one tube.

Rushing back to the research lab, I drew Stan Murphy and Robb into a

huddle, and explained the stock situation to them. "How's this for a trap?" I asked. "The guilty man alone knows that there's only one of these tubes in the stockroom. Suppose we fabricate another one and put it in its proper place in the rack. Then suppose we clear the stockroom of all personnel, and send our suspects individually in to take inventory of certain parts—say the parts which we'll have to replace on the XF. The innocent men won't show any emotion at seeing two dash-sixty-six tubes, but won't the man we're looking for rub his eyes, or otherwise give himself away when he bumps into the discrepancy? We could be watching from a balcony window, and—"

Joe Robb snapped his fingers. "How long will it take to fabricate another tube assembly?"

"Fifteen minutes," Stan said.

"Then hop to it."

Actually, counting the time it took to walk to and from the fabricating section, it was twenty minutes when Stan returned with the new tube.

"All right," Robb said to me. "Put this in its section while I start laying the groundwork for our trap. That was a good suggestion, Hurley."

So I went back to the stockroom, and put the tube where it belonged. I was beginning to feel a suppressed sort of excitement, as though I were wearing a vest that was too tight for me, and it was squeezing my ribs.

After walking back around the stock rack, I had stopped and was inspecting the balcony for its feasibility as a lookout spot, when I heard a slight sound behind me. I swung about, retraced my steps, and saw it, a hand being jerked away from the same shelf where I'd just deposited my tube.

Our trap was being sprung prematurely. I said, "Putting back your extra sixty-six tube, I see."

Matt Comstock turned abruptly to face me, startled fear in his eyes. I thought for a second that he was going to burst into tears, but I should have known better. Without a wasted motion, he picked up a heavy channel from the stock bin, and swung on me.

Instinctively I ducked, far enough for him to miss my head, but not my shoulder. It was a paralyzing blow, and the sharp edge of the channel bit into me, almost tearing off the sleeve of my new brown sharkskin.

He aimed a kick at my groin. I twisted about, and took it on my left knee. There was a sudden, savage pain. As I fell forward, I saw Comstock glaring at me. Fires seemed to be burning with a white light in his eyes. I realized now that I was in a fight to the finish.

Even as I dropped, I grappled with him, and brought him down too, underneath me. He still held tight to that channel. Again he went to work with it. I warded off the first blow, but the second one laid open my forehead. The blood spurted out, blinding me. Somehow, I got hold of the channel and jerked it free. He grabbed my fingers and started biting.

I pulled away; and then, still on top, I commenced swinging. I didn't aim, and I don't know where they went, but I threw punches as fast and as hard as I could, satisfied only that they were landing. After that, I grabbed his head and started to bounce it up and down on the floor.

A hand was laid on my shoulder, and I heard Joe Robb's urgent voice saying, "That's enough, boy."

I let them pull me off. Wiping the blood out of my eyes, I saw a couple of guards take charge of Matt Comstock. He looked pretty well beat up, although the only blood showing on him was my own. He was breathing hard and gasping, and there was slobber around his lips.

Joe Robb helped me over to a table and let me rest there.

"He was trying to put back a tube. You know, the tube that—"

"You don't have to talk," Robb said, taking out a handkerchief and using it as a bandage on my forehead. "Just take it easy." He turned.

"Comstock," I heard him say, "I have one question. What did you have against James Bassett?"

"That lousy know-it-all! He was going to take my job away. And that bonehead Hughson, if he'd used his brains and discovered what I'd done to his hydraulic system as soon as he should have, he'd be alive now and Bassett would have been fired over it, just like I'd planned. My job would have been safe, and everything'd been okay."

"Take him to the office and get a statement, boys," Robb said. "I'm sick of looking at him."

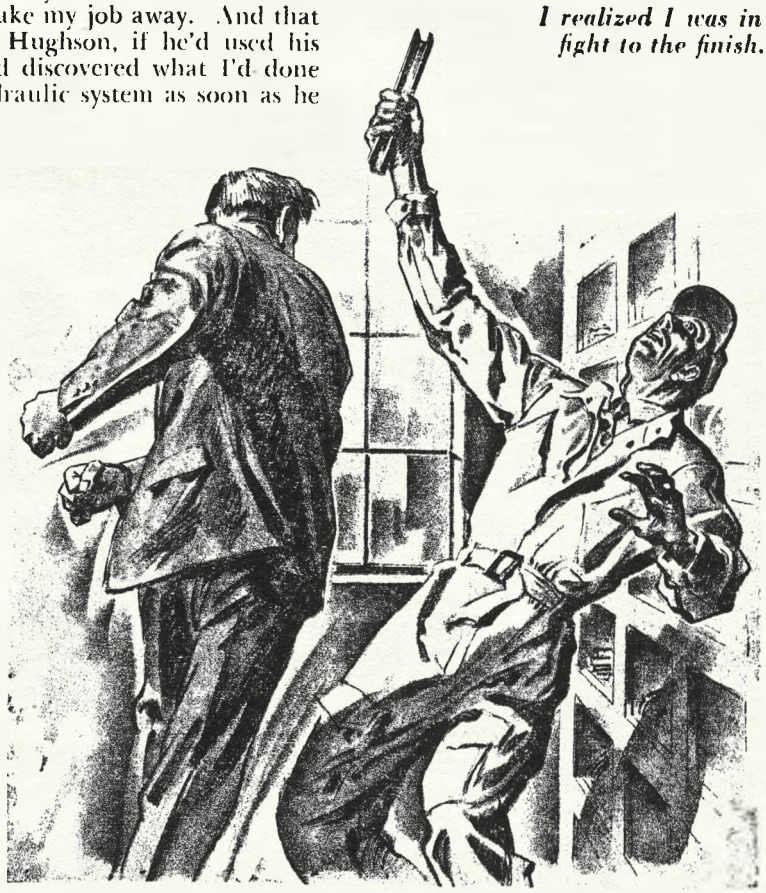
I found myself with tears coming from my eyes, tears of anger. That Bob Hughson should have been killed by a ferret like Comstock, and for such a miserable reason!

"Things don't always make sense," Robb said. "I think the ambulance will be here for you in a few seconds."

"I know now that Comstock was your main suspect all along," I said. "How did you do it?"

"The three men we interviewed this morning were the only ones who had any real opportunity to sabotage the XF. It was pure elimination, especially after I tumbled to the fact that this trick was pulled by an unbalanced mind. Basoldi was free and easy, and despite his screwball ways, obviously with a humorous and healthy outlook. A brilliant man like Bassett would never have left anything to chance. No, Comstock was the only one we caught in major inaccuracies, and his grudge against Bassett was the tip-off. A case of insane, irrational jealousy."

My head throbbed painfully, and my left knee was growing stiff. I was glad when the ambulance arrived.



I realized I was in a fight to the finish.

A search for a missing dog involves two boys in the affairs of a strong-minded and strong-armed female

A CASE

by OWEN CAMERON

MOST of the people in our neighborhood knew Rex, but they all said they hadn't seen him, thank goodness. One man wanted to give us a dog his boy had found; but we wanted Rex, and we went all the way to the Avenue, looking for him. We didn't see Rex, but there was a cop on a motorcycle writing out a parking ticket, and Mitch said we should ask him.

We crossed the street and Mitch asked: "Hey, could you do us a favor?"

"No," the cop said. "It was all right to let you kids ride the horses, but these three-legged bikes are dangerous."

"We lost our dog," Mitch said. "We thought maybe a policeman could find him."

The cop scratched his head and said there was a Missing Persons Bureau, but he didn't know about dogs, and we should try the pound. But Mother had already phoned the pound; and besides, Rex had a license.

"He was a kind of police dog," Mitch said.

"That makes it different," the cop said. "Active or retired?"

"Active," Mitch told him. "And pretty big."

The cop said every dog in town chased his motorcycle sooner or later, and to give him Rex's description, and he would keep an eye out for him. So I told him Rex was almost as big as Mitch, but not as old, and hardly ever bit anybody hard, and he had been gone three days, and even when he jumped down in the manhole, he was only gone one day. The cop wrote it down and told us not to worry—Rex would come home all right.

"Rex always looked for us," Mitch said. "And he'd come home to eat, anyhow, if he could."

"Take it easy, now," the cop said. "It's illegal for red-headed kids to cry."

"I wasn't crying," Mitch told him. "It just makes me feel funny. Maybe he's sick."

"I'll look for him," the cop promised. "Though he'll likely walk in tomorrow or next day, saying he lost his memory, and woke in this kennel with a strange— Whoap! A fight!"

The cop jumped off his motorcycle and ran to the sidewalk in front of Bond's grocery store, where a lady had picked up a man and was shaking him. She was bigger than the cop—not a fat lady, just bigger all over than other people, the way Rex is bigger than other dogs.

The cop grabbed her arm and hollered: "Cut it out! Let him go!"

"You let me go," the lady said. She talked kind of like a man we used to know who came from the Old Country, where everybody talks that way. "I can handle my own affairs, long as they was men."

"Not on a public street," the cop told her.

He hung on to the lady's arm, and both of them were too much for her to shake, so she let go of the man, and he began picking up his hat and things from the sidewalk. He was smaller than the cop, and a lot smaller than the lady.

The cop told the people watching to move on, but nobody did, and he told the lady:

Illustrated by
JOHN FULTON

"Whoap! A fight!" The cop ran to the front of the grocery store, where a lady was shaking a man.

of IDENTITY

"After this, ma'am, you and your husband fight at home."

"That shrimp!" the lady hollered. "I don't even know him, but he better look out."

"Case of mistaken identity," the little man said, putting on his hat. "No harm done, Officer."

"Following me!" hollered the big lady. "All my troubles is not enough, getting deceived and everything, but for a week when I go out of the house, here he comes mousing along, like some kind of friend."

"Aha!" said the cop. "You want to make a complaint?"

The lady shook her head. "I already make it to him. I get excited, but I hope I don't hurt nobody." She pushed her way through the people watching, and went into the grocery store.

"Now, then, Shorty," the cop said, "what's the big idea?"

"I was just walking along," the little man told him. "Is that against the law?"

"It is for your kind," the cop said. "You want to be fed to the psychiatrists? Anyhow, you ought to have sense enough to molest women your own size."

"Let's have a little professional courtesy, please," the little man said. "I wouldn't molest any woman, especially her. Glance at this."

John groaned: "What have I done?"
"Locked her to you," I said.

He gave the cop a card, and the cop looked at it, and kind of read it under his breath; but Mitch and me were pretty close and heard him all right.

"'*John Rhodes, Private Investigations, Shadowing, Skip Tracing, Missing Heirs Located.*' Oh, one of those things? And you were shadowing the muscle-woman, just like on the radio, huh? You take your risks, fellow! What's she been doing, stealing pianos?"

"It's a professional confidence," the little man told him. "Can I go now?"

"Go ahead," the cop said. "But keep out of commotions around here. You could get pinched or hurt, or both."

The little man squeezed through the crowd, and me and Mitch followed him, because we both thought of it at the same time. The man walked fast for almost a block, and then ducked into a doorway, and when he came out, he had a mustache.

Mitch asked: "Hey, Mister, are you a detective?"

"What gave you that idea?" the man wanted to know.

So I told him we had heard him talking to the cop and followed him, and we had a missing dog named Rex.

"Maybe that's my speed," the man said. He pulled off the mustache and looked at it, and then threw it away. "Tailed by a couple of kids! I guess I'm a failure. All my life, the thing I've wanted to be, and was sure I'd be good at—and I fail to crack my first case!"

"Rex was a big dog," I said. "With his name on his collar; and he answered, if you had a cookie or something."

The man shook his head and sighed, but then he began to feel better, and told us: "Even *Sherlock* was defeated by *The Woman,* and this one is all of that. Notice her complexion? No wonder she's in the beauty business, is it?"

"No," Mitch said. "And Father says nobody in his right mind would beggar himself to feed an animal like that, so unless Rex found somebody who wasn't, maybe he's hungry."

"Which reminds me, I am," the detective told us. "Could you boys eat a bite while we talk over the case?"

We said yes, and he took us into a restaurant and ordered lunch for himself and pie à la mode for us. He had scrambled eggs, and said that if hens knew how humanity treated their products, they would stop trying. He said one thing about Communism, it did away with the middleman, who was responsible for cold-storage eggs.

He told us to call him John, and he would call us Mitch and Edgar, and said he hated to think what this kind of food was doing to his stomach. He said his own cooking had been better, and a woman like Myrtle could cook—you knew it just by looking at her. Myrtle was the name of the big lady.

"Myrtle Mannix," John said. "This coffee is awful. They don't boil it long enough, or something. I met her husband when I came to the city to buy chicken-wire at the source." He kind of groaned. "I had a chicken-farm in Sonoma County. A man never knows when he is well off, does he?"

"Father said Rex knew when *he* was, and nobody could drag him away," Mitch said. "But he's gone. Three whole days, and we looked every place."

"I'll take the case for nothing," John told us. "Just to have somebody to talk to is reward enough. I don't know anyone else in the city. One thing about chickens they are sociable, and great conversationalists, and loyal to a fault. Still, I used to think I was lonely, living there alone."

"Didn't you have a dog?" Mitch asked.

The detective shook his head. "No. I like dogs, but chickens don't. I used to read a lot, and took mail-order courses, mostly poultry and Spanish and crime-detection, but the Spanish girl moved, so I gave that up. What I wanted to be, ever since I was your age, was a detective."

"I want to be a jet-pilot," Mitch said. "Father says it's logical. How long will it take you to find Rex?"

"Not long. This Mannix was working part-time in a hardware store, and we got to talking. I was desperate enough to talk to anybody, and still am, though it would surprise you how little folks know about chickens. Chickens are the backbone of the nation."

"They're bad for dogs," I said. "The bones."

John nodded. "And vice versa, like I said. Anyhow, when I found out Mannix had a detective's license, and wanted to raise chickens instead, why, it seemed like the hand of fate, and we traded. He even gave me a job shadowing his wife. It takes my appetite." John pushed away his empty plate, and told the waitress to bring us all another round of pie and ice cream.

"Rex always liked ice cream," Mitch said. "Any flavor, and pie too. If he was here right now, I'd give him half of mine."

"It's going to be all right—trust me," John said. "Myrtle's Beauty Saloon, that's her. What did she ever see in Mannix? He's a big, loud character."

"Rex is loud," Mitch said. "So if he was caught in a trap or something, we could hear him. Somebody would, anyhow. And if he's not in a trap, why doesn't he come home? It makes me feel funny, thinking about it."

It did me, too. John said to leave it to him, and the first thing to do was to find a suspect and tail him. He said we could work together, and Mitch and me could help him shadow Myrtle.

"Which is easy," he said. "She lives right there in the Beauty Saloon, and never goes any place. Yesterday she went to the bank, but maybe that was business, though I don't think she has much."

"We ought to hunt for Rex," I said. "Maybe he's stuck, and needs us. Once he almost drowned."

John said to trust him, and he would need our help, now that Myrtle had him spotted, and he would find Rex. He asked me if Rex had any enemies, and I told him only a Great Dane, because the other dogs weren't big enough. Rex liked the Great Dane, but he always growled. Father said that one of these days the Great Dane would change his tune, but he never did.

"That's a good clue," John said. "You know, Myrtle is the kind that grows on you. Why couldn't it have been me, instead of Mannix? I can just see her with her sleeves rolled up, mixing laying-mash. If she likes eggs, she'd be happy there. Life is sure funny. If I hadn't traded the farm, I'd never have seen her, and if I hadn't seen her, I might not feel so bad about leaving the farm, except for eggs."

"Mother says not to feel bad about Rex," Mitch said. "But I can't help it."

"Me neither," John said. "She makes me think of a mother hen. You know, sincere. What more can you say about a woman? Mannix slanders her. Says she has an affair with every man she meets! I wouldn't even read his last letter. Well, you saw what happened. Did it look like she was having an affair with me?"

We talked some more, about Rex, but mostly about Myrtle. Me and Mitch said we would help John shadow her, if he would find Rex, and we walked back to the corner where her beauty saloon was. It was upstairs in the building, with a sign on the window and a drugstore underneath.

We stood across the street shadowing for a while, and then Mitch wanted to go looking for Rex some more. John said to trust him, he was deducting, and he could stand there watching for Myrtle to pass her window and find Rex. That was how detectives worked.

Mitch said he just knew Rex was sick, or stuck some place, and he began to cry, so John said if Mitch would stay there and shadow Myrtle, he would go with me to the scene of the crime, where we last saw Rex, and look for clues. So we went to Mrs. Butler's peonies, where Rex had been digging the last time I saw him, but there wasn't a clue, not even a bone, and we left when Mrs. Butler yelled at us.

When we came back, Mitch said he had shadowed Myrtle when she went to the bank and talked to a man. We went there, and Mitch showed us the man sitting at a desk, and John said it was the same one she talked to before, and he looked like a sinister type; and Myrtle didn't have that much business, and he wished he had a dictaphone.

Then we went back and looked at Myrtle's windows until suppertime. Mitch and me weren't hungry, but we had to go home or Mother wouldn't let us come back next day, and it was important, because John said he would have a clue about Rex.

Saturday morning we came back early. John was already there. He said he had learned early rising from chickens, especially roosters.

I went to the bank to watch the man, and John and Mitch stayed to shadow Myrtle. There wasn't even any place to sit down, and all I did was look in the bank at the man and see if he was suspicious; but at almost twelve o'clock John and Mitch came, because they were hungry too. John

He said that if hens knew how humanity treated their products, they would stop trying.

asked me if our man had made any false moves.

"He just sits there shaking his head at people," I said. "Is Myrtle shadowing you? Because here she comes."

She walked straight to John, and he got behind me, but she didn't want to shake him. She said: "I wish to apologize, because I see you are not behind me. Too many troubles I got, and I think you follow me all over and make me nervous."

"We all have troubles, ma'am," John said. "Some with wives, some with husbands."

"Bankers is worst," the lady told him. "Like a trap on a rat, they are. I hope I don't hurt you, Mister?"

"It was a pleasure," John said, making a bow. "Though I am huskier than I look, only I wouldn't use my strength against a woman. Bankers, ma'am?"

"I got to do like he says." Myrtle looked sadder than most people, because she was bigger. "These two fine boys is yours? Always I dream I will have—but who cares?"

"Somebody cares, Myrt—ma'am," John said. "No, these are not my legal children, nor in any way, in fact. They lost their dog, and I'm helping to find him."

Myrtle kind of sighed. "I guess we all got troubles. But they could get another dog."

"These are one-dog boys," John told her. "I'm the same. If I can't have the one I want— And the boys would be happy if they knew their dog was happy, and I'm like that too."

"What kind of dog was yours, Mister?" asked Myrtle.

John kind of groaned. "Who's talking about dogs?"

"I thought it was us," Myrtle said. "Well, I'm glad I don't hurt you, because I see you got a kind heart. Now I got to go, but I'm sorry for shaking you."

"It's a memory I will treasure," John told her. "If I can help you, ma'am, say so. If you need a strong right arm—"

"That I got," Myrtle said. "Better if I was one of the weak and helpless ones, and not so trusting."

She went into the bank, and John looked in the window and said she should have known better than to trust that man. We shadowed Myrtle while she talked to him. He looked like his stomach hurt, and when Myrtle came out, she didn't see us. She kind of wiped at her eyes, like she was almost crying.

"She wouldn't let *him* see her tears," John said. "What a magnificent woman! What did Mannix ever do to deserve her?"

"I don't know," Mitch said. "Will we find Rex after lunch?"

John said maybe, except it looked like this case was about to break, and we shadowed Myrtle as far as the restaurant, and went in and ate lunch. Part of the lunch was squash, and it made Mitch think of Rex, because when Mother made Mitch eat squash, he always saved it in his mouth and gave it to Rex, because Rex liked it all right. Mitch began to sniffle, and John said we would find Rex today or tomorrow, sure, and he was ready to close in. He said pretty soon we would gather all our suspects into one room, and he would spring his solution and then snap the cuffs on the guilty party. He showed us the handcuffs to prove it.

John said Myrtle never went to the teller's window to deposit money or anything, and the man in the bank was up to no good and might be blackmailing her.

"Shows you how Mannix misjudges her," John said. "I won't read any more of his letters. I didn't even open the last one. He keeps saying she is a lovely flower a dozen men are sipping. The lovely part fits, but I haven't seen her talking to anyone but that banker. And she said she was too trusting, and he had her trapped.

"I sure hope Rex isn't trapped," Mitch said.

"Myrtle is all woman, and then some," John told us. "But I know she is on the level. If this banker is the one who broke up her home, it wasn't her fault. He probably wants to deck her in diamonds with money he's stolen from the bank. She should have known better than to trust him—I always buried my money, or hid it under a setting hen."

"Rex buried everything he found," Mitch said. Thinking about Rex made him feel bad, and me too. John said for us not to feel bad, and we could have chocolate cake for desert, and he would find Rex if anyone could.

After lunch we watched Myrtle's windows again. Once when she shook out a dustcloth, John said she was a home-maker by nature. We were there a long time, shadowing, and then a man went into the building. It was the man from the bank, and John got excited. He said the man wasn't after beauty treatments, and Myrtle lived up there, too, and probably his suitcase was full of money from the bank, and he wanted her to flee with him. John said he had known at a glance the man was that type, because culling hens made a man a judge of character.

John talked louder and louder, and said he was going over and defend the sanctity of the home, even if it wasn't his; but then the banker came out again. John said he had made an assassination, and told Mitch to go over and ring Myrtle's bell and tell her he was working his way through

school by selling subscriptions to the *Chronicle,* and look around for clues.

Mitch went over and was gone quite a while. He came back eating a cream-puff Myrtle gave him, because she was sorry she couldn't subscribe because she was leaving and wouldn't be there any more after today.

"I knew it!" John cried. "I deducted it! We'll have to stop her. Not that I want to save her for Mannix—just from herself. Let me think a minute." He closed his eyes and moved his lips, thinking, and then said for us to watch Myrtle while he telephoned, from the drugstore.

When he came back, he said it was just as he had suspected, and there was an airplane to Mexico at six o'clock, and it was sure to be the one. He said if he could make Myrtle miss it, the banker would go, because he had the briefcase full of hot money.

John thought some more and then gave Mitch a little key and said: "She might search me. If I holler, 'The game is up!' then you get rid of the key. Swallow it, if you have to."

Mitch looked at the key and then at me. "It's not very big, but maybe Edgar could do it better. He swallowed a penny once."

I remembered, all right, so I said: "I wasn't any older than you. Anyhow, it's your turn. What's it a key for?"

"For the darbies," John said. He took his handcuffs out and snapped one part to his wrist and then hid his hand in his pocket, and told us: "Do or die! Well, there are worse ways."

He went across the street and up the stairs, and we followed. When he knocked on the Beauty Saloon, Myrtle opened the door, and she had been crying. Before she could say anything, John asked if we could come in, because we had an important message.

Myrtle said to come in, and welcome, but the place was a mess, because she was right in the middle of packing, and she didn't want him to think she was the kind of housekeeper that left things like a world-wind.

The first room was big, and painted white, with a lot of shiny machinery, like the places where they make monsters in the movies, but this was for ladies. There was another door open, and a kitchen in there. When Mitch saw the big lady wasn't going to shake John, he went over and looked in. I guess he was looking for another cream-puff.

John kept his hand in his pocket, and he wouldn't sit down. He stood close to Myrtle and told her that first of all he wanted her to understand

The lady hollered that Rex would bite us. We knew he wouldn't, because he was our dog, and the lady said thank God, and did we like puppies?

that he understood, because anybody raised on a chicken-farm was broad-minded.

"Chickens!" Myrtle said. "Always I wanted chickens."

"I was afraid of that," John told her. "But if I hadn't given it up, I wouldn't have met you. The irony of it! Are you packing to leave, ma'am?"

"Right today," Myrtle said.

"It's that banker?" John asked, and she nodded. "No matter what he says, he's lying to you."

"It's all written down and signed in black and white," Myrtle said. "I was a fool to trust people."

"Listen," John said. "It's not too late, especially if you like chickens."

But Myrtle shook her head and wiped at her eyes, and John asked her please not to cry, and I went to the kitchen to see if Mitch had found any more cream-puffs. He was climbing up on the sink to look in a bag on the windowsill.

John asked Myrtle if she was determined to go, and she said she had no choice, and John said not to do anything she would regret, especially with a banker, and she said it was too late to regret anything now. Only I wasn't listening very good until he kind of hollered that it was a time for desperate measures.

Then he jumped at Myrtle, and she hollered and gave him a push, but she couldn't push him very far, because he had locked the handcuffs to her. He kind of bounced back to her and fell on his knees and yelled, and Myrtle shook him, and Mitch hollered to me if he should swallow the key now.

John hollered that he could explain his mad act, and Myrtle was kind of panting and said she thought he'd better. She asked me if he was crazy. I said he was a detective.

"Employed by your husband!" John hollered. "You may not love him, and I would be the last to blame you. But for your own sake, I can't let you—"

Myrtle shook him till he stopped talking. Then she asked: "By my what?"

"Your husband," John said. "To keep you from a life of shame, to put it bluntly. At the spur of the moment, I could think of no other way. You can't make the plane, and no matter what hold this banker has on you—"

Myrtle gave him another shake. "What hold? He has a loan on all this here furniture. The whole works I lose today, and just now he comes to say the main office is sorry, but no more time." She wiped at her eyes, and John got up on his feet, because he couldn't help it.

He said: "But your husband? This fellow Mannix?"

"I got no husband," Myrtle said. "And it wouldn't be Mannix, because I don't know him, and wouldn't marry a man with a dishonest wife like her. All my savings she gets with lies, telling me she owns all this machinery."

John groaned and tried to sit on the floor, but Myrtle kept wiping her eyes, and he kind of dangled. He said: "You aren't Myrtle Mannix? What hath God wrought? What have I done?"

"Locked her to you," I said.

John groaned again. "No husband! And I have no farm. All a detective can offer is danger and hardship. I haven't even a roof over my head!"

"Me too," Myrtle said. "We all got troubles."

Mitch hollered, in the kitchen. I thought he had swallowed the key, but he was looking out the window, and when I jumped up on the sink and looked out, there was Rex. He was down in the yard next door, with the Great Dane.

Me and Mitch ran out and downstairs and around the building. When we climbed the fence, a lady came out of the house there and hollered to us to look out, Rex would bite us. We knew he wouldn't, because he was our dog, and the lady said thank God, and did we like puppies? She said Rex wouldn't let her come out into her own back yard.

Rex kissed us, and we petted him, and talked to the lady; and after a while John hollered from the kitchen window for us to come up. I hollered that we couldn't come, because Rex might run away, but the lady said not to worry about that, because he liked her Great Dane too much.

Myrtle looked out the window and hollered for us too, so we went upstairs again.

We saw Myrtle wasn't crying any more, and John smiled and told us, "A case of mistaken identity. I would have known if I'd read Mannix' last letter. Listen: *'Must be some mistake about shadowing my wife as Myrt sold the business to a dumb Swede, and looked me up, and with this stake will hit New York and the Big Time, and you better come back to look after chickens, which neighbor says he is tired of doing, and will state did not know chickens was so dumb and so much trouble, and hope I never see another egg or hear another cackle.'"*

John stopped reading and said: "Chickens dumb! But what can you expect? He calls Myr—I mean Helen, a dumb Swede!"

"Dane," the big lady said. "But tell me more about these chickens, John."

"I'll show you," John said. "Let's have that key, Mitch. For the handcuffs. And Myrt—Helen— is not married or anything, though she likes chickens and kids and cooking, like I knew she would, and I got my chicken farm back and—well, while I don't want to frighten anybody by rushing things—"

"And he found Rex," I said.

"Who? Oh, the dog. I told you I would," John said. Mitch was looking in his pockets, and John asked what was the matter.

"The Great Dane stopped growling at Rex," I said. "It was a lady Dane."

"Me too," the big lady said. "Not Swedish."

"*Cherchez la femme,* every time," John said. "Where's that key?"

"I guess I lost it," Mitch said. "Anyhow, it's not in my pockets, and I can't remember swallowing it."

John hollered, "Lost!" and got excited, and helped Mitch go through his pockets again, and made us go down and look for the key, and pointed at places to look from the window, but we didn't find it.

When we came upstairs again, John was groaning and feeling bad. The big lady said it was Saturday, so maybe they couldn't find a locksmith to open the handcuffs till Monday, and she had her reputation to think of and wanted a chaperon. Mitch said we couldn't stay, because it was almost supper time, and Rex was probably hungry, because he always was.

John slapped his forehead and cried; "Wait a minute!" but he didn't mean us. "My car's around the corner in a garage. I've been sleeping in it, so my things are all there, and I ought to get back to the chickens right away, and you are packed. We can drive up in a couple of hours, and I've got hacksaws and all. I mean, it would give you a chance to look over the place at the same time."

"You got a chaperon up there?" the big lady asked.

"My neighbor is a retired minister," John told her. "Not unfrocked, just tired of talking. So if you liked the place well enough to—well, what I mean—"

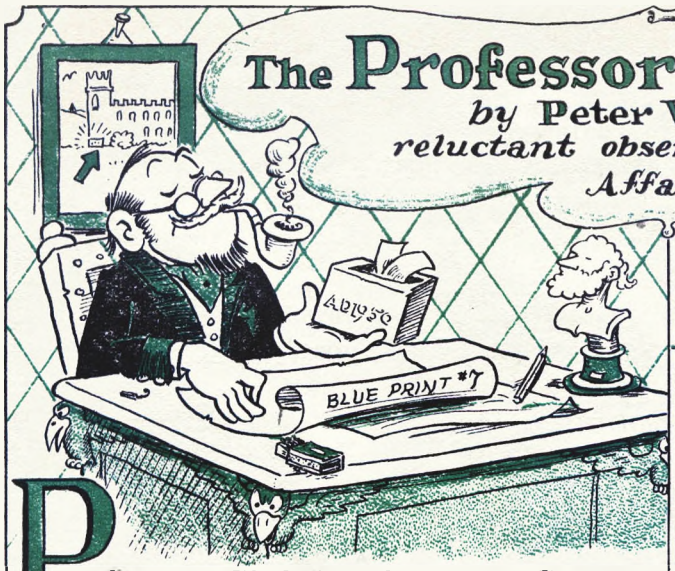
"I will fine," said the big lady. "Like a dream, it seems—with a cow and chickens!"

Then they just kind of looked at each other, but when me and Mitch were halfway down the stairs, we heard John holler and ran back. But it was all right, the big lady had just given him a hug and a kiss.

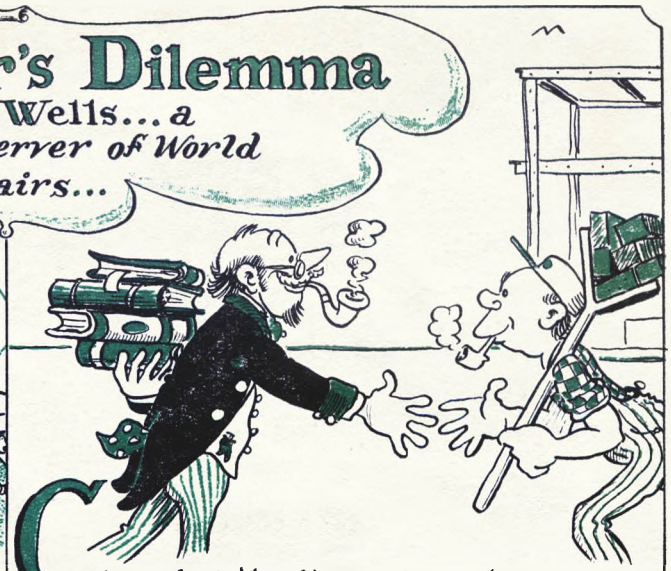
We took Rex home, and the Great Dane went with us. She growled at Father when he tried to chase her out of our yard, and he said that was the last straw, but it wasn't. The lady said her Great Dane was going to have puppies and we could have them all. *That* was!

The Professor's Dilemma

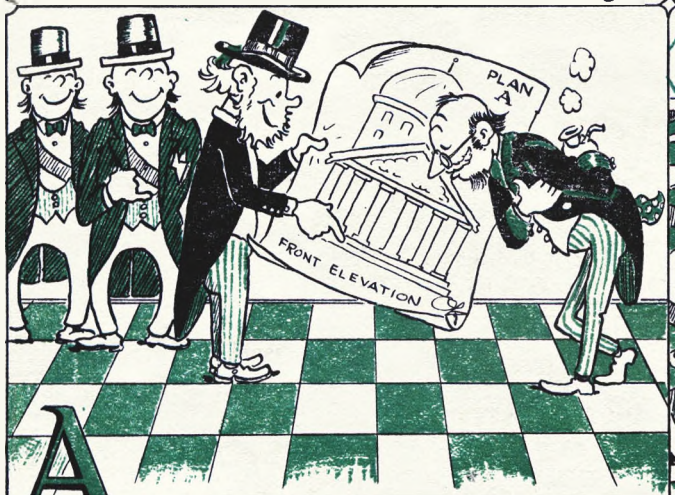
by Peter Wells... *a reluctant observer of World Affairs...*



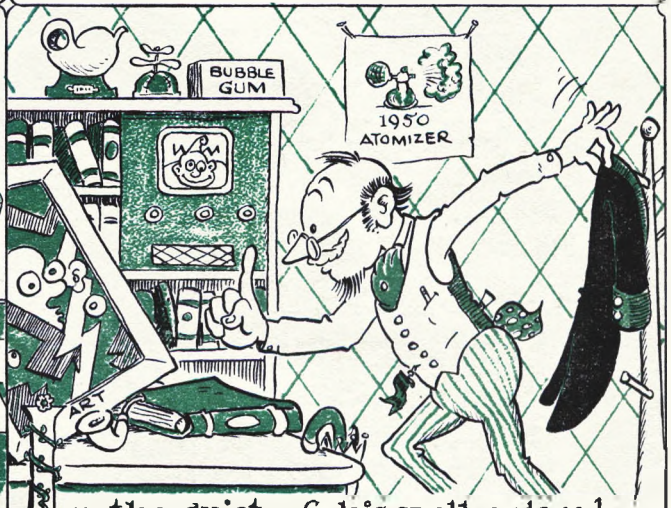
Professor Steinkopf was a Cornerstone Stuffer...He chose typical items of our complex civilization to put into the cornerstones of buildings...



Choosing the items by which our Posterity might judge us requires a wide knowledge among the Sciences and bricklayers' unions... He had it.

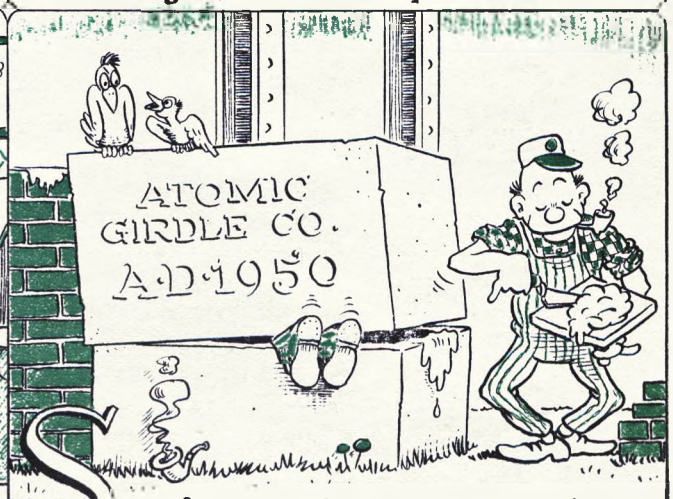


As a climax to his distinguished career, the Prof. was chosen to decide on the contents of the Cornerstone for a Most Important Building...



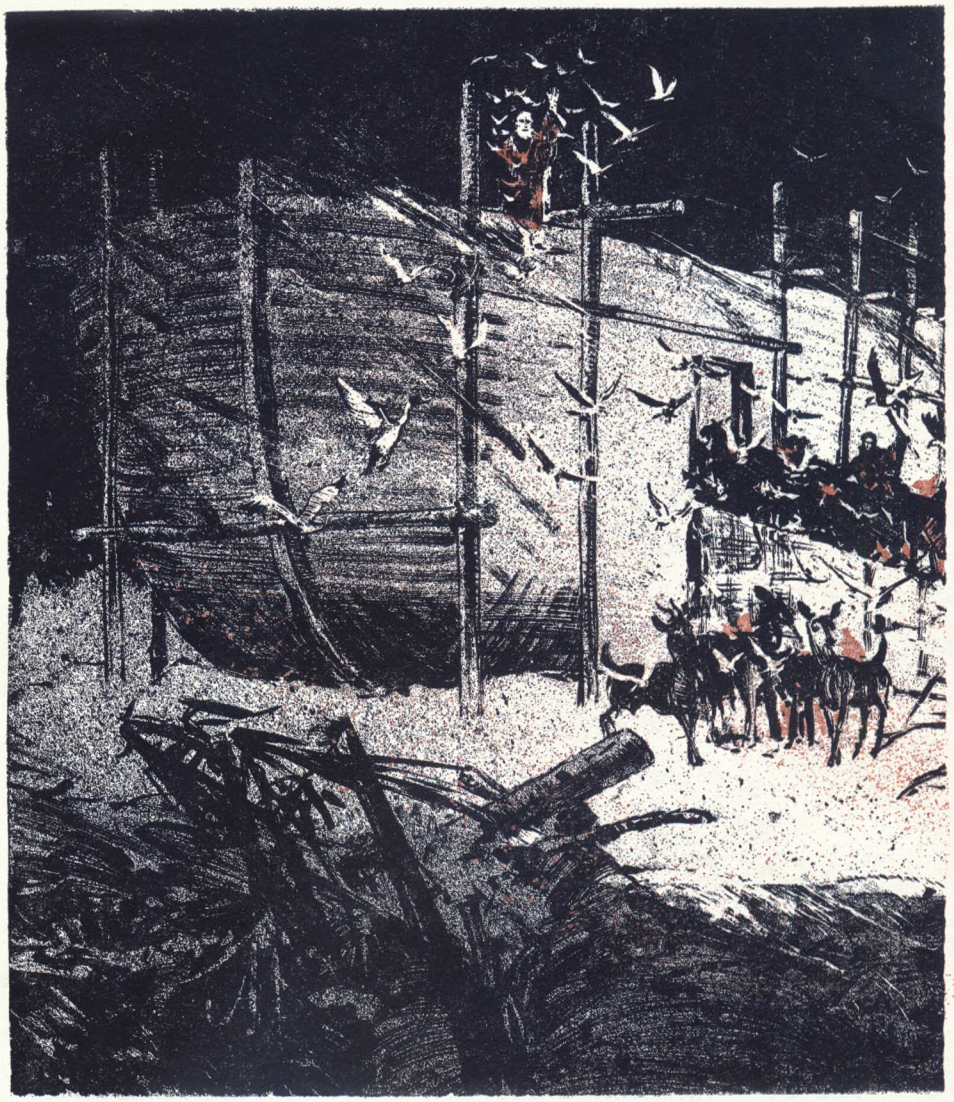
In the quiet of his well-ordered study he began his research for this Most Important job. The arts and crafts of our age were at his polished elbow...

The more he examined and read, the less easy his job became. A *doubt* crept into his mind that there ever would *be* any posterity to see his choice.



So, with a last glance around, the Professor crawled in himself. In his hand is one (1) gaily colored Yo-Yo, with one (1) extra string for posterity.

THE STORY OF THE FLOOD, AND THE ARK, OF NOAH AND HIS SONS AND THEIR WIVES, TOLD IN TERMS OF THE ORIENTAL TRADITION



CHOSEN

WHEN Kam came into possession of a young copper-colored Bedouin girl, he was tending his father's sheep along the banks of the Shatt-al-Arab. The girl was from nowhere in particular, since her tribe was nomadic, but at the time she was given to Kam, her people were tenting on the coast near Ras-at-Tannura, which is now well known to American oil men because of its giant refinery.

The time is harder to place. Many customs of northern Arabia have not changed for centuries. For example, the sacrificial ram still plays a part in some Moslem tribes, often serving as a figurehead on their river boats. Kam's strange adventure could have taken place today, with motor-trucks scattering his sheep; or it could have taken place long ago—longer than our calendar can tell. No matter exactly when, his adventure concerns us all.

When the camels bearing his father and brothers and the girl reached the Shatt-al-Arab, Kam was some miles upriver. The dust of the *shamal* which blew from the northwest covered his dark-skinned body and shoulder-long hair with dust. It choked the terrified sheep and Kam worked for hours herding them into a cave-fold.

Surprisingly, the wind stopped of a sudden, leaving his head ringing and dizzy. Sand- and rain-clouds whirled into a thunderhead and then another wind came from the southeast with a vast growl—the terrifying wind they call a *quas*. It came in hot blasts across Oman which, by coincidence, was the same direction from which the girl had come. It was a wind greatly feared by the nomads because it brought flash floods which often drowned their sheep in the wadis. In fact, since the days of the Chaldeans shepherds have worn charms against the "Evil of the South Wind."

When he reached home, he found his brothers and the shepherds driving more pegs for the tents, the women rushing for shelter, the camels gibbering and moaning in their beards, the donkeys huddled together, their rumps to the south. At an altar of stones in the middle of the encampment one man stood alone, offering a sheep for sacrifice. This was Kam's father.

According to the age-old custom he stood on the north side of the altar and thus faced the south wind. He prayed, his shaved upper lip trembling, the gale whipping his white beard in two parts over his shoulders. On each shoulder a dove perched, huddled against the beard, with feathers ruffling in the blast of heat.

Kam did not interrupt the old man's prayers but kept on toward the tent where his brothers were working. They were handsome fellows, their skin a gold brown in contrast to his, which was tough and dark as cured camel's hide.

"She's in there," one of them said, his eyes sparkling. "Cooking your supper. A lovely sight. Go and take her in your arms."

The other looked at Kam's muddy torso and goatskin apron and chunky legs: "Better put some clothes on first."

But Kam was too eager.

IT was a large tent like an inverted boat's hull with skin sides. Smoke came from the top, and as the squall whipped it away, Kam caught the odor of boiling goat's meat, onion pulp and cloves. He drew aside the flap with a rattle of wooden pegs, his eyes widening to the dim light of a butter lamp. The flame shone on the seed pearls around her neck, on the

CARGO

by KENNETH PERKINS

armlets of beads, on the *shulim* skirt of striped red and indigo.

She stared hotly at his hairy clothes, then at his dark face: "When is your master coming?"

"He is praying," Kam said, thinking she meant his father. "It's *your* master you should be asking about. And I am here."

"What of it? You are one of the workmen—a shepherd or a hunter. I asked you where is Kam?"

"I am Kam. So lift your arms to me."

Her arms came up but she held her hands with palms outward to push him away. The hands were a delight, jingling with tongues and wedges of bronze, the open palms scented with myrrh. She was a flash of polished bronze and silver, from the neck-chain on her throat to the spangles on her feet, for all her dowry was heaped on her thin graceful body. He caught her eyes—staring at him, baffled, then blazing.

As she backed away he said: "What is the matter with you, anyway?" The matter must have been with him, judging by the way she glared. He felt big-boned and clumsy. His *kelabh* sheep-dog, driven in by the gale, was peering between its master's legs and Kam almost stumbled over it. He began to sweat.

"They said you were like your brothers," she protested, "and you ask what is the matter with *me*?"

So that was it? His handsome brothers had been taken along as decoys when the bargain was made. She had been cheated; so had her father in giving that dowry. Kam's brothers were the kind any Bedouin girl would fall in love with. One was even nicknamed with the Hebrew word, "Beauty," while Kam's name meant "the color of Nile mud." His father had made a sharp bargain. He was known to be a wise and godly man, a mystic with a curious kinship for the birds, but he was also a very shrewd trader. At least, Kam thought seeing this bespangled creature in his tent, the old trader and holy-man had not got the worst of the transaction.

Kam was abashed, then angry. "It is not for you to say what I should look like. You do not seem to know what is going on. I am Kam, your owner, and you are *beulath ba'al,* which means taken in possession."

She backed to the fire of coals, where she snatched up an earthen *kidre* as if to throw it at him.

"It smells good," he laughed, "whatever you have in that pot."

"It's boiling milk," she said; "so don't come closer to me!"

"I'll come as close as I want when I feel like it." He inhaled the steam of goat's meat and spices in the milk. "But right now I feel like eating."

When she dodged away from him, he noticed for the first time a she-goat which she had probably brought in from the storm. He knew the goat with its shaggy hair and foot-long ears, as he knew every goat and sheep in his father's herd. Like many tribesmen of that country he called each one by name. This one, he remembered, had a suckling kid when he left that morning. "Where is the kid?" he asked.

"In the pot. Where do you think?"

"I think you are a heathen, cooking a kid in its mother's milk. That is not allowed. Nor is it allowed for women to slaughter what we eat. God has made a rule against that."

"Which god?"

"Your god now, just as my tribe is your tribe. We'll get that settled once for all."

According to age-old custom, Kam's father stood north of the altar and prayed, face to the south wind.

"I am going home to my own tribe when this *quas* stops blowing."

The *quas* was howling now, pelting the tent with flying palm fronds and stones. Somehow the roar of it thrilled Kam. He hoped it would never stop. "The storm will give you a long time to think about running away to your tribe. If you try it, I will—" He checked himself. "If you run away, my brothers and our shepherds will catch you and kill you."

"You might think of a worse threat than that." Her scarlet lips curled as she ladled out some of the stew into a bowl with lentils and figs and cheese. "You may as well eat this, since I spent hours cooking it."

When he took the bowl, the spices got his mouth watering. He trembled with hunger after his day's work. Breathing deep of the spicy steam, he decided she was a good cook, but he said: "You cooked this for someone who looked like my brothers. When you cook food for *me*, I will eat it." He threw the bowl on the ground in front of his dog.

When he walked out into the storm, it sent a shattering ache through his whole body. He bent against the solid rush of air, half groping his way toward the stone altar. He intended to tell his father as respectfully as he could that this bargain was not fair. The girl had been cheated. Although it was not the custom to let the bride see her future husband, it was wrong to let her think she had seen someone built in his image. It was like showing a finely woven mohair carpet as a sample and then delivering a patch of camel's hide.

But he could not tell his father now for the holy-man seemed greatly troubled over his divinations at the altar. He was casting dust in the air and tearing at his garment in the manner of the nomads when danger is imminent. But as he saw Kam trudging toward him, his mind came back to happier matters—the mating of his son. The matter was already settled, for there was no ceremony of marriage beyond the giving of the *mahr* as a dowry, and the *mattan* as a gift from the man to his woman, but the father made one comment. "She was a good bargain."

Kam nodded. "She cooks well."

The father stared at him out of eyes that looked dazed, dreaming. Something was wrong with his son.

"Take some wine," he said. "You look cold."

Kam took some of the date wine from the altar, and the warmth he had expected from his wife's food crept into him.

"What did you say about her?" the old man asked.

"She looks like a gazelle because of her eyes, and her thin body and her jumpy way of moving."

"You said something about her cooking. What was wrong with it?"

Kam did not tell about the kid

boiled in its own mother's milk. "It was savory."

"Then cherish her and protect her from that—" The holy-man nodded to the south; then he turned to the stone altar which made, as the saying goes, a table-bond between himself and God. "I will spend the night praying for my sons and their wives, for my flocks and camels. As for you—" He waved his hand in the direction of the girl's tent. "Enjoy her for the short time allotted you of life."

When Kam went back to her tent, he felt the air on his shoulders, a formless, smothering weight like tons of black sheep's wool. The vast rushing heat mauled his ears, pressed his eyeballs back into their sockets. He staggered, reaching for the flap of the tent so that it was the wind rather than his own pull which yanked the flap open.

The metal disks on the hem of her skirt tinkled as she whirled to face him.

"Now what do you want?" she demanded.

"I want to protect you, as I would protect a sheep or a goat that belongs to me."

"Protect me from what—yourself?"

"Some calamity is about to happen to us. My father just told me it will be more horrifying than the south wind."

"More horrifying than your coming in this tent?"

"When I come in the next time, I will bring a camel goad. There are ways to teach you how to talk to the man who owns you."

He drew the flap shut and turned against the wind, heading for the well where the camels were tethered. As he passed his brothers' tents, he heard the soft beat of a drum, a tambourine, laughter, the clink of a *kadh* of wine against bronze, then singing. His brothers and their wives were gay, warm with wine and the braziers of coals, taking a vicarious joy in the bridal night of the dark-skinned brother.

Because of the raving wind, the camels at the well growled and gurgled and spat. One of them kicked at Kam sidewise. "Just like the woman," he grunted. "This is my own camel that I feed and water and care for, and it spits its cud at me." Picking up a goad and lambasting the beast out of his way, he went back to the girl's tent.

Her scream when she saw him was unnoticed in the other tents because of the louder scream of the wind. He tore the wool garment from her shoulder and stood a moment getting back the breath the storm had ripped from his lungs. Her shoulder was smooth and soft when he clutched it. She squirmed free, but instead of trying to rush to the tent door, she stood with face lifted so that he saw the dimple and the tattooed dot on her chin. Her jet lashes narrowed.

"Go ahead. I'm ready." She folded her arms.

When he raised the cedar stick to give a preliminary whip at the empty air, the she-goat, with an almost human bleat, whirled on its hindlegs and buck-jumped toward the door. That was all right, he thought, as the goat ran out into the storm. His tribe had always believed in the efficacy of a scapegoat carrying away the sins of its owners. He raised the stick again, his eyes still fixed on her shoulder, which was the color of ivory in a sunset light. He would have to close his eyes before he could cover that skin with welts and smirch it with blood. He would flinch with each stroke he gave her!

He brought the goad down with a loud flap against his bare thigh. Back in his mind perhaps there was that strange belief his father had taught him, that a man can atone for the sins of others by taking their punishment himself. Once more he brought the goad down, his flesh exulting in the slicing pain. He did not flinch.

But it made her cringe, and the whang of the rod made the dog yelp loudly. They were the ones who suffered.

She looked down at the broken camel goad and the long welt across his thigh. She unfolded her arms and clasped her hands over her breast. Her breast went up, collapsed, jerked up again for breath. She bit her lips.

Outside the tent Kam heard his brothers laughing. "He's beating her," one said. And another chuckled: "What? On the very first night?"

Kam ran out, drawing the tent-flap tight and then turned to face them. "Beating my dog," he said, then added truthfully: "Ate the food she cooked for me."

His brothers looked at each other, tongues in cheeks. "Too bad to beat such a faithful dog," one said. "Now if you beat *her*, it would be all right."

"I should beat you for lying to her about my looks."

As Kam stalked off, one of them called to him: "Not spending the night in your tent?"

"After I get a wine gourd. Tonight is a night for fun."

This reminded them of their own wine jugs and wives. They turned into their tents.

Kam did not go for the wine. He kept walking toward the river; and with the ecstasy common to martyrs, he let the wind finish his castigation with flying sticks and salt. It was night now, but the planet Chiun which guided shepherds was snuffed out by racing clouds. So was the constellation Kesil, somewhere shining gloriously—but shining for blind, groping men.

It was dangerous to grope his way too close to the quicksands of the river, and too humiliating to go back to his father's tents. But in a shallow wadi that had once been the main waterway of the Shatt-al-Arab, he found refuge in a stranded barge. Long ago this hulk had taken wool and cedar and shelled barley to Gerrha, but now it was used only as a shelter for newly dropped lambs, also as a roost for many wild birds. Kam's father had ordained that the birds even at lambing-time were to be allowed this sanctuary.

He spent the night with owls and turtle doves, hoopoes and herons, and a few lost goats that had been driven in by the storm. The feed bins which his father had built in the abandoned hulk were noisy with clucking and cooing. The goats stamped and butted against the stalls, terrified at the mounting roar outside. Out there the date palms thrashed wildly, their fronds sawing and beating and crashing like a hundred camel goads. He could not sleep.

There was no dawn, but because of his hunger he knew many hours had passed. Turning for the camp, he saw the tents torn from their stakes but a few that had been pitched in the lee of the salt rocks still stood. One of them was his tent. She was safe!

Instead of going there for food, he went into a hide-roofed hut, the *sukkah* of one of the shepherds, and ate some lentils and locusts. When he came out, he saw his father praying at the stone altar with many birds fluttering about his flying mane of hair. Kam was about to pass him when he heard the old man's voice. "There is no fire in your tent. Since you are up, she should be cooking for you."

"I told her she could sleep a little longer."

The old holy-man shook his head. "Tell her to come here. We must all pray against this disaster!"

Obediently Kam went to his tent. He drew the flap and stood a moment trying to pierce the darkness. The butter lamp was out. No light came from the charcoal under the cooking stones. The perfume of myrrh and spikenard hung faintly in the imprisoned air but it was little more than a memory. He knew, even before his eyes became adjusted to the darkness, that she was gone.

No use asking any of the shepherds if they had seen her. If they had, they would have raised the alarm

when she escaped. No one need tell him the road she had taken. It would be down the coast without doubt, toward Hasa. But she would never get there.

A sudden vast bellowing shattered against his eardrums. The deafening patter came up from the ground like a giant thumb drawn across the hide of a drum. He smelled wet dust boiling.

It had started to rain.

Chilled and terrified, he ran out to see the wadis filled with running mud. In one of them the fugitive would be drowned if she attempted to cross. But there was one mild comfort in this cloudburst. His father would not be waiting for him to bring his mate to the stone altar.

Everyone had run for cover and so far as his father and brothers or their wives or the shepherds knew, Kam was in his own tent with his wife. He slipped out and saddled the fastest riding-camel—a dun mare.

Inasmuch as the Bedouins considered stealing stock an honorable pursuit, the girl had felt no guilt taking one of the donkeys for her flight. Her guilt lay in running away from her master. She would pay for that with her life if Kam's father or brothers found her; and that is why, after getting some dates and a goatskin bottle of wine, he rode off in pursuit alone. He wanted her alive, not dead.

The wadis boiled with scum and mud, but the fugitive had crossed them when they were dry. Now Kam had to turn inland before fording them, thus losing hours, then a whole night.

In the dull leaden sheen at sunrise he got back to the Gulf again but found an undulating morass that was neither sea nor land. Hopelessly he pressed on past the caving banks to the next wadi, and then he found her.

She cowered against a rock, her woolen garments plastered on her body, her hair sopping and tangled in a mass of bronze amulets and disks. The donkey was gone, swept away perhaps when trying to cross the mud river. The girl had clung to the rocks somehow and the marks of them were on her shoulders and thighs. Showing under the tattered wool, her bare skin was cut with purple welts as if Kam had used his goad. It enraged him. She had been whipped but he was the only one who had the right to whip her. No one else could smear or touch that copper skin, neither man nor god—not even the south wind!

He took her in his arms and her head sank forward over his shoulder as he lifted her. He carried her to the camel mare, got the wine from the saddlebag, and then rocked her head back, pillowing it in the palm of his hand as he made her drink.

Her wet lashes flickered and the rain coursed down her face like tears. She breathed in gasps as if choking back real sobs. He was glad there were no words in her soft moaning. She would have no words for him anyway. He was even glad she was without strength or will to do anything other than to surrender herself bodily.

He made the camel kneel, mounted, but instead of sitting crosslegged, he rode astride the hump so he could hold the girl in front of him. She made no protest. She might have been stricken dumb in chastisement for her sins. But when they fled the raging breakers of the Gulf coast and reached a low plateau, she finally spoke to him.

It was in a cave-fold where he had often bedded his father's flocks but now it was filled with wild beasts and birds. He could not see them but he heard the surprised whoof of a bear, the bleat of a goat, the fleering laugh of a raven. And he could smell them. But there was also the smell of myrrh and saffron from the pliant wilting one in his arms.

He did not drive out the beasts. Like his father he always pitied them. He did not fear them, nor did the girl. Even the camel was resigned to this strange company. And the wild beasts in the face of universal death forgot their hunger and hatred. The hart no longer hated the jackal, nor the jackal the wolf, nor the woman this man who owned her.

Kam spread the sheep's-wool saddle blanket for a bed and it was then the girl spoke to him. "After tonight, what?"

"We will find another cave-fold, spend another night and then another until I get you home to my tent where you belong."

"Your father and his shepherds will kill me."

"I am the only one who can do that, since you belong to me."

"Everything you have belongs to your father."

"My riding-camel and the flocks I tend and even my dog belongs to him—everything but you, which I own for myself alone."

"The wives of a patriarch's household belong to him too."

"A slave's wife belongs to him. But I am not a slave. I am my father's son."

"Are you?" she asked in honest unabashed doubt.

"You say that because my skin is not smooth like my brothers'! My skin, they say, is fit for the making of tents. That is what you mean?"

"I cannot see your skin any more," she said slowly. "If it is black I am blind to it."

They left the plateau and went farther into the low hills in the morning. The camel staggered blindly through the thickening curtains of rain, its cloven hoofs sloshing in mud. The journey which had taken Kam two days before finding the girl now stretched into time which he could not measure. The day was a streaming dusk but under the incessant bolts of lightning, both day and night were the same.

It was a fork of lightning that lit the broad wadi where Kam's tent and the tents of his father and brothers had stood. Now the ground was bare except for sheets of brown ooze sweeping across it in a steady cascade. Somewhere beyond, toward the swollen Shatt-al-Arab, Kam heard the distant pounding of stone mauls and the shouts of men. They were working, he guessed logically, on the refuge left in this maelstrom—that deserted barge.

The cumbersome old *tebhah,* long stranded on dry ground, had become a sanctuary for more than wild birds. Kam could neither see it nor, because of the river of mud, could he reach it. The haven, like Paradise, was unattainable in this life. He could only listen, lost and spellbound, to the sound of mauls and men which was like the voices of cherubim in the sky.

Banks crumbled, streams boiled on every side, isolating Kam and the girl on an island which was strewn with carcasses—a goat, two camels, a ewe. When he dismounted and took the girl in his arms, she gave a gasp at his savage strength, but he kept pressing her against his chest. "If we drown, let it be together. I will hold you like this and carry you even as far as Paradise."

"Why will we drown? You are so strong—stronger than any tide!" But she saw the island fast shrinking to a mud lump. Terrified, she locked her arms about his neck, pressing her face against his breast.

Sensing the dissolution of the ground beneath it, the kneeling camel pitched up its hindquarters, unfolded its front legs and bolted. It waddled off toward the unseen *tebhah,* plunged knee-deep in the swirling mud, then belly-deep. When the torrent frothed over its shriveled hump it rolled, sank, its cloven pads flaying above the surface. A vivid fork of lightning revealed it far down the stream still rolling until it was tossed in a heap of flotsam and other carcasses on the opposite shore.

The camel's death suggested a desperate speculation. Clearly enough a

Her jet lashes narrowed. "Go ahead. I'm ready." She folded her arms.

sharp turn of the current piled up the flotsam on the shore of the ridge where the *tebhah* stood. With the girl still held close against him, Kam looked over her shoulder at the drowned animals on the ground. The two camels had been dead a long time for they were bloated. Releasing the girl, Kam sliced some strips of hide and bound two legs of one camel to two legs of the other. He dragged the makeshift raft into the stream, called to the girl and both climbed on. But the bloated mass began to sink with Kam's weight.

"The current will take you," he said, "if you cling on."

"I can't cross without you!"

"No room for both—and no time for talk! I'll follow."

"But there is nothing else that will float!"

Without answering, he wrenched himself from her clinging arms and shoved the raft out into the swirl of mud.

In a sudden panic he feared she would let go, preferring to drown herself rather than to meet his father and brothers. Considering her crime, any woman might have taken that choice. But like every other living thing, she had only one terror now—this *mabbul* of boiling waves.

Thunder rolled and the darkness cracked open. In a lurid flash, brighter than day, he saw her on the opposite shore on hands and knees like the half-drowned beasts wallowing all around her.

The beasts made a continual procession toward the sound of those screaming birds, instinctively knowing perhaps, that where the birds sought a roosting place there would be a dry spot in this maelstrom. Many of them in their trek inland toward high ground had found the low cliffs covered by unbroken waterfalls. Because of the deafening roar in the hill wadis they had come back to the river. Here they were trapped.

Another flash revealed the girl on her feet, but instead of running toward the barge she was coming upriver in Kam's direction. He yelled across the river to her, pointing toward the *tebhah,* but his voice was drowned by a strange subterranean thunder rolling beneath his feet.

The water that crept up to his knees had turned hot. Mud and scum boiled about his waist when another flash revealed her standing on the shore opposite to him holding out her arms. Because of the wet robe clinging to her she seemed much slimmer and smaller —a wraith, a vague shaft of light. He heard her calling to him faintly, frantically.

He stood helpless, legs spread wide to keep his balance as the tide swept completely across his island. Branches of cedars from the distant massifs rolled past him, slamming his hips. A tree bole bashed his stomach and he doubled, flaying his arms, fighting the chunk of wood as if it were alive. He rolled with it, binding his arms around it to choke out its writhing life, but it still lived, bobbing and squirming and leaping as the current carried it downstream.

It landed on the opposite shore, crashing against a rock, and Kam landed with it. Although no longer

possessed of demoniac life, the tree bole was still his master, pinning his leg in a crevice of the rock.

He looked up and down the beach in search of the girl, calling to her wildly, his voice a hollow bleating against that strange roar that came from beneath the earth. He thought he heard her answer but it might have been the scream of the birds tossing in the clouds.

He pulled himself up, half standing, peering over the rock's rim toward the barge. He could see it now, lined with rows of chattering birds. Hawks and herons, kites and quail roosted side by side trying to shoulder each other out of the way with their wet wings. Beyond the birds he saw the men on the barge binding braided withes of cedar around the hull to serve as undergirders to prevent the

Illustrated by Cleveland Woodward

Kam held the girl in front of him, but she made no protest. She might have been stricken dumb in chastisement for her sins.

planks from starting. One man was calking the seams with bitumen while two wolves, grown tame as dogs, watched dumbly, yearning for his friendship. For they knew this man was working some magic against the *mabbul* which was his enemy as well as theirs.

KAM yelled for help again, but there was no hope of the men on the barge hearing him. It was the girl who heard him and called back.

She flitted wildly in the dark, trying to find where his call had come from. And then she saw the rock where he was clinging. She gave an exultant scream and ran toward him, her arms outstretched. When she waded out in the water, circling the rock, the sluicing mud gouged the ground from under her feet and she fell forward, arms still outstretched toward him as she disappeared.

The same torrent that had hurled Kam and the tree bole on this shore caught her and tossed her in a long rolling comber against his body. In the violence of their contact and embrace his strength seemed to pass from his body into hers. She tried to lift him but failing to pull him free of the tree bole, she got a broken branch to use as a lever.

It was while she worked that the eruption long heralded by the underground roarings, the quaking and the hot springs, sent a spear of light into the sky. Kam blinked at the heat searing his eyeballs, his ears rang with the blast and in every bone he felt the concussion as if the *quas* had given its last monstrous puff of rage.

The rain kept pouring but it was lighted by another rain of incandescent dust. Giant breakers washed the trembling ground as if it had sunk below the level of the river beaches.

"You get to the barge!" Kam pleaded. "You may have time if you run!"

But she kept pushing the branch under the tree bole, trying to lift it. She got on the other side and tried again. When he felt the tree trunk shifting he glanced frantically over his shoulder at the barge, measuring the distance. The men up there on deck were battening down the hatches, whipping at the animals, herding some of them below. More animals stampeded up the rock ramp leading to the deck, many falling to their death into the breakers which were now crashing against the hull. Some got aboard.

Kam twisted his foot, clutching the rock and lifting himself. The moment he was free the girl ran to him and caught him as he staggered forward. With his arm over her shoulder he started limping, wading through the mud and débris.

NOW he could see his brothers herding the animals up the ramp to the barge's deck. A dozen harts and their does were followed by a herd of antelope, another of oryx, another of zemers. All of them were ceremonial-

ly fit for food, which was perhaps the reason they were saved. But then he saw a camel mare and camel stud which were unclean meat. There might be a reason for this too, since Kam's father would want to breed a new herd. These beasts and their mates were being saved just as Kam and his own mate would be saved—if they could reach the barge in time.

They were close enough now to see Kam's father, a majestic figure alive with the fluttering of many wings. When he saw Kam and the girl he called to his sons who were busy at that moment chasing a Syrian bear off the ramp. Another bear had almost reached the deck, but seeing its mate driven back it turned and followed. Hate had dissolved in this flood—but not love. Kam was glad his brothers were called from the chase for this gave the two bears a chance to skulk aboard.

THE brothers threw ropes over the side. As Kam tied one around the girl's waist, he looked up fearfully at the faces peering over the rail. Joy beamed on each face because of the return of the lost brother and there was a malignant joy at the return of the runaway wife. It was propitious, their grins said, that she had been saved from the *mabbul* which was an act of God, so that she could be punished by the hand of man according to the law of man.

While Kam hesitated, a wave higher than a date palm roared down the Tigris. The wall of water—a "bore"—met the greater wall rolling up the Gulf. This was the real deluge—the sinking of the land, the eruption at sea, the bore and the tidal wave! A breaker exploded in a brown cloud higher than the barge itself. Kam's throat filled with salt water and in a spasm of choking he thought he was sinking again into the torrent—until he felt the comfort of a solid deck.

A small, aged voice came as if from a great distance in the whirlwind. "Take him to his mother."

One of his brothers lifted him to his knees. The other lifted the girl. When they were taken into the semi-darkness below decks Kam thought he was in the cave-fold again, for he could hear many animals stirring in the stalls and birds clucking in the feed bins. As it was in the cave-fold, all enmity was forgotten. The beasts of prey that had prowled aboard had not been driven off for these were the pitiful remnants of life. All life in the face of so much death had become precious. The old holy-man had so ordained. Nothing that was living must be thrown to the *mabbul*.

Kam lay exhausted while his mother bathed his crushed leg with oil and gave him wine. He looked up dazed, his eyes roving. In the smoky light of firebrands he saw two more women standing above him—his brothers' wives. They were jabbering excitedly about the shepherds who had fled to the hills, but the jabbering stopped when they saw Kam looking at them.

"Where is she?" he asked faintly. He heard the whisper of spangles and caught the scent of myrrh.

"I am here."

He wiped the mud from his eyes and stared groggily. He saw her silver anklets first, then her bruised thigh, then a shoulder and bare throat shining wet in a tangle of amulets. On each side of her one of his brothers stood watching her from the corners of half-closed eyes. In front of her stood Kam's father, squeezing his water-soaked beard as he studied her. Obviously she was a prisoner at the judgment seat.

"You have said nothing except that you are here," the old man began. "But where were you these many nights when you should have been in your husband's tent?"

Kam answered for her. "When I went to save my sheep she followed, faithful to me even against death!"

The brothers gave a sigh of relief. So did their wives and mother. But the old patriarch looked at the girl with a steady light in his mystic eyes; then he gave his judgment. "There is to be no death in this sanctuary." The sweep of his arm included all on board—the men, the women, the birds, the clean and unclean beasts, even the beasts of prey. "You are my son's mate," he said. "Bear him sons. Let all that God chose to save"—with another gesture to include the beasts—"let them bring life again to the earth."

The girl fell to her knees by Kam's side, watching anxiously while the mother bound his wound.

"There is no worry about him," the mother said. "He is tough of bone and flesh."

"And tough of heart," the girl said. "As tough as he is merciful. I will follow such mercy to the ends of the earth."

"There is no earth."

"Then I will follow him on the sea and in the sky."

"The sky?" Evidently the old woman had heard of that kid boiled in its mother's milk, for she snorted, "You think they will let a heathen like you into Paradise?"

"*He* will get me in!"

BEHIND her Kam could see his brothers binding the hides which made a hatch covering—the last hatch to be closed against the burning dust. Below he saw the fire of coals at the stone altar where his father was praying. Kam slept and awoke and saw the same picture, the white-bearded man with a dove and a raven on his shoulders, making his table-bond with God. After many hours—yes, days—of prayer the old patriarch said, "This is not the end but the next time it will be the end."

"When?" Sem, the oldest son, asked.

"After many generations. But it will not be flood which is the work of God. It will be fire which is the work of man. Man will learn to loose the bands of Kesil, the slow-witted star. And when man learns the secret it will be as if the Mazzaroth themselves had fallen from their orbits to shatter the earth in pieces!"

This was the prophecy Kam's father made when the barge, drifting for many days before the south wind, approached the plateau of Bayezid. It had been leaking badly toward the end. To keep it afloat they jettisoned much of the cargo of palm-nut flour, the kopher wood of the stalls and bins, the heavy sodden hides covering the hatches. They jettisoned everything of weight, but not the living cargo, not even the beasts of prey. These, the elect, were safe when the *tebhah* rubbed bottom on the uprooted birches and olive trees at the foot of the great massif of Ararat.

A Pilot Must Know

A lesson learned at great peril in World War I proves of unexpected value in a very modern plane.

by ARCH WHITEHOUSE

Illustrated by Clayton Knight

OLD MAN CROSSETT patrolled the sunlight gilding the magnificent cloud-walled corridors. For the past hour he had been darting and wheeling on laughter-light wings through the blue-white slopes and precipices. He climbed again, skimming the cold vacancy, and raced among the top-gallants of the windswept heights with the liquid grace of his imagination.

"I suppose I should buzz down around La Bassée and see if Jerry is bothering our artillery-spotters," he decided, and winged over into a tight turn. A friendly anti-aircraft battery exploded two blobs of white cotton indicating hostile aircraft in the area, and the Old Man went down in high-tailed pursuit. His air-speed indicator showed one hundred sixty—seventy—eighty; and he was about to draw a bead on a Hun two-seater when the radio on the window seat canceled the attack.

"We interrupt this program to announce that a fatal air crash has just been reported from the Gordon Aviation Corporation field. A new type jet fighter known as the Gordon Comet crashed shortly after taking off on an initial test flight. The name of the pilot has been withheld pending notification of his next-of-kin. We now return you to—"

"I suppose I ought to go back," the Old Man said, and fumbled with an adjustment lever on his wheel chair. "I should be in the mess when the message comes through. Too bad—I could have potted that two-seater."

The Old Man spun his chair and worked his way across the floor to the telephone stand. There was time now to piece it in. It might be well to review it all, because they'd want to know when they put the piece in the paper about Dave.

"David Crossett, who was killed while testing a new jet fighter for the Gordon Aircraft Corporation yesterday, was the son of E. D. and the late Pamela Crossett of 5198 Las Palmas Avenue. His father had been an ace in World War I, having joined up with the British Royal Flying Corps before the United States had entered the war. Mrs. Crossett had been a member of the W.A.A.C., employed as an automobile driver on overseas duty with the R.F.C."

Well, Dave was dead, and they'd be calling him any minute now. It had to be Dave. They wouldn't trust that new aircraft with anyone else. He pondered on unrelated segments of the past, and finally realized that he was alone, because Pamela had died several years ago. It was hard to figure how many, because numbers puzzled him. Pamela had, as he remembered, worried about the war—the one just finished. Not the Great War. The war the Japs were in as well as the Germans. Pamela had worried about it, and about young Dave; and one day he remembered she just sat down and sighed. After that, she was dead, and they had to have a funeral. The Daughters of the British Empire came and sang hymns, and someone put a Union Jack on the coffin. He always wondered where they got the Union Jack.

Then the telephone bell tinkled. The Old Man cleared his thin throat, sat erect and reached for the instrument.

"Crossett speaking," he said bravely. "Thank you for calling. I fully understand."

"Hey, Gaffer! What's the deal? This is Dave!"

The Old Man eased the receiver from his vein-traced ear. He stared at the mouthpiece with watery eyes and assumed the air of a man who considers he is being chivvied at an ill-timed moment.

"I—I heard the report on the radio," he tried to explain. "I presumed it was my son."

"Listen, Gaffer," Dave said quietly. "I'm all right. It was Briggsie: Paul Briggs. This is Dave. You understand now, don't you?"

The Old Man considered all that and said: "I see. Then you weren't given the test assignment? That was too bad, Dave."

"Yeh. Too bad for Briggsie. He never had a chance. He just took off, pulled up off the runway, and she went over sharp in a right-hand turn and nosed straight in. I was afraid you'd be upset, Gaffer. That's why I called."

"But you'll test the next one, won't you, Dave?" the Old Man pleaded. "They'll let you have the next one."

"Who else? It was between me and Briggsie, and we tossed—and I lost. Sure, I suppose I'll get the next one.... but I'm afraid she's a killer, Gaffer. Be seein' you."

The Old Man replaced the phone with trembling hands and backed his wheel chair away. At the little window he tried to reshuffle his thoughts. "They should have sent Dave up right away," he complained. "Then there

wouldn't have been time for him to decide the Comet was a killer. That's the mistake—I made."

That was how it had been the day of *his* crash. Number 24 was taking over new Camels, and he had climbed in for the first time, anxious and advice-cluttered, to try the intractable scout plane. He recalled tightening his belt, staring at the taunting eyes of the crash pads pillowing the gun breeches, and the effort it took to taxi out and nose the blunt-headed demon into the wind.

"Don't give her a chance," they had warned. "Get to five hundred feet with 110 air-speed before you try to turn. Watch her, Crossett. She'll spin in if you don't."

Dave had said: *"She just took off—and went over in a sharp right-hand turn and nosed in."*

Once he was away, he experienced a moment of paradisal bliss; and while the Camel held her javelin-straight course, it was heavenly; but he had to turn eventually. He had to get back and put her down again.

He swept the stick over just as he would have done on the Sopwith Pup. The horizon tilted and began to whip away fast. There was a flopping lurch, and he knew what had happened.

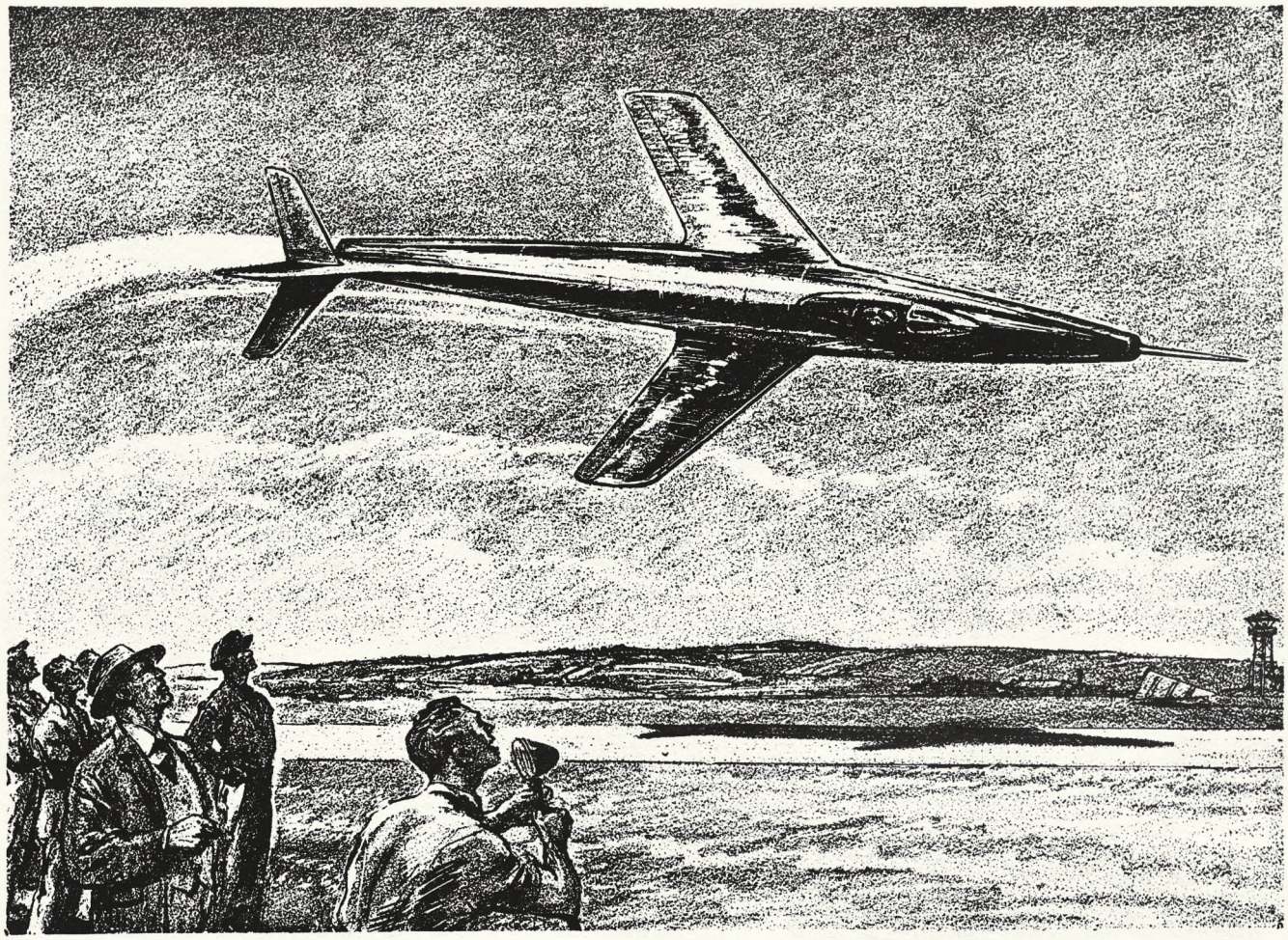
That was all he remembered until they were hacking at the *longerons* and grasping to haul him out. He still recalled pleading with them to run him back to the aërodrome and put him aboard another.

"It won't happen again," he snuffled through the spray of scarlet spume. "I'll know what to do—next time. One more try before I lose my nerve."

They didn't have the courage to tell him he might never be able to press the rudder again. They rushed him off to the casualty clearing station, and Pamela wangled a leave and married him, believing that would help pull him through.

Maybe it did, but Crossett never walked again.

The living-room in the bungalow was square and roomy, and the floor gleamed like the interplane strut of a Sop Snipe. Dave had had a large picture window set in on the wide side, with a padded seat where the Old Man could have things handy, where he could look out on the front garden and see folks walking downtown; but his father still sat at the small casement which offered a restricted view of the scraggy hills of Topanga. Said the big window made



The Comet roared back in triumph and bombarded the field with ecstatic frenzy.

him feel he was sitting in the front office of a blasted great Handley-Page bomber. He'd never flown bombers. He was a scout pilot.

There was a fireplace, a square table and a comfortable leather couch. The room was uncluttered, because the Old Man had to get about. Since Pamela's passing, he had become mess president and hut orderly, as he called it. Breakfast was simple; Dave had lunch at the field; and Mrs. Carthage, whom the Old Man studiously avoided, came in from next door late in the afternoon and prepared their evening meal.

Dave arrived on time, sniffed for details of the menu and gave the room a quick inspection. The Old Man turned slowly, sat erect and wheeled so he could be near Dave when he lounged on the window seat.

"That chap Briggs—he died?" the Old Man began.

"And how!" Dave said, and forked his fingers through his crisp sandy hair. He looked tired and unwashed. He had his mother's violet blue eyes and dimpled chin. His nose was large but well proportioned like the Old Man's.

"I was wondering. If they could have— But he died, you say?"

"It was a hell of a show, Gaffer. No one can figure it."

"He was taking off and went into a right-hand turn?"

"Just that. It happened so quick—"

"I know. I know. That's what happened to me, and they wouldn't let me try another. I knew the instant it started what I should have done; but they wouldn't—"

"Maybe Briggsie knew too, but he's not here to tell it."

"Of course," the Old Man admitted, and stared down at the chestnut-bright leather buttons on his frayed tweed jacket. "But when *you* feel her going over, Dave; when you sense that first—er—twitch, you should put on top rudder to keep her nose up. It comes from the gyroscopic effect of the whirling engine. You get it on all rotaries. Now on the S.E. 5—"

DAVE winced, closed his eyes and pressed his temples with thumb and forefinger. His other hand went out in silent protest. The Old Man folded his thin hands in his lap and waited with ascetic patience.

"Look, Gaffer. Rotary engines went out with World War I—your war. This was a jet job. No prop, no nothing. Just a blast of hot air blown out of a tail pipe, and she flies. I've shown you the pictures."

Puzzlement ribbed the Old Man's placid features. "I don't understand how you can fly without a prop. We had Bentley rotaries on the Camel."

Dave interrupted: "Here, I'll explain it to you." He reached over for a book, and began sketching in an outline of a jet engine on the flyleaf.

"They fix an air scoop somewhere in the leading edge of the wing, which is carried to this section here. Fuel is burned in a series of combustion chambers, and this mixture—heat and air—is compressed by a high-speed turbine wheel—set somewhere here. This blast is rammed out through the tail pipe, something like the explosive from a rocket—and there you are!"

"No propeller?" the Old Man persisted.

"Just a blast of hot air, Gaffer. That's all there is to it."

"Then no wonder Briggs crashed. . . . No prop!"

Dave sighed. "Listen here, Gaffer. We've been flying jets for years and years. The Comet is just another jet job, only we're using a plant that produces ten thousand thrust-pounds. That's about twice the power of anything they've tried before."

"I see," the Old Man said thoughtfully. "But you're going to test the next one?"

"I'd rather not talk about it, after seeing what happened to Briggsie. Anyone can have my spot."

The Old Man pleaded: "All you have to do is to ease in top rudder if she begins to fall off. It's just getting past that first time. After that, you'll do it naturally. I always wished I could have had another try."

Dave felt dazed and numb in the presence of this quiet, confident man who no longer seemed an invalid. He sensed that if the Gaffer could walk, he would climb into that treacherous contraption and take off. He felt that this little man, soft and vulnerable from his years of pain and untold anguish, would harden, anneal, and on contact with the Comet become a part—a dominant part— a sort of automatic-pilot device that would unerringly guide that metal monster through the high halls of time and space—and bring it back again.

"I don't know what I'm going to do, Gaffer. Right now I'm scared of the witch."

"Oh, we mustn't be frightened, Dave," the Old Man warned. "You should have climbed right back in another," he added wistfully.

"Let's eat," Dave said and went out to the kitchen.

"You're not really frightened, are you, Dave?"

THE papers were full of it the next day. Two separate investigations of the crash were under way, and a third was being prepared. They had four-column shots showing several policemen guarding the wreckage. There was a picture of Briggsie's girl, taken on some front steps, telling the reporters how they were to have been married once the Comet test was over. The news programs inserted strips of the hesitant interview that sounded like something lifted from a soap opera. All it needed was an electric organ.

Old Man Crossett caught none of this: Number 24 squadron was too busy on another legendary patrol over Cambrai. A phantom Jerry triplane put four bullet-holes in his tail, and he was quite happy.

Not so Dave. He returned shortly after Mrs. Carthage had taken the apple pie from the oven. The Old Man was sitting by the telephone poring over the jet-engine sketch Dave had scrawled in the book. He spun his chair sharply.

"You flew it, Dave! She didn't spin on you?"

Dave waited until the Old Man wheeled over. He gripped his thin shoulder affectionately. "Not yet, Gaffer. They're still looking over the crash. I've stayed away from it to check over the one they want me to test."

"You didn't fly today?" Gaffer asked incredulously.

"I'm not taking one up until I know what happened to Briggsie. That's all I ask. Just tell me what was wrong, and I'll know what to do. Otherwise it's like fighting a guy in a dark room. You don't know whether he has a gun, a knife or a bull-whip."

"But it's just as I told you, son. It's the effect of the whirling engine on right-hand turns. Gyroscopic effect, Dave. All you have to do is to start her around, and as soon as you feel her nose go down, you put on top rudder. I figured that out just before I crashed, and if they'd only let me take up another—I might have gone on patrol the next day."

Up to now Dave had enjoyed this pleasant madness. There had been times when, unknown to the Old Man, he had taken part. He had been a youngster then, and it had been realistic and exciting to trail along on one of his father's nostalgic flights of fancy. How much they had contributed to his going into the Air Force in spite of the mounting casualties in Europe that winter, he would never admit. But the war ended before he got overseas. Jets had come in, and he had stayed on to experience the thrill and prestige of flying without a prop. He had been marked for the Gordon test crew months before his service time was up. Dave was good—or had been until the day they began assembling the new Comet fighter. It leered at him, and the swept-back wings reminded him of the biased ears of a vicious mare that had thrown and dragged him at camp one summer. He had never put foot in a stirrup again.

"You're not frightened of it, are you, Dave?" the Old Man appealed again.

"A-Flight got seven Huns."

Dave ignored that. "It could have been anything. Suppose the turbine blew, cut the push-pull rods and took out the controls? That could have happened. The engine is a complete write-off."

"Those rotaries do that," the Old Man said.

Dave punched his fist into an open palm. "If I only knew. That's what gets you, Gaffer! Could be that Briggsie blacked out when she left the ground. She whips off like a bullet. If I only knew!"

The Old Man could not understand the complicated curse of fear. There were no intense emotions to flail his mind with the twanging strain of cowardice. There was no sadness nor any degree of pleasure because all his views were enjoyed through a retrospect mirror. His weakness was not in those shriveled legs but in his peculiar honesty, the quality of his innocence. He thought as a child with all the child's sincere belief in simple facts. If someone designed a Comet fighter, he felt, putting the details down on a sheet of paper—it was an airplane. If some engineer had produced the parts and bolted them together, it was still a Comet, and would fly. All it needed was a pilot. It was as simple as all that to the Gaffer. No one in his opaline world would build an airplane that would not fly. The failure couldn't possibly be in the structure. It was always in the man honored to fly it.

ALL these things Dave knew, and he had no defense for any of them. It was crazy, that weird prattle echoing from a wounded mind; but Dave could never say, "He's crazy!" because he was Gaffer—the Old Man; Dave was a part of him, and one doesn't deny one's flesh and blood.

"Sure, that's one way to find out," Dave said: "but I like the routine of walking away from a test job. When they come after you with can openers, it can be bad, Gaffer."

"A gyroscope can be a queer thing," the Old Man said, and peered at Dave's drawing again.

"Look, Gaffer," Dave said and dubbed out his cigarette. "It's nothing like that. Practically no moving parts except the turbine wheel."

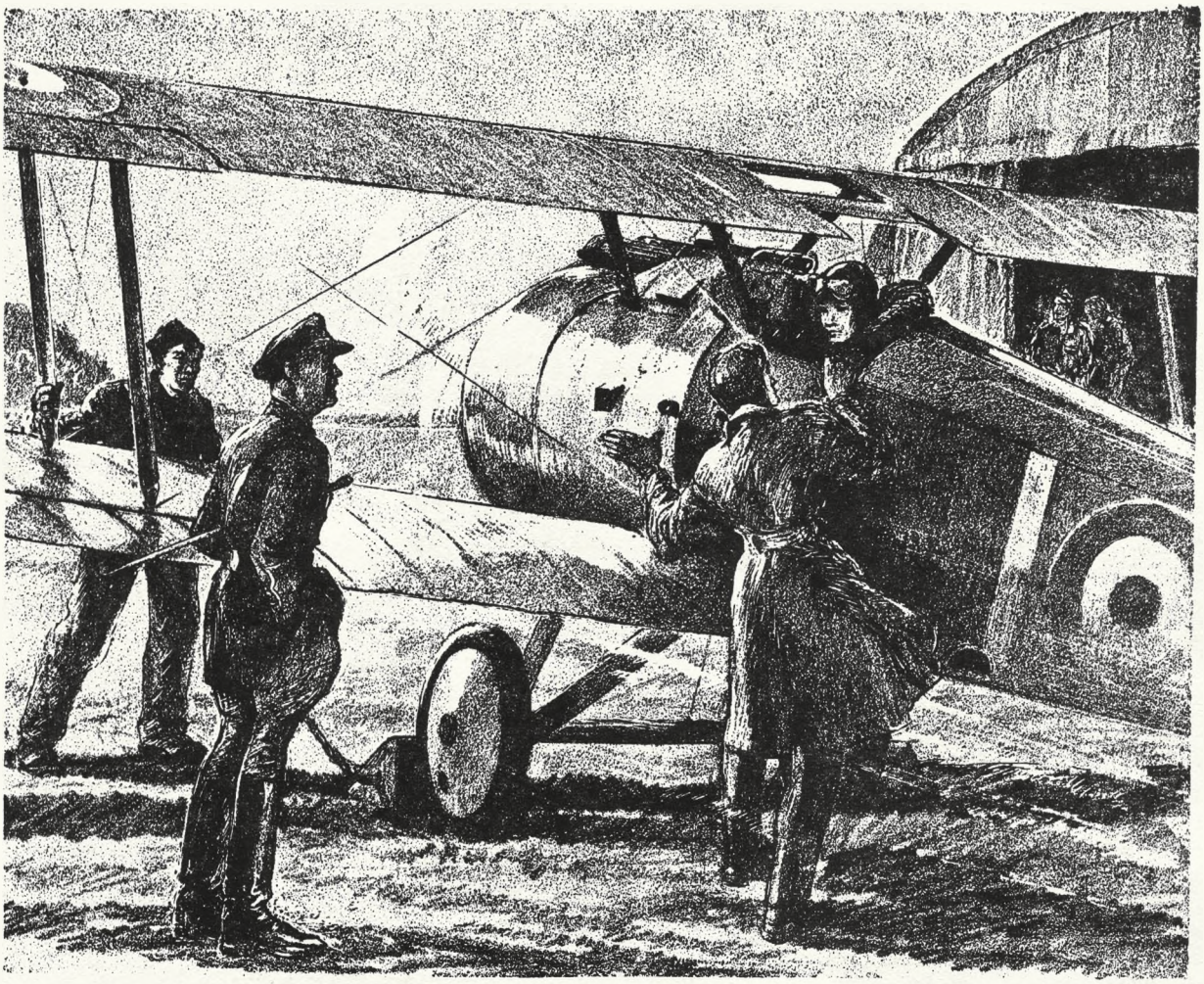
"How big is that turbine thing?"

Dave stretched out his arms. "Almost as big as the fuselage."

"How much would it weigh?"

"I don't know. Plenty, I suppose. It's heavier than the ones they used to use, because it has to rev at fifteen thousand on take-off. They have had turbines break up, so now they make them heavier and stronger."

The Old Man's smile illumined his great solution. "Well, there you are, then. You are getting the same effect.



"Don't give her a chance," they had warned. "Get to five hundred feet before you try to turn."

That big turbine thing—whirling away like that—produces the same gyroscopic pull as a rotary engine. A rotary, you know, was a circular nine-cylinder engine that whirled on a fixed master crankshaft. With your Comet, it's a whacking great turbine wheel. But they both create the same effect."

Dave's eyes began to widen with understanding.

"That's what happened to me, but I didn't know what caused it until a chap in the next bed at the hospital told me. He was a Camel pilot. The place was full of them. If I'd known what you know now, I would have been quicker putting on top rudder."

The Old Man's smile distilled a brew of courage and laced it with a dollop of confidence. Dave's spirits rose as though lifted by some pleasant music. What the Gaffer offered was not necessarily a true diagnosis of a solution, but the idea might help him unravel the secret of that wicked projectile. It was something to work on.

"You might have something there, Gaffer," he admitted. "That turbine could weigh plenty. It's something to consider."

"I feel sure of it, Dave. We can't let a little thing like that frighten us, can we?"

Dave stood up and gripped the Old Man's neck warmly. "You're a great guy, do you know it? I'll bet no one on the field would have thought of that."

The Old Man looked relieved, and smiled again. "They haven't had the experience, you know. You only get it on active service."

"Yeh. That war of yours must have been something. What about chow?"

The Old Man winced. "Chow?"

"Dinner! I think you could take the top of the table tonight, Gaffer. Proper regimental formality, and in deference to established mass procedure, the guests will refrain from smoking until after the toasts. We'll have music and wine. A word or two from the Colonel—that'll be you—explaining how the squadron has been read out in orders."

"We destroyed thirty-five enemy aircraft in one week with the loss of only four of our machines," the Old Man added.

"We'll dress for it!" Dave enthused. "Pressed slacks, Sam Browne belts and full decorations. What do you say?"

The Old Man gripped the middle button of his jacket, stared away and declined. "Not tonight, Dave. Not tonight. I don't feel quite up to it."

Dave searched for the trouble, put out his hand and then withdrew it. "You're all right, eh, Gaffer?"

"I'm quite all right!" the Old Man responded, dipping deep in his parched vitality, "but I'm leading the early morning show tomorrow. Two streamers on my tail. Cosgrave has the day off.... You understand, of course?"

"Of course. Tell you what. We'll make it for the night we test the Comet. We'll have the toasts in sherry, and a bottle of bubbly to top it off."

The Old Man sat erect. "To His Excellency, the President—His Majesty, the King—and to our absent guests!" he said slowly.

"Oh, I like that, Gaffer. I like that!"

"Then I'll bung off, eh? Want to be top hole for tomorrow," he explained. "Just so long as I know you feel all right about the Comet; and don't worry about me. Jerry doesn't like aviating too early in the morning."

"Good night, Gaffer. Keep fleeing speed."

Two days later the Brass came in from Wright Field and they couldn't delay the test any longer. The slipstick guys were still searching, but so far had found nothing that would account for Briggsie's crash.

"Don't worry," Dave said after he had skimmed through the findings. "I have an idea what caused it."

"You haven't been anywhere near the wreck," they argued.

"I didn't have to. I talked it over with a guy who ought to know. She won't spin in with me."

They were glad he felt that way, considering what they had pawed over for the past three days. No malfunction of engine or aircraft had been uncovered to explain why Paul Briggs had spun in. If Crossett had an answer he must have pulled it out of a hat.

They couldn't know his solution had come from a turfed field over six thousand miles away more than thirty years before. They couldn't know....

There was an oppressive air of concern blanketing everything in spite of the favorable barometric conditions outside. They employed vague excuses to pass his locker and take a look at him while he sorted his gear and checked the valves on his face mask. They offered gum, cigarettes and improbable suggestions for a party afterward. Their concern was tinged with the grim realization that if Dave couldn't make her behave there would be pink slips in a lot of pay envelopes next week. Dave had thought of that too but now he was thinking of the Old Man sitting back home. The same set-up as before. The radio on, the Gaffer's thin fingers fumbling with the latches and levers of his wheel chair. His pale blue eyes at the narrow casement window, jetting his mite of courage and morale over the fine scarlet thread of lineage.

"There's nothing to be afraid of, Dave. Just ease on top rudder when you go into the turn."

Briggsie didn't know. He couldn't know. You had to go through the Great War to learn things like that. But when you knew.... Dave realized now it was wonderful to know. Knowledge is a fine thing. It was Life itself.

"Let's go!" Dave said and cranked to his feet. "Let's get it over."

The President and the Chief Engineer walked out with him. The Brass moved in echelon from the main body as if they had washed their hands of what might happen. They smoked cigars, inspected their nails and rubbed their chins wondering how Public Relations would explain what was about to happen.

"This means a lot to us, Dave," President Gordon was saying.

"Take her straight out to five thousand feet before you risk a turn," the Chief Engineer advised. "You might have a chance then."

"Don't worry. She may do a lot of queer stunts but I promise you she won't spin in with me," Dave said but with each stride his courage drooled like grains from a snagged feed-bag. He saw the radio men on the apron with mikes mounted on tripods and he knew the Old Man was with him from here on and there could be no turning back.

The Comet sat low and squat on her tricycle gear, a scowling vulture awaiting the flush of the beaters. Her sleek projectile body was fletched with small swept-back wings that seemed mere appurtenances for photographic effect rather than utility. The crystal dome over the cockpit suddenly reminded him of a cover for artificial flowers set on a grave mound. There was the same old tang of hot metal, lamp wicks, acetone, simulated leather and lubricating oil. The snarl of metal on metal, the scrawnch of wrenches and the clank of tool boxes. Otherwise, a silence that comes when men can no longer think of any more words to say, warnings to make or advice to offer.

Dave broke in with, "What are we waiting for?" and climbed up the spindly ladder they hooked on the cockpit ledge. They moved in with the starter dolly and fire extinguishers. "Let's have it!"

The jet caught with a choked roar and rammed a jagged spear-head of flame from the tail pipe. A doughnut of smoke circled, twisted away and broke up leaving a dreary gray crepe. Another adjustment and the flame spear crept back into its sheath. They took the ladder away and he cranked the canopy forward.

"You can now hear the roar of the great jet power plant and Test Pilot Dave Crossett is moving the Comet away for the take-off," the radio announcer was saying. *"Stay with me . . .*

The Comet vibrated with the dampened roar of the turbine and Dave moved the stick, looked out and checked the movement of the controls. He winked at the kid with the fire extinguisher and eased off the brakes. "Here we go, Gaffer," he murmured.

He rumbled her around the taxi track until he reached the end of the long runway. He checked the panel and stared up into the clear blue sky. He had a good day for it—whatever it was.

By the time he had her nosed into the wind he felt cold and emulsified, his heart beating with the swelling vibration of the great force behind him. There was little sound in the cockpit. The power was all aft. Just the simple every-day thump and hiss of pumps and boosts, the automatic operations of flight a man never caught in a propeller-equipped plane. Grumbling ghosts in a spook box. Clank, rattle, swish. Just like a guy coming up with a tray of loose ice cubes.

"Well, I can be read out in orders," he reflected and rammed the throttle up the box. The Comet snarled, tried to lash her tail around and he swore and blasted it back with the rudder. She pressed hard on her front wheel and the horizon was warped with the erratic movement. Ahead domed the gray-blue vault of sky.

The Comet took off after a long snarling run and charged into the blue. Dave upped the wheels, checked the panel quickly and relaxed his grip on the stick. If she was contemplating treachery, that's where he'd sense it first—through the vibrant nerves of his fingers. The clock read three thousand feet and the field was a toy pattern below with sponge rubber foliage, linoleum runways and grass sprayed on with a paint gun. Her speed did not matter but from the pressure of his back against the seat she could be hitting over five hundred—practically crawling. Next time he looked at the clock he was nicking six thousand feet and then he realized he wasn't flying straight.

At first the sensation of side-slipping was lost in the electric thrill of flying the machine and as his senses fingered through his bewilderment, a feeling of malevolence; the first twinge of fear reminded him that eventually he would have to attempt a turn. He experimented gently with the rudder and she responded to the touch and the secondary vibration of the side-slip died away.

"Nothing wrong with that," he decided and hoped it *was* the torque of the turbine. He put her in level flight, sneaked a peek at the mach-meter—and whistled.

The jet job was thrusting like a berserk typhoon and he felt constrained to throttle down before he could muster the courage to put her into the turn. But his orderly mind argued that he had to know whether it was the turbine, and the turn had to be made with full power. There could be no evasion. There was that damnable automatic camera focused on the panel and whatever happened they would have the figures on a strip of film: The air speed, the altitude, the degree of bank and the details on the tachometer.

"Neck or nothing, Gaffer," he growled and eased the stick and rudder over gently. He could have sworn all tension went out of the controls. She *was* slipping away. Of that, his instinct—or was it his imagination—was certain.

"*All you have to do is to put on top rudder,*" the Gaffer had said and Dave knew then; that if the Gaffer hadn't said that, the canopy would be back now and he would be yanking the lever that would explosively eject him from the ship. He would let her go and pile up anywhere and they would have another wreck to paw over.

INSTEAD he sucked in his belly and when the wing was down he pressed the left-hand rudder pedal and vitality flowed back and she responded. It came through like the music of a great symphony. He laughed and pulled the stick back into his middle and she went around neat and nimble. Just a little top rudder as she started over and she gloried in his touch which was like a lover's caress. She responded, free of all metallic rigidity, her movements true and flowing.

He leveled off and sat back breathless.

"She's beautiful! Nothing wrong with her, Gaffer—when you know. She just has a built-in side-slip. They all have something—but when you know.... They can take that out, no trouble at all!"

He pulled into a zoom, half-rolled and went hurtling back to the field. "We'll give them a show, Gaffer. Oh, but we'll give them a show. Steam on the whistle and a production line a mile long. *'Help Wanted, Male,'* contracts, priority, backlog of orders. Three shifts a day and double for overtime. Let's go!"

The Comet roared back in triumph and bombarded the field with ecstatic frenzy. Dave hoiked her hard, corkscrewed into the blue, power-stalled and brought her down in a tight spin. She came out like cream from a separator and tore with her paean of power into a series of tight right-hand turns, that for accuracy might have been plotted with a pair of silver-compasses. He showed her off, this beautiful falcon, and presented a gaudy extravaganza, sporting her charms until every man on the field was limp with longing and admiration. The fierce intractable Comet was tamed and the flying of her had become more a matter of volition than of the conscious control of human mechanism.

"Thanks, Gaffer," Dave said when he rolled the canopy back.

"QUITE a show," the Brass agreed. "Very convincing."

"Nothing to it," Dave grinned. "She's a dream-boat."

"They want you to talk on the radio," someone said and tugged at his parachute webbing.

"Not now! Not now! Just tell 'em she's swell. Couldn't find a thing wrong with her. I can't understand. . . ."

"Quiet," the Chief Engineer said under his breath. "We got a lead on Briggsie's crash."

They went back to the hangar, and the Chief Engineer showed him a length of battered copper tubing attached to a small brass cylinder. "Gilpin found this just as you were taking off. Now we know."

Dave rubbed his finger over an open fracture in the brass cylinder. "His aileron-boost fouled," he whispered. "So *that* is what spun him in."

The Chief Engineer nodded grimly. "Exactly! Paul never had a chance at that height. Once he tilted her over, the boost jammed, and the wing stayed in that position. Otherwise, she was perfect!"

"Perfect," echoed Dave and began to think. "But if it hadn't been for the Gaffer's idea, I don't think I would have—"

"Eh?" the Chief Engineer broke in, puzzled.

"But we can't deny the Old Man his part, can we?" Dave went on. He pointed at the treacherous cylinder. "You didn't put *that* on the radio, did you?"

"Judas, no! We can't let a thing like that out. We'll have to tell the Brass, of course."

"Sure! That's not for the public," grinned Dave and began clawing out of his gear. "I'll buzz off now. I mean, I want to assure the Gaffer I'm all right."

The Chief Engineer nodded. "I understand, Dave—but come back. They're setting up a party for the Brass. They'll want a word or two from you."

"They'll get plenty—all lovely words," Dave said and sneaked out the side door of the hangar and headed for his car. All the way home he sang a war song the Gaffer had taught him:

Take the pistons out of my kidneys
The gudgeon pins out of my brain
From the small of my back take the crankshaft
And assemble the engine again.

The first thing that hit him when he opened the door was the sharp whiff of camphor balls. It knocked Mrs. Carthage's pork roast for a loop. Then he barged in yelling: "Hey, Gaffer! We made it. It was exactly as you said!"

"Here, here, Mr. Crossett," the voice of the Gaffer pulled him up. "Let's not get slack. This is a formal night, and we will come to attention when we enter the mess. Now then, sir!"

"Sorry, Gaffer," Dave said and clicked his heels in the doorway. He stared at the Old Man. "What the deuce!"

THE Gaffer was sitting in front of the fireplace, his right hand gripping his old walking stick—the one carved out of an old wooden prop. He held it between his knees like a joy stick. The camphor whiff came from the uniform. He had dug it out of his old kit bag in the rumpus room. The whole thing: Split-ess cap, high-collared tunic, the Sam Browne polished to a church-parade gloss, his embroidered wings agleam and the ribbons touched up with a spot of cleaner. He had even pressed his slacks.

"Gaffer!" Dave half whispered. "Oh, I like that, sir. I'd completely forgotten."

"You have fifteen minutes to change," the Old Man said crisply. "And no smoking until after the toasts, remember."

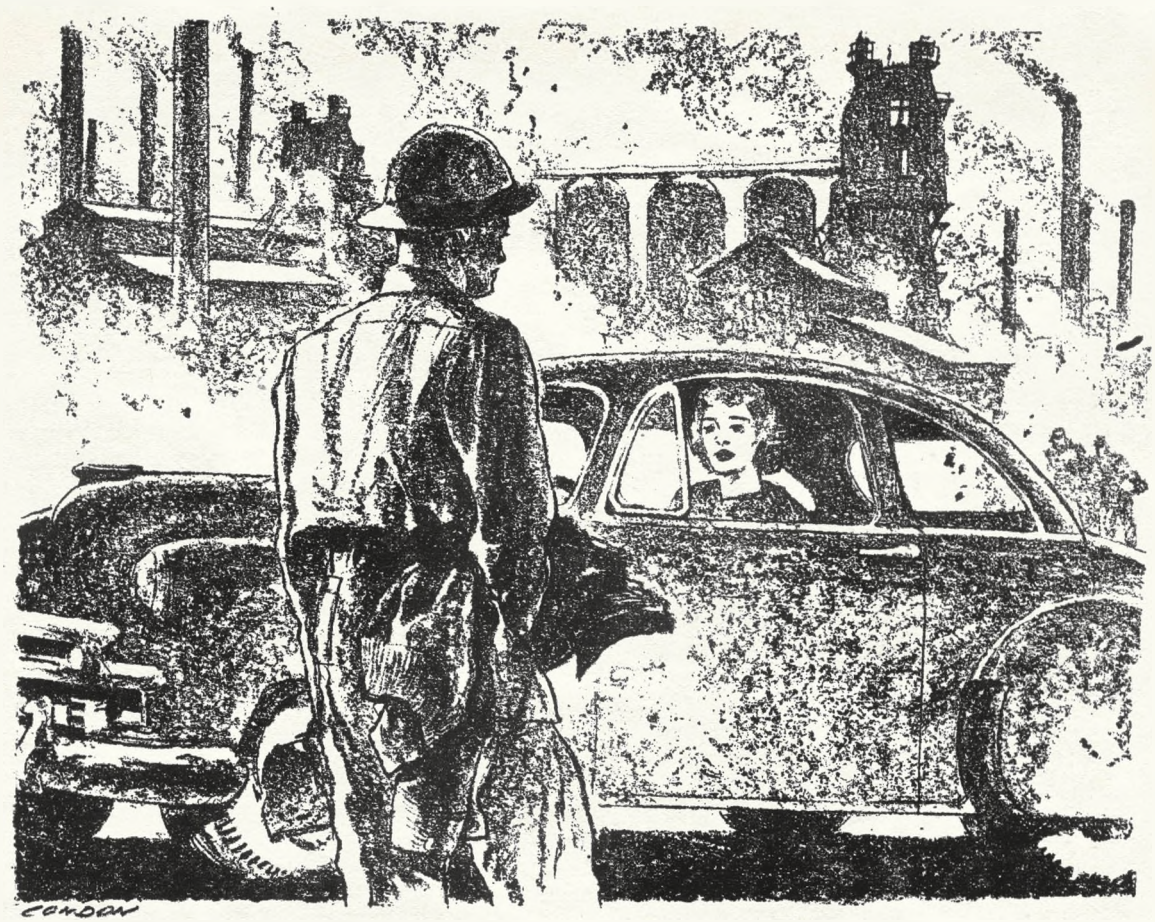
Dave saluted smartly.

"I'll be right there, sir. I've a lot to tell you."

"I've a lot to tell *you*," the Old Man corrected. "We had a rather good day today."

"I'll say. It was just as you said, Gaffer. I mean—when she—"

"We put six patrols in the air," the Old Man added. "A-Flight got seven Huns before lunch."



Boomer's End

An open hearth mill is no special pleasure resort, but a wanderer might learn to like it.

by GEORGE WORTS and ERIK FENNEL

DAN CAREY hooked the wire through the radiator grille of the green coupé, twisted, jerked, and the hood latch clicked. He was grinning as he leaned over the engine and drew a heavy pencil line down the porcelain of each sparkplug.

Then he lighted a cigarette and looked around while he waited. Beyond the parking-lot fence was the smoke-grimed Open Hearth building with its eight towering concrete stacks. At the far end, where the new construction was going on, his men were dogging off the big boom-crane for the night.

Number Three was smoking heavily, brown with a yellow tinge, a color Dan had recently learned meant the furnace was starting a charge on rusty scrap. The eighth stack was still a virginal white, and until recently he'd taken it for granted that before it acquired a soot-crown like the others he'd be long gone, following the red iron. A skyscraper job, a bridge, perhaps a factory or a radio tower. Now he wasn't so sure.

He had no trouble spotting the girl when the whistle blew. Her canary-yellow sweater, no longer hidden under the white smock she wore in the analysis laboratory, made a bright dab of color against the dark work-clothes of the off-shift men moving toward the gate. He liked the way she walked. He had taken an immediate fancy to several things about Helen Polchek.

When she reached the green coupé he had his back turned, careful not to look around too soon.

Her starter growled. It stopped and growled again.

Dan heeled his cigarette into the packed cinders and sauntered over.

"Trouble, Miss Polchek?"

He couldn't decide whether her eyes were blue or gray. But whichever color it was, it was right.

"Sure you have the switch on?"

Deliberately she looked him over—red hair under a cockily tipped-back safety helmet; khaki shirt that cutting torch sparks had left looking as though it had termites; on down to scuffed and iron-cut climbing shoes.

But she checked the key before trying the starter again.

"Want me to look at it?" he insisted.

"Why?"

He ignored her vote of no-confidence. "I'm pretty hot with engines. Just snap the hood latch."

She started to climb out.

"No," he said quickly. "You stay inside and run the starter."

He bent over the engine, stalling, and then wiped the graphite marks off four of the plugs.

Mr. Polchek looked incredulous. "A boomer settling down?"

"Now," he told her.

The engine ran, but raggedly. He passed a forefinger across his throat, the habit of a structural steelworker accustomed to places where words wouldn't carry through the uproar of rivet guns. She understood, and he cleaned the last two plugs.

"Try it again."

This time the engine ran smoothly. Dan closed the hood.

"What was wrong?" Helen asked.

"The distributor cap must have worked loose." This girl was too smart for any "framis of the transmoglifyer" guff.

"That's strange. It ran perfectly this morning." She frowned, and he liked even the way she did that. "It's almost as though someone had sabotaged it."

Dan looked shocked. "Who'd do that to you, Miss Polchek—Helen? And how could they, with the hood locked from inside?"

She nodded slowly. "I guess you're right. And thanks for your help."

"The garage didn't get my car back out here, and it's a mighty long walk in to town," Dan suggested.

An odd, calculating look crossed her face. Then she turned the voltage into her smile.

"All right, Mr. Carey."

"The name is Dan."

She chuckled. "I know. Everyone around Open Hearth found out who you were the day you brought your construction crew in."

Dan felt his ears reddening. "Look!" he barked. Then he began again, more quietly. "Look: Let's admit that crane tipping over wasn't a flying start. But that old wooden pipe tunnel wasn't on the layout chart. Anyhow it's all done now."

"But you were warned about that tunnel."

"The devil I was!" This time Carey's astonishment was genuine. "By whom?"

"By Jake Hamilton, of course. And it's a long ways from done. Number Four was just tapping out when your crane blocked the loading ramp. Do you realize what happens to an open hearth furnace lining when it stands empty between melts? They had to cut the blast and let both checkers cool, and then it took six hours to patch up the pitting and cavitation, and more hours to bring the furnace back to heat. And Jake's still angry at how you paid no attention to his suggestions."

"Are you kidding?" Dan snapped. "Help? He'd have made a real hurrah's nest of it."

"Would he?"

Dan liked this girl; he'd gone to enough trouble to meet her. Yet the way she spoke of Jake Hamilton, day shift boss of the Open Hearth line, had him on the prod.

A big shot trying to act bigger, Dan had decided during the bitter argument over the crane accident, and he hadn't seen anything since to change that impression. He didn't like Hamilton's sense of his own importance, or his looks, or his voice, or his manners. And the way Hamilton always carried a pair of yellow pigskin gloves whenever he went out onto the floor, or took over the electric stripper crane to strut his stuff, for some reason got under Dan's skin.

Even without the accident and Hamilton's inside track with Helen Polchek, they would never have been buddies.

And Hamilton had not said a word about that rotten gopher-burrow of an unused pipe tunnel.

He glanced toward the gate and there, speaking of the devil, was Hamilton.

The furnace boss started toward the green coupé, scowling as he spotted the construction superintendent.

But at that moment Helen put the car in gear. Dan wondered what she'd seen in the rearview mirror, and exactly what cooked. But, sometimes, he knew enough to keep his mouth shut.

He studied her profile as she drove. He'd always had a weakness for pert, up-tilted noses. And the queer little secret smile on her lips was disturbing but nice.

The silence, though, was getting him nowhere.

"You know, I like this town. I could mighty easy drop anchor here for keeps." That was usually a good opening.

Her smile broadened. She had a dimple too. Then dimple and smile vanished.

"Should I laugh now, Mr. Carey?" she asked with exaggerated seriousness.

Dan winced. This gal knew too many answers.

"No kidding. The glamour of far places has worn thin," he lamented. "Saudi Arabia—sit on a piece of iron after ten in the morning, get up fast with blisters yet. Aruba; everything you eat and drink and smoke smells of crude oil. Alaska; freeze all winter, and comes summer the mosquitoes and no-see-'ems shake dice for your blood. Always cooking that would gag a maggot, and never anyone to sew on a button or darn a sock."

"Never?"

He passed that off with a shrug. She must have heard the sad, sad story before.

"And what would you do for a living in our fair city?" she asked.

"Work for the mill, naturally."

She laughed lightly. "You may know more about construction than

how to tip over a crane, but when it comes to making steel all you'd be good for is a shovel job—and Jake Hamilton wouldn't hire you even for that."

"Nyah!" he objected. "I got an angle. I hear the mill is going to organize its own construction force for the expansion program coming up, instead of hiring outside contractors like the one I'm working for now. They'll need someone to run it."

"Like you, of course. But after that? The expansion program won't last forever."

"There's a structural rolling mill on paper, and with that goes a fabricating division. It takes a man who knows how steel is erected to run fabrication with real efficiency."

"And you think you're the only one around here who could—"

"This afternoon is too nice to waste talking shop," Dan broke in. "And the evening could be even nicer."

The girl smiled, again that secret little smile. "How?"

"Dinner with me. Soft lights and a good dance band."

She hesitated.

"Please. I don't bite. At least not often."

"I don't usually—but—"

"I'll pick you up at seven."

"Dad, this is Dan Carey," Helen began. "He runs that—"

Carey wasn't sure whether Polchek grunted or said "Oh!" Helen's father was a surprise. She was petite. He was all brawn, though getting slightly thick through the middle, with wrists the size of an average man's ankles.

"Dan, Dad runs the day shift in the rod mill. I suppose you know what a rod mill is?"

"Helen, I thought you and Jake—" Polchek started.

Quickly she gave him the family eye. "I'm having dinner with Dan tonight."

Polchek definitely said "Oh!" this time, with a rising inflection.

"We have a lot to talk about, Dad. Dan's going to settle down and help us out at the mill by taking over the expansion program, and later the fabricating division."

Dan didn't like that phrasing. This girl carried a very sharp needle, and used it.

Mr. Polchek looked incredulous. "A boomer settling down?"

"Anything wrong with that?" Dan demanded belligerently.

"No. Only it's talked a lot oftener than it's done."

Dan merely shrugged; sometimes there was no use arguing.

She started the evening alert and on guard. But they enjoyed the same kinds of music and discovered they danced as though they'd been practicing together for years. Little by little she relaxed and occasionally even forgot he was a here-today-gone-tomorrow construction man and therefore not to be trusted. He was careful to steer clear of boomer-talk about big jobs in far places and the tremendous parties when those jobs topped out.

"You've certainly found your way around our town in a hurry," she commented in mid-evening. It was in the sixth or seventh place they had visited.

He grinned at her. "Naturally I've studied the town. I'm going to settle here and become a respectable citizen."

"You really mean that?" she asked doubtfully. "You're not just talking?"

"I could mean that very deeply," he assured her.

Hamilton's name came up only once. "Where does he usually take you?" Dan asked.

"Mostly to the country club."

"Fun?"

"Well—"

He kept quiet, but the girl's mouth tightened in annoyance. She knew what he was thinking—that the country club was the hangout of the more stodgy element, those who thought they could do themselves good by being seen in the proper places with the proper people.

Her guard came up again riding home along the river road. Dan knew exactly when it happened, because she moved a bit farther away from him on the seat. And he knew why.

He hid his grin. She had been right. But now he decided to scramble the signals.

At the door he held her hand only a moment before turning toward his car, leaving her staring after him.

Her father was still up, reading.

"Jake was around," he informed her.

"I thought he would be."

"Oh, like that, eh? You wanted to stir him up? Well, you did. And the boomer, did he get fresh?"

"No, he didn't." Helen sounded more puzzled than pleased. . . .

Dan whistled through his teeth as he watched a roof truss for the building extension that would cover Number Eight furnace go into place. Egghead Stone and Okie DeLaye, hanging on opposite columns, caught the ends, swung them into place with clever teamwork, levered with their spud points, and had the plate connections made.

Dan smiled. That had been fast; the gang was shaking in right.

"I want to talk to you, Carey," Jake Hamilton said, coming up behind him.

Dan eyed him coldly. "Go ahead."

"You keep away from Helen, understand? She doesn't want anything to do with boomers like you."

Dan's eyes narrowed, but he kept his voice down. "I'll wait to hear that from her. I didn't see any ring on her left hand."

"I'm telling you, you leave Helen Polchek alone, or else."

"Or else what?"

"You'll find out. To me you're just another construction stiff, and don't forget it."

Dan's fists itched. But he guessed Hamilton's game. They couldn't exactly fire him for fighting on plant property, because he wasn't on the direct payroll—yet. But they could certainly get the contractor, his present boss, to take him off the job.

A few minutes later Hamilton put on his yellow gloves, climbed the ladder to the overhead crane rails, and waved the operator of the stripping crane in so he could board the cab and take over.

He was good; Dan gave him that. Fast and clever with an electromagnet. But maybe too fast, and he was setting heavy cylindrical ingot molds near the end of the old building, close to the new extension. Dan made sure all his men were in the clear.

A thump and a clang made him jump. A two-ton mold had gotten loose from the magnet, fallen, and rolled over against a building column. Hamilton maneuvered into position, grabbed with the magnet switch, picked up on the swing, and moved away.

But Dan had left his lunchbox at the base of that column. Bits of bread, soaked with coffee from the smashed thermos, oozed through the broken box seams like toothpaste from a squashed tube.

Dan swore luridly. Accident! Accident on purpose! But he'd only look silly blowing his top.

The rest of the day was no good, either. He saw Helen only once, and then through a laboratory window.

Mr. Polchek didn't seem too surprised when he went around that evening.

"She's out with Jake," he said before Dan had time to ask. "But come in anyhow. Plenty of beer in the icebox."

That wasn't pure friendship, Dan guessed. Polchek looked like the sort who'd want a line on any man who dated his daughter even once.

Next morning he reached the parking lot early. But Helen came in racing the whistle and he had to talk fast.

"This evening?" he asked.

"Yes," she said quickly.

She seemed irritated and upset about something, though not at him.

Hamilton, he had a hunch, had tried *I'm telling you* tactics on her too. He hid a grin.

"Seven o'clock, then."

All morning he expected an invitation to step off mill property. He wasn't cocky about it, for the furnace boss had him in weight and reach, but he wasn't dodging.

Nothing happened.

Four flatcars of red-painted structural shapes were shunted in just before noon.

"How's about cutting them over to a siding nearer the building?" Dan requested.

The engineer shifted his chew. "Orders say spot 'em on siding six."

Dan glanced at the in-plant transportation slip. The approval signature on the Department Superintendent line was J. M. Hamilton. Going to the front office might get the cars spotted closer—but then it might not. Hamilton had the *minimum interference with normal operations* clause of the contract on his side.

He studied the situation briefly, put some of his men to handling dunnage around the rails, and told his rig-runner where to make his stand. The big crane lurched around on its caterpillar treads, straightened, and moved clumsily out into the siding yard. From between the second and third tracks it could just make the swing from the flatcars to the narrow open area beside the furnace building.

"Keep awake, you lugs," he told his men. "We haven't got much clearance here."

A string of the short, heavy charging cars from which the furnaces were fed uncoupled on the first siding. But Dan's men merely took their loads of structural steel overhead. Traffic on all the switching tracks was heavier than normal. A few times it meant holding up, waiting for clearance.

Then another string of charging cars, full ones this time, came down from the scrap yard ahead of the switching engine permanently assigned to Open Hearth material handling. Track two, right alongside the crane.

Dan waited for the lokey to slow down. The caterpillar treads were clear, but the crane cab was turned on its pivot ring and the back end, containing the diesel and counterweight, stretched over the rails. Tomcat Roberts and Butler were on a flatcar, hooking on.

Then he spotted the coupling pin. The cars were riding the front drawbar loose, and the engine's brakes wouldn't hold them.

Butler and Tomcat sold out in a hurry at Dan's startled yell, knowing the man-mangling mess a half-hooked load could make if it dragged.

Dan snatched a length of four-by, tossed it under the wheels, jumped back in case of a derail. The cars bucked and lifted as the timber crunched between rails and wheel flanges. But they stayed on, slowed, and ended against the crane with a noisy but harmless jar.

Dan went up into the engine without touching the grab-irons. Butler and Tomcat were at his heels, and Tomcat had a heavy wrench in his hand.

"Leave us give this jerk a lesson, Boss," Butler growled.

Dan ignored him and faced the engineer. "You trying to kill someone?"

The engineer fidgeted like a mouse in a cattery. "Orders. I was told to run uncoupled to save time."

"Hamilton?"

The engineer nodded.

Dan glanced at the two angry ironworkers. "You two get back to work."

They climbed down reluctantly, looking back to watch the lokey-runner get separated from his front teeth. But they were disappointed.

The engineer promised to keep his couplings locked, Hamilton to the contrary notwithstanding. . . .

That was only the beginning. Dan's temper grew ragged and he heartily cursed the minimum interference clause. It had seemed reasonable enough, but it gave the furnace boss too much discretionary power.

And Hamilton rode his joker.

The part of the contract calling for reinforcing and charging floor of the existing furnaces would have been a rough shuffle at best. There was little working room between the steel deck and the room-sized brickwork checkers or preheaters beneath. An awkward spot. And if a beam or even a heavy tool fell, it might crash on through the brittle firebrick. That would turn loose a sample of Hell under pressure—flame and superheated air and noxious exhaust gases.

Dan had counted on borrowing the two light electric service cranes that ran above the charging floor, cutting small holes for the cables in the deck, lifting the reinforcing beams, and welding up the holes again. Tricky, but it could have been neat.

Hamilton fixed that. He refused even to permit temporary holes for the use of crab winches. They might interfere with the travel of his charging machine, he insisted.

"You talk a hot construction job," he taunted when Dan protested. "So don't come crying to me."

Suzy Wilson snatched that one out of the skillet. Old Suzy was no longer a spry climber, but he had served his apprenticeship in the days when rivets were driven with sledgehammers and muscle and the only power machines were clumsy old steam cranes. He had used—and still remembered—an entire book of tricks the younger ironworkers had never needed to learn. Dan asked his advice and got it.

But twisting screw-jacks and setting cribbing, raising the steel inch by inch from below instead of lifting it from above, was slow and backbreaking work. Dangerous too, despite the net of safety cables Dan ordered laboriously rigged above the checker roofs. Each evening the men crawled out with clothes sopping, the soot on their faces furrowed with rivulets of sweat. And Dave got as dirty as any of them. It wasn't an operation to be run from a swivel chair.

That put the job days behind schedule. And other things piled up.

They had arranged to use the mill's air-lines instead of bringing in a gasoline-driven compressor. But guns would start right, then stutter and hit light and rivets would cool while half driven. Each bad one meant ten minutes lost cutting it out.

The apprentice discovered the trouble the first time. A valve on the mill line had become partly closed, giving full pressure but insufficient flow. The remedy was easy—but other valves developed the same habit. It was a constant source of annoyance and delay.

Redskin Fitzsimmons laid his favorite spud wrench on the side of the loading ramp one day, and a few minutes later it was gone. Redskin was moody all that week.

The weight vanished from a set of blueprints Dan had spread out, and a gust of wind blew them out onto the pouring floor. He watched helplessly as one sheet brushed against a glowing ingot from which the mold had just been stripped.

A couple of floormen, protected by their long asbestos coats and transparent face shields, rescued the other sheets for him—and were yelled at by Hamilton to get back to their own work.

Hamilton, it seemed, was always around to look pleased when trouble developed. But there wasn't anything Dan could prove.

Sometimes, wondering what would go wrong next, he felt like kicking it over and moving on.

But he didn't like getting bully-ragged off his first job as superintendent.

And there was Helen.

And his own crew. They groused and grumbled like good construction men, but they had added up the score and didn't like it. He could count on a full crew each Monday, hangovers or no, and they used all the savvy and shortcuts they'd learned on jobs around the world without waiting to

be told. The riveting gangs, when the air was running right, sounded as though they were driving piecework. If any superintendent had tried to push them that hard they'd have spat in his eye and drawn their time.

With Helen, the fly in Dan's ointment was that he was in no position—yet—to complain because she spent half her evenings with Hamilton. But there'd have to be a showdown. Soon.

"You going to make it by the fifteenth?" Mr. Polchek asked one evening as Dan waited for Helen to finish dressing.

"Sure," Dan said quickly. Then he decided to play it strictly honest. He had grown to like Mr. Polchek, and not only because being friendly with the girl's father was good policy. "If we go like blistered bats and don't get fouled up."

"Lassiter was wondering about that today. Guess he heard you're bucking for a job."

"You tell him?" Dan demanded. Lassiter was vice president in charge of operations, a very important man.

Polchek shrugged. "He has big ears, and eyes in the back of his head."

Dan had been wondering too, not happily. Assembling the furnace frame, the last part of the contract, would mean working inside the Open Hearth building extension. The huge ladle crane would be working close—far too close, considering the heat radiated by ninety tons of molten steel. And with the new rails in the stripper crane could come all the way out, setting up mold groups, stripping and loading ingots. More trouble was a sure bet.

The bitterness of his thoughts made him spill over that evening, although he knew after the first sentence he'd made a mistake.

"I don't believe a word of it!" the girl finally snapped. "Jake Hamilton wouldn't stoop to such things!"

"Stoop, nothing!" Dan growled, his temper flaring. "That's a high reach for that snake! Of course I can't show anything; he's too slippery. But it goes against my record, not his, if the new furnace doesn't fire up on time."

Very carefully Helen laid down her dessert spoon.

"Mr. Carey, I don't like men who blame their own failures on other people. You'd better take me home now."

Dan pushed back his chair and stood up.

"If Jake knew what you're saying about him behind his back, he'd beat you up," she told him in the car. "And I wish he would, too!"

Dan laughed then, and that topped off her anger.

He spent a week of sleepless nights spraining his brain over an idea. For once he was determined to dodge trouble.

Illustrated by Grattan Condon

"Keep away from Helen. She doesn't want anything to do with boomers."

Ordinarily the furnace frame would have been assembled piece by piece, in place. But he put his men to making subassemblies, working outside the building where there would be no interference with—or from—Hamilton's furnace operations. Ends in single assemblies. Front and back in two pieces, with the clumsy roof framing in three sections. All of it planned to go up with a few lifts of the boom-crane's big hook. The apprentice spent days with a wrench and oilcan, running down nuts on the huge bolts and heavy threaded rods that would hold the furnace together. Dan didn't intend to let burred or rusty threads delay the final assembly.

He was busy but not happy. He hadn't expected to find himself missing Helen so acutely. He had broken up with other girls in other towns, but this time it was different, and telling himself that a girl brainless enough to be slickstered by Jake Hamilton wasn't worth the bother had done him no good whatsoever.

On the twelfth, Lassiter came around. Only the heavy, close-set columns that would support the furnace bed and its load of molten steel were in place, bolted to the concrete foundation. The subassemblies on the ground didn't look very impressive.

"Carey, are you going to finish on time?" he asked.

"Mr. Lassiter, your bricksetters can move in for swing shift on the fifteenth," Dan said confidently.

Lassiter raised his eyebrows. "I hope so."

On the afternoon of the fourteenth, Dan murdered a song as he showered. A job wasn't in the bag until it topped out, but his subassembly scheme had worked even better than he'd dared hope. It had held down new troubles and they'd picked up time. That left only Jake Hamilton unhappy, and his scowling didn't leave Dan sad.

The last three massive sill beams would go up in a hurry, and then would come the payoff deal with the upperworks.

Furthermore the grapevine had brought him word the Big Wheels from the main office would be around in the morning on one of their periodic inspection tours. He'd give them something to watch.

And maybe—he hummed as he dressed—maybe Helen had had time to simmer down.

He reached the Polchek house just as Hamilton was helping the girl into his car. She didn't see him—but the furnace boss did as he walked around to get behind the wheel. He smiled.

Dan found himself remembering that smile all through a solitary dinner. Remembering, and wondering, and liking it less and less.

He didn't know what he was looking for. Just following a hunch. The boom-crane hadn't been tampered with. The subassemblies took up most of the room between the building and the switching tracks, stacked in the order in which they had to go up. Beside them were the three remaining sills.... But there were only two.

The third sill, the short front key sill that went between the two main expansion joints, was gone.

He began to sweat under the armpits as the idea sank in. In place of a seven-hundred-pound H-beam there was only a furrow in the dirt.

He spent a few frantic, unthinking minutes peering into all possible hiding places and some impossible ones. Nothing.

Then he had to step aside as a lokey with headlight glaring in the dusk chuffed by, returning a string of empty charging cars. Those cars, full of scrap, had been on the ramp conveyor at quitting time, ready to start recharging Two when it tapped out early on the swing shift.

Scrap cars. And a drag-mark where the sill had been. A clever operator could have reached, even that far out, by swinging his magnet pendulum fashion. If done just after shift change, nobody would have noticed.

He'd come back to the plant too late. Hamilton had had reason to smile. Fiasco in the morning—and with the Big Wheels there to see it.

For a few despairing minutes Dan thought only of getting whatever satisfaction he could out of the furnace boss' skin. He was done.... No—not yet. Not with eleven hours to get workways!

He did some rapid remembering as he hurried toward the pay phone at the other end of the long building: Seabee days. Jack Fry, who'd been a material clerk. Oakland. He kept his fingers crossed; not many places would carry H-beam stock that heavy.

A lisping little girl came on the line first, then Jack himself.

"Trouble? What jail you in and how much bail they want?"

"You go spit straight up a rope!" He gave the specifications from memory. "And I need it right away. Tonight. You got?"

"Could be."

"I'll be right down."

He tromped throttle all the way to Oakland. Jack had already persuaded the watchman to unlock the gates of the shop where he was chief clerk. One glance at Dan's set face and he led the way into the big, dim warehouse, deciding to let reminiscences wait.

"There she is, Dan. Left over from some rock crushers we built. Nine feet long and you said seven-two, but it's the nearest we got. Go?"

"I won't forget this. Any chance of getting it fabricated here?"

Regretfully the clerk shook his head. "Power's locked off. Insurance regulations, with just one shift working. How you going to carry it?"

"Like this." Deliberately Dan smashed the back window of his car. "It won't stick out too far—I hope."

But a beam wasn't a completed furnace sill. The bolts were two-and-a-half, which meant two-and-nine-sixteenths holes, and drills that size weren't found in just any garage. And specifications for the coped and beveled ends called for saw-cutting. He could get away with a cutting torch only if nobody were interested in causing trouble—which let that out.

He'd go behind perhaps a day. Not too bad, considering. But even one hour late would be too much, after his big talk to Lassiter.

The Polchek living-room was still lighted as he drove by. He stopped.

"Oh. Helen isn't home."

Through the door Dan saw an opened book and a pipe still sending up a blue curl of smoke.

"This time it's you I want to see. Maybe you know of a heavy-duty machine shop where I could get some work done tonight?"

"Tonight? What for?"

"Because I've lost a sill for the new furnace," Dan said very clearly.

"You lost *what?*"

"Seven hundred pounds of structural steel."

"But how—"

"Stuck to a magnet. It didn't go out in anybody's pocket."

"Magnet? You mean—"

"Helen bent my ears down and welded them last time I opened my mouth. So let's say it got lost. Now about that shop?"

Polchek considered. "Only one around here is at the mill. They work nights on engines and cars."

Dan turned away. "And a fat chance I'd have of getting them to do anything for me."

"Wait a minute!" Polchek's voice was sharp now. "You think Jake Hamilton—"

"Yes, if you want it straight," Dan snarled. "And you can tell your daughter she can have him, but his face ain't going to look so pretty."

Once more he turned away.

"Damn you!" Polchek roared. "Your talking has got my Helen all upset. So this time we're going to settle it once for all. Wait until I get a jacket."

The shop foreman grinned widely when his old friend Polchek suggested the job be done quietly. That turned it from ordinary work to interesting skulduggery. Dan drew his first deep breath of the night.

"I don't know how I can ever repay you for this, Mr. Polchek," he said.

There were stern lines in the big man's face. "It isn't for you," he said slowly. "I don't want Helen to make a mistake one way or the other."

Dan understood.

"Was there paint on the original iron?" the foreman interrupted.

"Red lead. Wish we had time to slap a coat on this."

The foreman chuckled. "Son, you ever hear of mixing paste pigment with quick-drying lacquer thinner and putting it in a warm place, like alongside that annealing oven?"

Dan held out his hand. "Mister, any time you and your men meet me uptown, beer flows until you're full or the kegs run dry."

The shop crew made it an artistic job by tuning down the raw newness of the paint with floor dirt and greasy rags, and the sky was faintly gray over the hills when Dan finally drove Mr. Polchek home....

The first remaining long sill was already set and the second was being bolted in.

"Carey, you still think you'll top out this evening?" Lassiter asked.

Dan looked over his shoulder, keeping an eye on Jake Hamilton as he stood near the inspection party.

"Sure. The short key sill next, and from there on it goes fast."

"Hmm," Lassiter said noncommittally. "Clever, if it works."

From the corner of his eye Dan glimpsed a white smock on the charging floor. Helen. She'd been talking to her father, he guessed.

Then old Suzy Wilson was looking over, a twinkle in his eyes. Dan gave him the nod.

Hamilton was listening most respectfully to a Big Wheel, as though impending trouble were the furthest thing from his mind. He didn't see Suzy kick aside a few old sheets of galvanized iron, snap a choker around the new sill with a couple of easy motions, hook on, and raise his hands for *Take it away.* He didn't see it until it was in the air above the furnace bed.

Then his jaw dropped in the middle of a word. He looked, Dan reflected pleasantly, as though he'd just stopped a good hard fist in the belly. That greenish, shaken look. Or like a man seeing a ghost, the ghost of a melted-down H-beam.

Lassiter too was watching Hamilton. He made no move, though, to ask the furnace boss what was wrong.

Dan had all the proof he needed, and suddenly the worries of recent weeks refused to stay bottled up any longer. His muscles tightened.

"Carey," Lassiter said softly, "we don't only fire men who start fights on company property; we don't hire 'em for responsible positions."

For a moment, even though Lassiter's words were as good as a promise, Dan was tempted to go ahead.

Then he noticed Helen. First he thought she was going to cry. Then anger crossed her face, fading quickly to disgust. Finally she turned toward him, and managed a tremulous, uncertain smile.

Slowly Dan's fists unclenched. He wanted to show her and the rest of them that he was more than willing to coöperate, to do things their way. He was as good as in the mill now and that was how he wanted it, but it wasn't the way Jake Hamilton wanted it. Jake would keep on looking for trouble until he really found it.

Dan walked away to supervise the placing of the first subassembly. He couldn't afford to have anything go wrong now.

Lassiter followed. "I don't know anything about this. Officially, that is. What do you want to do?"

It was a hard decision and Dan thought it over a full two minutes. A few words from him would send Jake down the road. If he didn't say those words, Jake would wait for another chance, and on another chance he might make good.

"Nothing," he said at last.

DAN rang the Polcheks' doorbell at a little before seven that evening. Helen opened the door. She looked at him critically. Her expression did not change as her eyes went from his swollen jaw to the blackened left eye. He managed to look whimsical, apologetic and defiant at the same time.

"Jake, of course," she said.

He nodded. "Yes. He was waiting for me in the parking lot. As he saw it, this town isn't big enough for the two of us."

"And you," she said, "agreed with enthusiasm."

"Not until he tried to make it stick by hanging this mouse on me. At that point, since I was figuring on settling here for keeps, I agreed—with enthusiasm."

Helen caught her breath. Her eyes were shining wet.

"Who—who won?" she said tremulously.

"Jake," he answered, and paused, to enjoy her expression of alarm, "is now packing."

A thump and clang made him jump. A two-ton mold had fallen.

Said the tournament official: "Bad things have happened in baseball and boxing and even basketball. But golf is clean. Always has been. We've got to keep it that way."

by JACK M. TUCKER

He Wanted

THEY sat in the drab hotel room, Eddie and the gambler. Anne had gone out. Eddie was glad of that. He had an inkling of what was coming.

"This room!" the gambler said. "How many lousy cheap rooms you been in all over the country?"

"What's it to you?"

The man smiled. He was big and heavy-shouldered and expensively dressed. There was an elk's tooth on his watch-chain. That was supposed to make him look respectable, Eddie figured.

"Look," the man said. "Get wise to yourself. You ain't getting any younger. Thirty-four. Some golfers get washed up at thirty-four."

Eddie felt nervous.

"Five grand," said the man, the words coming out like a caress. "Five thousand bucks. That's what it's worth."

"What what's worth?"

"Come off it," the man said sharply. "You ain't got a dime." He waved at the dingy walls. "Look at your clothes. Why, you don't even eat enough."

"I'm all right. I'm fine. I'll win this tournament."

"No. You ain't gonna win it, boy. You're gonna lose—a nice close lose."

Eddie called him something. The gambler smiled.

"Four years," he said. "Four years since the war. And you ain't finished better than a tie for third yet. All the dough's gone. You're a married man, boy. You gotta think of your wife."

Eddie tensed, and his stomach muscles jumped. The gambler puffed at a large cigar, letting the smoke drift in Eddie's face.

"What do you want?" Eddie said. "My wife will be back here in a little while. I don't aim to have her see you."

"But she's gonna love it when you come up with five grand. Cash money. On the line, soon as them last thirty-six holes end tomorrow."

"What is it—a gift?"

"That's right. For being a nice boy."

"I'm a nice boy. I'm going to stay that way. Get out."

The man inhaled and watched the rich smoke curl up. He didn't look at Eddie now. He spoke softly.

"Maybe you're forgetting something. Yes sir, I bet you are. You got arrested once. That wasn't a nice thing to have happen. It was real bad. Kinda broke your mother up, didn't it, boy? And your wife don't know nothing about that little sentence."

Eddie's breath whistled in. *The dirty— He found out.*

"That was a long time ago," Eddie said tightly. "I was a kid. There wasn't much to it."

"You were seventeen. Acting in concert in a holdup. I and my colleagues checked. People who don't know nothing about that pinch would be surprised now, wouldn't they?"

The gambler leaned toward Eddie until his dark, close-shaven face was inches away.

"Wouldn't they?" he demanded loudly.

Eddie thought of the new club connection at Deepdale he wanted. He thought of its permanency, of a nice little house nearby, where Anne and the expected child could settle down. He thought of a lot of things—of Bougainville and Leyte and Manila, of Anne's patient waiting, of her faith in him, her faith that he'd come home all right and become a big star on the tournament circuit, and win a lot of money; and how later they'd have their own place and a fine-paying club where Eddie could teach and keep an immaculate pro shop.

That Job

He wanted that club job really fierce. It meant security, an end to the ceaseless week-long stands in hotels like this one, or in tourist cabins near the tournament course.

It meant an end to the terrifying knowledge, in the tournaments, that he was just missing the real money, that his slim bankroll was almost nonexistent.

Sure, the runner-up tomorrow collected a thousand in prize money. But he owed nearly that much. And he knew he had to win to prove to the Deepdale crowd that he had what it took.

He sighed, and his big hands clenched.

The gambler eyed him with curiosity.

"I know about that job you want, boy. . . . Want it pretty bad, don't you? You been pretty well promised it—if you win tomorrow. But there's other guys after it."

"You'd do anything for money." Eddie said it bitterly.

"Sure I would. That's my business. And if those gents over at Deepdale knew the pro they might hire has a police record—unh-unh."

The man arose.

"Five grand. You make it look good, though, when you lose. My crowd has too much riding on bets to take any chances. Brown's got to win."

"Maybe he'll win anyway," Eddie said abruptly.

"We gotta be sure. Let's see. Brown's six shots ahead of the field, and you're only two behind him, and playing pretty well."

He stared hard-eyed at Eddie.

"I and my colleagues see the rundown like this: The tournament's liable to be strictly between you and Brown. If both you guys have that much lead startin' the last eighteen holes tomorrow afternoon, the five-grand offer holds. Okay. But what if this Brown slips and you catch him?"

The gambler smiled.

"Make sure that don't happen. Be seeing you when it's all over. With cabbage."

Eddie looked at him dully.

"Close the door on your way out," he said.

The visitor hesitated.

"Tell you what," he said. "We'll make a little down payment. Just for the personal record, boy."

Casually, he pulled out a wallet. It was a fat wallet. He took a sheaf of bills and snapped a rubber band around them and flipped them on the bed.

"Now I'll close the door on the way out, nice boy. Nice boys don't never get their fingers burned if they play ball. Good-by, nice boy."

The door slammed.

Eddie stared at the bills on the bed, walked over and counted them. There were ten of them—all fifties.

Inside was a card. *"Vito Generoso,"* the printed type read, and listed an address.

Golf is a peculiar game, Eddie was thinking. *A lot of people look on it as being maybe on the silly side.*

Fellow hits a little ball into a little hole. But when a fellow makes the tournament grind all year long, battling for his bread and butter, and sweating and fighting off the jitters, and knowing that maybe two or three little missed putts spell the difference between being a champ and being a perennial also-ran—well, it's mighty important.

And you're all alone. Nobody else on the team. Just you and God. . . . Eddie prayed a lot in tournaments.

He was a good professional. But there were too many Demarets and Mangrums and Sneads around, grab-

bing most of the gravy because they were that much better.

And now Eddie was broke. Today was his last stand. He knew that with a chilling finality. And what then? He'd have to quit golf, and hustle for any kind of job he could.

Carefully, he picked up the wad of fifties and Vito Generoso's card.

ANNE kissed him good-by at the hotel.

"You'll win this time, darling," she said, holding him hard.

"Yes," he said.

"Don't think about anything else."

He tilted her chin. She was smallish, and her trim figure showed the pregnancy. The child within her stirred.

Eddie kissed her.

Anne said: "We'll always get by."

"Sure. You're so sweet. I feel like a bum."

"You're a lovely bum."

"I hope the baby grows up to be a lefthanded first baseman—or a good bricklayer. Not a golf pro. The racket's too tough."

"You have to do what you can do best. What you enjoy doing."

"Enjoy doing," he said with an undertone of harshness. "I used to love golf. Now it's murder."

She reached up and kissed him again. Eddie thought for the thousandth time: *.How did I ever rate her? Me, a guy with a record. A guy who maybe has to take a gambler's handout to keep going.* "Anne," he whispered in sudden despair, and clasped her tightly, smelling her clean blonde hair and knowing the softness and freshness and goodness of her. "Oh, Anne," he whispered.

She stroked his lean cheek, browned and toughened under a succession of suns in a long succession of places from Winged Foot to Pebble Beach, from Inverness to Ponte Vedra.

"I know, dear," she said. "But it'll be all right. I know. I said a novena for this one. God won't let us down. You'll win. I know it."

He released her.

"Have to get out to the course. Want to hit a few practice shots. Loosen up."

"That's it. Loosen up. You get so tense. It's easy for me to say relax, but try. Pay no attention to Brown or the gallery or anything. Just hit each shot."

"Yes," he said, and walked out into the hot Florida patio to the battered car parked at the curb. He got in and went to the course and entered the locker-room, dressing there silently, wondering how soon the gambler would show.

Brown came by Eddie's locker. He was burly and big-wristed and well-fed.

"Hi-ya," Brown said. "Nervous?"

"Just like you."

Brown laughed.

"Keep your head down today."

"Sure."

"Good luck, kid."

"Same to you, Brownie."

Eddie went out to the practice tee. The grass still was wet from overnight dew. His caddy was waiting.

"Go out a hundred yards," Eddie told the boy. "The usual."

"We win today," the boy said. "Then you can pay me."

"I'll pay you all right." Eddie smiled. The boy was a good boy. He knew the boy liked him. That helped.

"Look," the caddy said. "I got a few bucks. You eat a good breakfast."

"I'm not quite that broke. You get out there and don't lose any balls."

The boy went out, and Eddie methodically went through his routine. A few Number Eight iron shots to start. He switched to a Number Five, and clipped long irons through the soft sunshine. He waved the caddy farther back. The boy nodded and trotted out some 250 yards. Eddie took his heavy driver and brassie, swung them together for a minute, and discarded the brassie as his wrists lost their tightness and his arms felt limber.

With the driver he pounded out a dozen balls. The fifth one hooked, and Eddie opened his stance slightly. The rest of the shots went straight, flinging far and true with a loud whoosh.

He was ready. He went in the grill and ordered scrambled eggs and crisp bacon and drank two big glasses of milk, slowly.

I'm ready as I'll ever be, Eddie told himself roughly.

THE crowd watched the morning scores go up: *"Kovach . . . 68" "O'Brien . . . 75" "Barnes . . . 72" "Fusari . . . 78."*

Applause and whistles as the scorer penciled after Brown's name— *70.*

That made the big fellow 69-67-70 for the fifty-four holes, and he still was on the pace now, a solid eight blows ahead of the field—except for Eddie.

The gallery raced for the eighteenth green as Eddie teed off in the distance.

He came down the fairway with a booming drive, a rifled iron shot to the green, and his twelve-foot putt dropped for a birdie.

Eddie checked his card and signed it and the score went up on the big board—*69.*

A murmur from the clubhouse gallery swelled into a roar. Now Brown had a bulge of only a single stroke, so it would be he and Eddie down the home-stretch that afternoon in the closing eighteen holes. Nobody else was near the pair.

Eddie signed autographs for some young galleryites and made his way into the clubhouse. He stripped and took a shower and massaged his legs. He felt all right. Then he went from the locker-room and into the grill and had a light lunch. It was hard getting the food down. He paid for it out of the last of a few bills in his wallet, left a quarter tip and got up.

A locker-boy stopped him. "Message from your wife. She wants you should call her."

IN a minute he heard Anne's voice on the phone.

"All my love, darling," she said. He could almost feel her soft breath. "Between the novena and us, how can we lose?"

His throat tightened.

"Don't be disappointed."

"I never could be disappointed in you—no matter what happened."

"You're sweet."

"Everything will be fine."

"Sure."

"I'll be at the club for the finish. At the last green." She never had been able to bring herself to follow him around in a tournament. He never had wanted her to do that. Anne understood. A man has to concentrate.

He said quickly, "You're a sweetheart," and hung up.

Brown walked by and hesitated. He looked bigger and more hamhanded and more serene than ever.

"You're looking grim, boy," Brown said.

Eddie measured him, and his emotions were jumbled with a vision of many fifty-dollar bills that added up to five thousand dollars, and he tried to relax, and suddenly he felt like that fellow, what's-his-name? Oh, Atlas, the fellow who held up the world on his shoulders.

"What's the matter, boy?" Brown asked curiously.

"Good Lord Almighty, stop calling me *boy!*" Eddie snapped.

"No offense." Brown looked surprised.

"Well, skip it, then. Anyway, good luck."

"Same to you. See you on the tee."

Eddie felt like a heel for being snappish. His head ached.

He forced a smile, pushed through the usual crowd of back-slappers near the bar and went outside. Meredith, one of the tournament officials, met him at the doorway with a Tom Collins in his hand.

Meredith shook hands and said: "Do well. Swell gallery out there.

Best ever." The official hesitated, then said cryptically:

"Diogenes should be in the gallery today. He wouldn't need his lantern, either."

The two men exchanged glances, and Meredith went on:

"Bad things have happened in baseball and boxing and even basketball. But golf is clean. Always has been. We've got to keep it that way. And that's why it gives a tournament official like me a great feeling when a man like you won't tolerate temptation. Now get in there," Meredith added reassuringly, "and pitch."

It was time to tee off. His caddy was waiting, and Eddie strode stony-faced to the first tee.

They still talk about the finish on that blistering day, with the sun beating down, and Brown's golf hotter than a smoking pistol.

But Eddie hung on—doggedly and almost incredibly.

For Brown, hammering the ball vast distances and pitching and putting like a robot, played the outgoing nine on the final eighteen holes in thirty-two strokes.

And Eddie, the sweat pouring down on his lean frame and his shirt plastered to his back, nearly matched him, blow for blow—thirty-four.

So they entered the closing nine with Brown three shots to the good. The gallery was getting wild.

Brown couldn't keep it up. Neither could Eddie. Probably no golfer could at that stage. But it was Brown who slipped the more, and when they trudged wearily to the second-to-last tee, Eddie was a pair of strokes to the bad.

This was it, then. The entire issue had to be resolved painfully on these last two holes.

Eddie's mouth was dry and cottony. His tongue felt swollen, and he fought to keep his gradually twitching nerves quiet.

Then he froze—froze into immobility while addressing the ball. Just like that, he froze.

Leo Diegel did it once, in about the same situation. Leo had a chance for the U. S. Open, until the freeze set in so rigidly he had to walk away from the ball twice before he could bring himself to swing.

Eddie tried to swing. But his wrists and arms and shoulders were locked.

He shook his head, and backed away.

Again he took his stance. He backed away again.

Meredith, the tournament official, walked over.

"Anything wrong?" he inquired, his voice sympathetic but firm. "We can't delay the tournament."

"Five grand," said the man. "Five thousand bucks. That's what it's worth."

"Yes," Eddie said. "I know."

Tortured, he eyed the long undulating fairway, sloping to the distant green.

In the background he heard the low murmur of curiosity. It hushed quickly, but a small boy spoke up. "What's the matter with the man?" the little boy asked his father. "Is he sick or something?"

"*Sssshhhh,*" the father answered.

Blindly, because he couldn't stand there like a man in a dream, Eddie somehow forced back his driver in the long high arc and cocked his wrists at the top, and came down viciously and too fast.

He topped the shot.

The ball dribbled sickeningly fifty yards into the rough. It was a poor thing to see, and the gallery was silent.

They don't know, he told himself in agony. *They don't know.... Oh Lord, please help me.*

Brown came to life fast. He stepped up and drove one hard and true. His ball went whistling out a good three hundred yards.

"A beauty," Eddie said tightly, and walked toward his own ball.

The Seabees used to have an old saw in the war's early days that went something like: "The impossible we do now. Miracles take a little longer."

The thought trickled from nowhere into Eddie's mind, like a calming breeze. He became white-faced and cold, and he did not have time to wait—the miracle had to be now. The ball lay reasonably well, despite the surrounding rough.

He came down savagely on his second shot with a brassie, putting into the shot everything but the laces of his hard-pivoting shoes.

The ball sprang from the clubhead with a galvanized sharpness. It whined through the still air and then arched higher and higher, hooking slightly. It bounded into the baked turf two hundred and fifty yards out, and began rolling from the hooked momentum. It rolled and rolled, and finally halted on the green's edge.

Illustrated by O. F. Schmitt

"Anybody could have missed it," she cried. "It's all right, darling! It's all right."

So Brown, shaken, three-putted, and there was the one hole remaining, and Brown led by a single stroke.

Eddie drove long and straight. But the bigger man's hands were shaking, and he sliced abruptly into the woods.

Brown's nerves were in a bad way. There was no way he could get his next shot through the woods to the green. In dead silence, he dribbled a shot sidewise back into the fairway.

His third shot didn't quite make the green, and when Eddie laced into a fine second that stopped fifteen feet from the flag, it looked like a possible birdie three, or sure par four for Eddie, a six for Brown and a smashing climax.

ANNE was sitting on the green's fringe as the packed gallery made way for Eddie. And there was another familiar face in the background, a dark, close-shaven face. An elk's tooth dangled from a vest.

Anne smiled and blew a kiss.

Eddie nodded and tried to smile back. But he wished only to concentrate, concentrate, concentrate as he never had before.

Don't think about anything but the next putt, he prayed. *Just the next putt. Don't crack now. You've got to win.*

Brown, plainly on the ropes, stood over his approach shot and swung.

It was a half top, the kind of shot an arrant dub would make under the pressure of a twenty-five-cent bet. But his ball, jerking from overspin, did the unexpected. It hopped up inches from the cup for a certain five.

The gallery's collective breath drew audibly.

Now Eddie had to hole his fifteen-footer to win the hole by two strokes, and the tournament by one.

He got down on his hands and knees and squinted intently along the putting line. He walked to one side and examined the intervening distance. Then he walked to the other side and eyed the putt calculatingly.

This can't miss, he told himself in desperation.

Then Eddie three-putted the green.

It was all over, and Brown was the winner. . . .

Eddie stood unbelievingly over that last missed putt—a putt of less than two feet. It hung obstinately on the cup's edge.

Now he was shaking Brown's hand and muttering something about "Congratulations, Brownie," and feeling like a man in a nightmarish dream; and the crowd clapped automatically without meaning it, and Anne was running across to him, and her arms were around his bowed neck.

"Anybody could have missed it," she cried. "Anybody! It's all right, darling! It's all right."

He fought to keep back tears of frustrated rage and contempt for himself, a contempt that boiled inside so strongly that he felt his head would burst.

"No," he said. "It's not all right. Listen, Anne—"

She was leading him off the green, and camera-men were snapping away. Somebody shoved a mike to his face, and Eddie said: "Sorry, not now."

The crowd made a narrow lane, and he pushed through toward the locker-room. Anne clung to his arm. She said:

"Snead got an eight one time at the last hole in the Open. He only had to get a six win. But he got an eight."

"I blew it," Eddie said tonelessly. "A bum. Get a real husband, Anne, somebody who can do things for you."

"Stop it!"

"No. This is where I came in."

She whirled him around, her eyes deep and hurt and compassionate, and there was no mistaking the depth of this woman.

"I love you," she said. "You're my husband. You always will be."

He swallowed.

"But, Anne—I—I— You don't understand. You see, I—"

"I UNDERSTAND more than you think." She was angry. "Now you listen to me, you big worried lug! I was proud of you when we first met. I was proud of you during the war. And I'll be proud forever. We share and share alike—everything. I mean sharing good times and bad, and your suffering when you don't win and—well, as the priest said—'in sickness and in health—for richer, for poorer.' And oh, just plain for always."

Her eyes snapped and she said:

"Now you go in that locker-room and have your shower, and I'll be waiting. I have a little money put

away. Let's use it. We'll go out and have some cocktails and a wonderful meal and celebrate."

"Celebrate. Celebrate what?"

"The bravest finish in a tournament I ever saw," Anne said. "They just forgot to make the cup on that last hole bigger, darling."

He sat mechanically on a bench, and stared thoughtfully at his locker.

Meredith sipped a Collins.

"So I lost," Eddie said. "It never fails."

The tournament official shook his head. "You didn't lose. You won."

Eddie looked at him.

"That's right," Meredith said. "You won more than you'll ever know."

"I don't get it."

"Your gambler friend is on his way to the District Attorney's office now. With detectives."

"Oh, that. I figured he would be. You did a good job."

"His name isn't Vito Generoso. It's Gus Parisi—though that's probably an alias too. The cops and the FBI have been chasing him for months. He tried to do a fast fadeout, but we grabbed him in his car outside the club. Your description of old Elk's Tooth was perfect."

"I guess he figured I wasn't very smart."

"He knows different now. The cops have enough on that guy to put him away for years. Outside of what you told us! And maybe the D.A. can prove something with that roll of new fifties you turned over."

Eddie said tiredly: "Well, have to get going. You wouldn't have a job around your house as a flunky, or something, would you? I got to make a living. The golf is out."

Meredith said: "You know, that's funny, that crack about *me* doing a good job."

"Hell, all I did was report the bribe offer."

"I don't have a job for you," Meredith said quietly.

"That's all right. All I know is golf. Or thought I did."

"But I know where you can get a job."

"I'll take almost anything."

"You'll like this one." He eyed Eddie quizzically. "It's that professional job over at Deepdale Country Club."

"Deepdale?" Eddie grunted. "They wouldn't have me on a diamond platter. That's one of the best pro jobs in the country."

Meredith was grinning.

"Deepdale," Eddie repeated desperately. "Now look, Meredith, what makes you think—"

"They know all about the bribe. They wired me the job was yours. Makes kind of a nice birthday gift for that new baby you're expecting. Y'see, I happen to know a couple of important guys over at Deepdale. I tipped them off, Eddie."

Eddie moistened his lips. There were goose-pimples suddenly racing up and down his weary spine.

He gripped Meredith's arms tightly.

"You mean it?" he stammered. "It's on the level? Even with that last lousy miserable little putt I missed?"

"A man never tried harder in his life to hole a putt. You lost the tournament, Eddie. But you won something a hell of a lot more important, boy. I don't have to tell you what that is."

Late afternoon sunshine filtered faintly through the locker-room windows. To Eddie, it felt suddenly symbolic, as though the Lord were sending him a gentle kiss.

He got up and pounded Meredith's back. The Collins crashed to the floor.

"Never mind!" Eddie yelled. "I'll buy you a hundred Collinses!"

He sprinted for the door and nearly crashed through it in a haste that was imperative and wonderful.

"Anne!" he cried. "Anne, honey!"

"Never mind!" Eddie yelled. "I'll buy you a hundred Collinses!"

The LAUGHTER

CARRIED FAR BEYOND OUR BOURNE OF TIME AND PLACE, THEY FOUND THE MOST PRECIOUS TREASURE EVER SOUGHT BY MAN. . . . A COMPLETE BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL.

by

ROBERT SPENCER CARR

Burgess Wood tottered after them,

IT MADE HIM FEEL LIKE A beachcomber, to stroll back to his office after a long, late, and leisurely lunch, wondering what rare and curious new business matters the tides in the affairs of men had cast upon the small shore of his desk in the hours he had been gone.

He rode up in the elevator, full of warm well-being, sirloin steak, and an affable readiness to be entertained. Perhaps the murmuring gray city had washed up a pearl, or a lump of ambergris, among the driftwood of the day. There might even be some money in the afternoon mail, he thought hopefully, and smiled.

He ambled down the corridor until he came upon his name, in small black letters on the frosted glass. It always surprised him a little, to find it still intact.

DON BROOK. *Room 79.* No occupation stated. The door to his modest two-room suite gave no clue to what went on inside. It was difficult to state his business in words that would not prey upon the minds of other tenants. Don didn't like to worry people. He didn't worry himself.

As he did from force of habit before he entered any room, he paused at his own door and listened. He could hear his secretary, Miss Mosely, enjoying a personal telephone call. It was mostly shrieks and giggles. Don smiled indulgently. So spring had come again! He hoped she would be happy. Perhaps her punctuation would improve.

Rather than inhibit her, he stepped around the corner of the hall and quietly unlocked the side door to his private office. He crossed cat-footed to his high old-fashioned desk, and leafed through the telephone-message slips that had accumulated in his absence. Some were funny. Some were going to be sad, for somebody. A few were cryptic utterances no sane mortal could have made; but Miss Mosely would die gamely at the stake insisting that was what the Voice had told her. The oddest things happened to Miss Mosely. People said peculiar things to her, and to no one else. She paid receipted bills a second time, and saw bluebirds out of season. Don Brook would not have traded her for the sharpest secretary on Sunset Strip. Miss Mosely kept him on his toes, a quality essential to his profession.

When Miss Mosely finally signed off, with a singing commercial, Don coughed apologetically. There was a scurry in the outer office. She came in contritely with the afternoon mail, unopened. She was a small plump person with an earnest red apple of a face that looked as if it wanted to be picked.

After throwing the advertisements and bills into the wastebasket, Don was left with one envelope that looked as if it might be a letter. "Can that be all, Miss Mosely?" he asked, disappointed.

"It can," she said. "All except a woman who keeps calling."

"Did she leave her name?"

"You know they never do. These—"

"What does she seem to want?"

"Same thing I always want: To know when you'll be in."

"And what did you tell her?"

"Expected momentarily."

"Did she laugh?"

"Not a nicker."

"Must be serious. Let her in, when she comes."

"Ohh-kay," sighed Miss Mosely, and trudged out.

Don examined the envelope. It was postmarked *Pasadena, 7* A.M., that day. Plain white envelope. Address typewritten on a new machine. No return address. Stamp upside down.

Don reached for his letter-opener, had a hunch, snapped on his lamp instead, and held the envelope against the strong white light. Inside, dimly outlined, he could see a folded triangle of darker paper. He worked

Illustrated by JOHN McDERMOTT

of the STARS

holding out his shaking hands in a piteous appeal. "Martha," he implored, "don't you remember me?"

open one of the seams at the side of the envelope, leaving the closure intact, and drew out a square of violet paper folded once diagonally. On it was typed, by a very old machine, in quavering queer letters like a cracked, mad voice:

My friend, prepare yourself for the inevitable dawning of the golden day of which the bravest hearts and noblest minds of every generation since the world began have always dreamed: The day when we shall know the Answer to what lies. . . .

The message ended in mid-air, without punctuation or signature. The paper had been torn straight across.

Don sighed. Another screwball! He brushed the message off into the wastebasket. Living in Los Angeles, you learned to take these things in your stride. The parks were full of them. They rang your doorbell, phoned you, mailed you the mimeographed secrets of the universe, postage due. In the City of the Angels, the beat of mighty wings was not far overhead.

His buzzer buzzed. "Lady to see you, Mr. Brook." It was Miss Mosely's favorably impressed voice.

"The one who phoned so many times, and wouldn't laugh?"

"I'll ask her." The circuit clicked into silence. When Miss Mosely's voice returned, it had suffered a spiritual defeat. "She wants to know

"I wonder why we don't hear from Pritchard. The time is getting short."

what blessed difference that could possibly make."

Don chuckled. "Send her in." Miss Mosely having promoted her from woman to lady, Don emptied the ashtray in her honor. Then he lay back in his swivel chair, relaxed, and made his mind a neutral blank. First impressions of clients could be as useful as a wax imprint of a key. Sometimes in the first few seconds you sensed situations that took weeks of outside work to prove.

The door was opening. A tall, cool girl entered with an easy stride. She wore a straight white dress so smartly simple that Don had to look a second time to convince himself that it was not a nurse's uniform. Her dress had tiny triangular black buttons and a long, long zipper down the front, from throat to hem. He liked that; but he did not like the little smile of scornful amusement she wore upon a pale, fine-featured face. She glanced around his office with delicate disdain.

Slumming, Don decided. She was more amused by her surroundings than by her errand. That was bad for him. He stood up. "Good afternoon. Won't you sit down?"

"Not yet," said the tall girl, and turned her back. She had found his bookcase. She went to it, bent close, and read the rows of scientific titles to herself.

"Hmm," she said to the books. Presently she straightened up and took a new look at their owner. Her smile of amusement was still there, but the scorn was fading from it. "Aren't these books rather unusual reading for a detective?" she observed. "'Our Expanding Universe.' 'Our Shrinking Solar System.' How did you get interested in such deep subjects?"

"From reading comic books," said Don.

She tried to stare him down, and permanently failed. He held out the chair for her in silence. She surrendered, conditionally, and sat down, curling herself in a way that made her look much smaller than she really was.

She made a move to open her handbag. Don parried with a cigarette. She nodded, and he lit it for her, observing that she wore no rings. She could scarcely be looking for an absconding husband, he decided. Even from a cursory examination, Don doubted that missing mates would ever be a problem in her life.

He put on his bored, professional manner. "What's your trouble?"

"Haven't any." She crossed her ankles. "I am representing someone. Under protest." She watched closely for the effect of her next words, as if much depended on it. "Doctor Burgess Wood."

Don nodded. "The great astronomer. Retired last year as president-emeritus of the Astro-Physical Institute."

Her look of amusement went the way of her scorn, leaving an unalloyed smile of frank approval and surprise. "Imagine a policeman knowing that! Or even pronouncing it."

"I'm not a policeman," Don said patiently. "I do not take criminal cases."

"What, no murder mysteries?" She summoned her amused smile to return to her defense. She was fighting against a favorable impression.

Don looked down at the soles of her outthrust, tilted sport shoes. "Murder is no mystery," he said, patting in a yawn. "Killing is the commonest thing in life. What is more obvious and unmistakable than death?" (She had stepped recently in red clay, he noted.) "But the inexplicable, uncanny disappearance of a responsible adult is different," he went on. (Wonder where she found red clay to step in?) "It may mean anything from amnesia to espionage. More disappearances remain unsolved than murders. That's because there's no law against taking a powder, if you don't take anything else. And that's why I specialize in missing persons who've done nothing but disappear."

"Another specialist," said the girl. "Aren't there any general practitioners any more?"

"Your Doctor Wood was something of a specialist himself," said Don, try-

ing hard to find common ground with her elusive smile. "His lifework, as I recall, was combating the dangerous theories of Professor Pritchard Leigh—the rocketeer who killed so many volunteers in his experiments, some years ago."

"You needn't use the past tense," she said quickly. "Gramps is still very much alive, at home in Pasadena." She sensed his scrutiny of her shoes, and tucked her feet back underneath her chair, self-consciously.

Don raised his eyebrows. "I read in the *Astronaut* that Doctor Wood was a confirmed bachelor."

"He is. Oh, don't look so conventional. Gramps is my pet name for him," the girl explained. "I've been his confidential secretary for a long time now—since I was eight. Titles wear off, around the house. He's such a grand old party, I just call him Gramps. Think nothing of it."

"I don't. What did he send you to see me about?"

"To ask," she said with disapproval, "how much you would charge to find a woman. A distinguished female scientist whom Doctor Wood has been in love with all his life—and lost. She's dropped completely out of sight, and yet he knows she isn't dead."

Don studied the zipper. "Isn't Gramps getting on a bit for such research?"

"He's only eighty," she said maternally. "Is that too old?"

"I wouldn't know," said Don. Her proposition sounded as wacky as the one in the wastebasket. There seemed to be a bumper crop of nuts, this season. He decided not to bite. He said: "Since you're here under protest, I think you'd better go somewhere else."

"Oh, I intend to," she said. "This call is a mere formality, to humor Gramps. Some colleague told him that you are the top man in your field. Some absent-minded professor."

"Investigations are expensive," Don warned her. "And astronomers haven't much money, as a rule."

"Not as a rule," she agreed. "However, Doctor Wood has just won the Pelton Prize in Science, as of course you wouldn't know—"

"For his remeasurement of all interplanetary distances," Don went on modestly, "in the light of neo-relativity—"

"Oh, stop showing off," she said. "Just tell me how much you'd charge for wasting your time and our money, and I'll leave. And you can stop staring at my zipper. It doesn't work. It's stuck."

Don could feel his neck growing red. He found himself disliking her intensely. He tried to fight it off, for she was as inviting as a long slim glass of iced champagne. She had a tall girl's lonely look underneath her clever air. And still the price was set too high—needling, badgering, condescension. He decided not to take the case. He would get rid of her immediately; but it would have to be done with finesse. The best technique, safer than a blunt refusal, was now to say something so preposterous and alarming that the prospective client voluntarily withdrew, never to return.

Don thought quickly while he lit a second pair of cigarettes for both of them. In her case it should be easy to drive her away at once. Her employer was notably conservative, even among the high academic brass. For half a century, through his telescopes and in the science journals, Burgess Wood had fought the fantastic in every form. This girl's weak spot—no doubt her only weakness—was her loyalty to Doctor Wood. He began obliquely.

"My fee depends upon the type of disappearance I am asked to solve. The other-man and other-woman runaways are fairly easy to trace, as a rule. Love is not only blind, but careless with clues. Did Gramps' lady scientist run off with another man?"

The girl nodded. "Yes, but she married him first. Gramps was best man at their wedding. Broke his heart, poor dear."

Don blinked. "When was this, please?"

"Long before you or I were born."

He scratched his head. "I don't understand the time element in this case."

"Don't try to. Astronomers think in closed, curved space-time. The Neo-Einstein Theory. That lets you out."

Don knew then the time had come to scare her off. Lowering his eyes, he said mysteriously: "I think it's only fair to warn you there is one common type of disappearance I have found it impossible to solve. I never take those cases."

"What on earth is that?"

"That's just the trouble," he said darkly, unable to look her in the face for fear he would laugh out loud. "It is not entirely of this earth, I fear. After investigating many inexplicable disappearances, it is my considered judgment that certain selected human beings, usually persons of talent, are deliberately plucked off this planet by unseen hands that reach in from the Outside!"

He kept his eyes fixed on the floor and braced his pride against the coming of her scornful laughter. She would rise and leave in indignation, freeing him from the disturbing sense of stimulation he had experienced since the moment she came in. His life would be simple again—but a little lonely, ever after.

He waited. Nothing happened. He looked up. She was nodding gravely. "Yes," she said, "you are definitely the right man for this case."

Don sat up in alarm. "Now, wait a minute—"

"Yes," she went on thoughtfully, "nothing will bring Gramps to his senses more quickly than to have a lunatic like you around. Then he'll drop this quixotic notion, and save his money for his old age."

Don stood up, smiling. He was definitely angry now; and when his temper rose, his mind grew clearer, calmer, more controlled.

"That will be all, thank you," he said quietly. "Good afternoon."

She crushed out her cigarette. He did not offer her another. She opened her handbag and began to rummage. "Why don't you like me?" she asked in a smaller voice.

"How could I?"

She found a cigarette and tapped it on the corner of his desk. "Please understand that I have nothing against you personally, Mr. Brook. You're passably good-looking in a battered sort of way. You're no midget. You have a beautiful bright red neck. Under different circumstances—never mind." She waited for a match. No light came. She delved in her purse again. "But under the present impossible circumstances, we'll just let the whole thing go." She broke off, stared into the clutter of her purse, and gingerly removed a triangle of violet paper.

Don watched narrowly while she unfolded it into a square and read it through. It seemed to him that her surprise was genuine. There was so little of it. An actress would have given the part more emotion than she did. This girl was trying *not* to seem surprised at what she had found in her purse.

She finished reading the few typewritten lines and looked at Don resentfully. "Veddy, veddy funny," she said. "How did you manage to slip this into my purse without my knowing?"

Don took a quick look into his wastebasket. His violet message was still there. He held out his hand to her. "Let me see that, please."

She drew away. "No, I'll save this for evidence at your sanity trial."

"I didn't write it or put it there. Give it to me, I said."

"But it fits in exactly with that rubbish you were talking a moment ago," she insisted. "Listen, in case you've forgotten your own prosody." She read aloud, in a taunting voice of mock grandiloquence:

". . . beyond the skies; but when the cosmic promise is revealed, then strengthen your soul, O little men, for the great surprises of the spirit. What man in his earth-blindness seeks upon the luminous high seas of space may not—"

She put it down impatiently. "Torn off, top and bottom. You should learn to finish sentences, Mr. Brook." She rose with a gesture of dismissal. "This is too much. I'll go back and tell Gramps to forget it. You said you hadn't accepted the case. Well, you needn't—now. Good afternoon." She replaced the violet paper in her purse, and started toward the door.

The moment her back was turned, Don stooped and snatched the first part of the message from his wastebasket. He put it in his pocket, took his hat, and beat her to the door.

To his bewilderment she raised her face gratefully to him. "Thank you very much," she said with sincere simplicity. "I really wanted you to come with me all the time, you know."

"You conceal your desires well," said Don dryly.

"I'm no good at crawling," she confessed. "Especially when it's something I want very much. I always kick it in the shins."

As if embarrassed by having said too much, she veered away from him, circled back to his bookcase, and drew out a volume bound in purple. "You'll need this," she said, "where we are going."

Chapter Two

THEY WERE IN THE ELEVATOR before he got a clear look at the title of the book she had selected. It was *"The Sublime Adventure,"* by Pritchard Leigh. It had been written years ago, before Leigh's billions were cut off by an outraged Congress and his whole project discredited by the orthodox astronomers, led by Burgess Wood, marching as to war. The book's jacket showed stars and skyrockets; but Leigh's fireworks had fizzled out long ago.

Answering Don's puzzled frown, the girl explained: "I brought this book along because I want you to get off on the right foot with Pritch. Since his fall from grace, he's hard to know. Suspicious of strangers."

"Pritch?" said Don. "I thought we were going to Pasadena."

She led him toward a parking lot on Olive Street. "We are. Right up the speedway."

"But it says in the *Astronaut* that Professor Pritchard Leigh never, never leaves that desert hide-away of his out in New Mexico."

She laughed. "The *Astronaut* should have said, 'Well, hardly ever.' Pritch has been our house-guest one week a month all year."

While Don pondered this, a panhandler with the face of a tragic poet crossed the busy sidewalk, cut Don out of the crowd, and asked him for a dime, in cultured accents.

Don gave him a quarter. The beggar bowed silently and dropped astern.

"Always impress females with your generosity," the girl teased. "It helps fool them. Leave big tips on restaurant tables. You'll be eating off the ironing-board soon enough, honey."

"But I didn't have a dime," said Don mildly.

"You could have asked him to change it."

In front of the interurban station, a little old lady stood tremulous and lost. She had a furled umbrella, a straw suitcase, and an air of bewilderment. The passing throng ignored her, but when she saw Don Brook, yards away, she brightened and signaled to him with her umbrella.

Don sighed and went to her assistance. The tall girl followed curiously. "Are these characters your confederates?" she demanded.

"Yes," said Don. . . . "Yes, ma'am?"

"Young man, how do I get to the La Brea Pits?"

Don told her. It took quite a while. When they walked on, the girl asked: "How long does this go on?"

"All day," said Don.

"What happens if you take your hat off in a department store?" she asked.

Don grimaced. "You tell me."

"Which counter has stylish stouts, and where do I open a charge account?"

He nodded sheepishly. "Also, on what floor are girdles. Is that bad?"

"Very bad." She stopped and took his chin briefly in her cupped hand. "Let me look." She looked and let go. "Yes, you've really got one." She turned into the parking lot and handed the white-robed attendant a claim check. "They're fairly rare, too. Those nondescript, good-natured mugs that simply look like whatever kind of man a body happens to be waiting for. A laundryman, a doctor, a kindly janitor. I assume you've been mistaken for long-lost relatives, and soundly bussed?"

Don nodded grimly. "And old school chums. On busses."

A large open roadster, shimmering in two tones of pastel blue, lurched up in front of them. The girl slipped in on the right side and curled up on the canary-colored leather. "You drive," she said.

Don flashed her a warm look of appreciation. "How did you know that about me?"

"I don't know anything about you, personally," she replied, "but I know a little bit about men. They love to be fed regularly, have their backs scratched, and hate sitting idly by while a mere miss enjoys driving a high-powered car. But if this was a vacuum cleaner, you wouldn't mind my driving it."

He swung into traffic with a grin. "You know everything you need to know, Miss."

"You don't, Mister. Take the emergency brake off, please. It's under there."

He flushed, and drove north in silence. The girl lay back in the warm breeze and closed her eyes. At traffic lights, he studied her. In repose, her face revealed that she was younger than she acted. He wondered what her name was. The California registration certificate on the steering column caught his eye. He turned the big card in its leather holder and read aloud. *"Holly Summers, Age 23, eyes blue, hair l. brown, sex female, height five-ten, weight two-twelve*—they must mean *one-twelve*, Holly—*valid only while wearing glasses."*

"Oh, shut up," she said sleepily, and turned her back.

FAR out on Colorado Boulevard he slowed down and debated how best to wake her. He ruled against anything sensational, although she did look quite appealing, asleep with her ivory face against the yellow cushions. He tapped her formally on the shoulder.

"Pardon me, Miss Summers, but how do we get where we're going?"

She woke up quickly and took her bearings. "I'll drive now," she said. They changed seats; she turned off Colorado and took him careening up into the hills. He closed his eyes and hung on as she barreled into the corkscrew curves. He remembered questions he had wanted to ask while she was asleep. "In the *Astronaut*," he shouted, against the rushing wind, "it always says that Dr. Burgess Wood and Professor Pritchard Leigh stand at opposite poles of the scientific world, and are bitter enemies."

She turned off toward thin air and parked on a narrow ledge. When she replied, her voice was low as if they might be overheard. "Pritch held out the olive branch some time ago. Gramps took it; Gramps would. They're both getting to the age when a good tangible cigar and a game of chess are more important than abstract theories no one has ever proved, and probably never will. Too bad all men can't live that long! Besides, Pritch has got Gramps working hard on some kind of super-dooper calculations, for him. Says he'll recant, if Gramps proves him wrong." She

guided Don to a narrow flagstone walk that curved around the hilltop like an encircling arm.

"That doesn't sound like Leigh to me," Don said softly, keeping close behind her. How convenient it was, he found, not to have to stoop to whisper into a girl's ear. She was right there.

"I told you Gramps is a gullible old dear," she whispered. They turned a rocky corner and came upon a hilltop house, rambling and low, with more ups and downs to it than an author's life. A taffy-colored cocker spaniel bustled up to Don, sniffed his credentials, woofed cordial greetings.

Directly below them, in a tiled patio on the edge of a sheer precipice, two old men sat eating in the sun. One was long and thin, with a feathery white plume of hair: an egret of a man. The other was short and round, with a large sun-bronzed bald head like a cannon ball.

Don gripped Holly's arm. "Why, that stocky man is really Leigh!" he whispered. "I thought you were kidding!"

"It could be a fatal mistake," she said, under her breath, "to think I'm kidding. When I'm not, that is. Or, if I am, to think I'm *not* kidding." She handed Don the book that she had carried from the car. "Be very boyish about asking Leigh for his autograph. It's the only way of disarming a misanthropic author. Now, with Gramps you'll have to smile expressively and make eloquent gestures. Gramps goes by people's expressions and behavior, more than by what they say. Usually he doesn't even listen to what they say. He just watches their hands. Now be still. Here are the stairs."

She stepped down first into the patio, and introduced them with the easy air of a veteran hostess. Wood's handshake was dry and cool, his voice deep and slow. Leigh's palm was moist and warm, his voice high-pitched and rapid. The three men stood waiting for Holly to sit down. "Don't mind me," she said. "When I'm starved, I eat standing up." She went to a portable steam table and began to fill her plate.

"My grandniece has an appalling appetite," said the old astronomer. "I can't see where she puts it all."

"It goes directly into energy," said Leigh. He pushed aside his empty plate and stood up, patting his solid midriff with satisfaction. Then he saw the purple cover in Don's hand, and gave a sickly smile. "Well, now," he said, "it's been a long time since I saw one of those. Don't tell me I have a reader, after all these years."

"Yes, and I'd like your autograph," said Don, opening the book at the flyleaf and holding it out.

"Why, I'd be delighted," said Professor Leigh, his nervousness dissolving. Then he stiffened and scowled. "But who told you I'd be here? Who are you, anyway? You look like a reporter to me!"

Don concentrated upon unscrewing his fountain pen. Holly came to the table with a steaming, heaped-up plate. Leigh turned to her. "I begged you not to tell anybody where I am."

Holly said, with a pacifying sweetness Don found quite surprising: "It happens that this young man carries your book around with him wherever he goes. That's how much he admires you, Pritchard. He wouldn't be without it."

"Oh, really?" said the stout professor, growing pleased. He turned back to Don and scrawled his name in backhand loops like whiplashes. Then he said: "Excuse me, I must begin packing." He started toward the house.

Doctor Wood smiled at Don. "So you're going to find Martha Madison for me."

Leigh paused, picked up his empty plate and went to the steam table.

Don looked at Burgess Wood. Despite his reputed sensitivity to behavior, he had noticed nothing. He turned hospitably to Don. "Help yourself to anything you see. We don't pass things here. This is Freedom House." He beamed. "I'm eating breakfast; my guest is eating lunch; while my ravenous niece is eating the first of a series of dinners. So we never know. Which will you have? Cereal, or lobster?"

"I'll settle for black coffee," said Don. He went to the electric hot plate, and poured. Professor Leigh was taking a long time selecting second helpings of everything, in homeopathic portions. One olive. Two mushrooms. Three peas. He kept his face averted, toying with the curried lobster. The peas shook on his plate. One rolled off, and fell into the sautéed kidneys with a tiny splash that could be heard in the silence that had descended.

Don carried his coffee back across the patio and sat down beside Doctor Wood. He remembered to smile encouragingly. He made risky gestures with his brimming cup.

"Ah, yes," said the old man. "Let's get under way. How much has my niece told you?"

Don looked to Holly for his cue. She minutely shook her head.

"She didn't tell me anything," Don said promptly.

"Excellent," said the old astronomer. "I always prefer to present the original formulation myself. Briefly, these are the factors: The girl married my best friend, instead of me. Oh, there wasn't any ugliness." His keen eyes took on a far-off, starry look. "Martha made her choice openly, honestly and calmly, in front of both of us, one moonlit night. She said that since she loved us both, and knew we were both destined to become great men, it was for her a question of deciding which man needed her the most in his life's work.

"I dare you to look in that telescope, Burgess Wood!"

"I was bound to be a scientist, an astronomer. I already had a respectable, well-paid appointment at the Yale Observatory. But she was smart. She knew intuitively that star-gazers need less from their wives than almost any other men. Their minds are apt to be light-years away from home. That's where Martin had it over me. He had just been ordained a minister of some peculiarly penniless sect. A medical missionary, if you please, bound for no less than the Cannibal Isles, where he would put pants on the pagans while they took his off and put him in the pot. Martin Madison would need a good woman's love, to say the least; not to mention a few regiments of Marines.

"Martha's heart being what it was, big and brave as all humanity, she kissed me good-by—and married him. That was fifty years ago this month." He paused and looked questioningly at Professor Pritchard Leigh.

"Is anything wrong, my friend? I thought you were going to pack."

The stout, bald-headed man was standing in a cramped position, looking pale. "My sacro-iliac is out again," he groaned. "Give me a hand, somebody."

Don rose and helped Leigh to a *chaise longue*. His hot hands had turned quite cold. He lay down at full length, and closed his eyes. "I'll be all right if I don't have to move," he said weakly. "Carry on. Just ignore me."

While Don was up, he filled his coffee cup again.

"Yes, Doctor Wood?" he prompted, expressionless and still.

On her way back for second helpings, Holly kicked him lightly on the shin. He turned on her in exasperation. She showed him in swift pantomime how he looked, and how he ought to look, to keep her uncle's attention.

Don turned back to Doctor Wood with an engaging smile, and waved his free arm with animation. "Oh, yes!" The old man brightened and resumed his tale, puffing on a long pale cigar.

"I PRAYED that after a few years of malaria and jungle rot, Martha would have enough religion, and come back to civilization. Meaning me. I was then a full professor. I measured the distance to Saturn; but I misjudged Martha's courage. She went with Martin Madison from triumph to new triumph, through every hell-hole on this pestilential planet. Madison became a scientist, of sorts, obviously to compete with me. For I was growing famous, too. The deeper they went into the jungles, the higher I went into the skies. And then Martin Madison began to develop his obscene obsession." The old man chomped angrily on his cigar.

Leigh opened his eyes a slit. They were guarded, veiled. "You shouldn't say that, Burgess. There is nothing obscene about the major promise of all the higher religions. You're blasphemous!"

Wood pounded his cane on the flagstones. "I say it's blasphemous, and obscene, for anyone to want eternal life—literally, in the crumbling prison of the flesh. Nothing in Nature lives forever. Stars are God's grandest creations, but even they don't live forever. Old stars burn out, like altar candles, and have to be replaced by novae." The old man turned to Don. "Do you know what that crazy sky-pilot did to my Martha?"

"I'm afraid I don't," said Don uneasily.

"Why, he dragged her up and down the boondocks, looking for a source of everlasting youth, to prove the Bible's promise. They went into the Florida Everglades, ostensibly as missionaries to the Seminoles. Actually he was hunting for Ponce de Leon's fountain of eternal youth. All he got was amœbic dysentery, the same as Ponce de Leon. Then he took her to Tibet, presumably to convert the Dalai Lama, but in reality to study the secrets of longevity those old buzzards up there claim to know. All that he acquired in High Asia was altitude sickness, and pinworms. The last I heard, he was trying to break into Russia the back way to try some weird new long-life serum they claim to have developed. I can't imagine why." His voice sank. "That's where their trail faded out, ten years ago. That's where you come in, young man. Somewhere in the Gobi Desert."

Don stirred his coffee industriously. He had a feeling he was falling into the black whirlpool in his cup. Off at one side he heard Leigh saying to Holly, in the plaintive voice of an invalid, "Bring me a cup of coffee, too. That's a good girl. Oh, my aching back!"

"That, Mr. Brook, is my problem," Doctor Wood said. "Have you any questions?"

"Yes," Don said. "Why do you want to find Martha Madison?"

The old astronomer waved his arms. "All kinds of obvious reasons. She may be alone, and in poverty. They were the kind who donate their book royalties and their lecture fees to charity. For the first time in my life I've got some money. I'd like to bring her here and make her comfortable for the first time in her life. We could sit here on the patio side by side, enjoy a good long rest, and watch the sun go down together, thinking of all that might have been."

Don observed a minute of respectful silence, to let the picture fade. Then he asked gently: "Where do their children live?"

"They never had any children. Now, if she had married me—"

"Do you have any pictures of her? Any records or mementos—"

It was Wood's turn to interrupt. "Have I!" He laughed. "You come with me." He arose, to hobble down a walk toward a concrete vault with barred windows. At the threshold he pulled out a jingling key-ring and unlocked a fireproof door. "You step in here," he said, and smiled.

Chapter Three

DON ENTERED A DARK ROOM. A switch clicked behind him, and a light came on. He saw a shelf of books. All were by Martin and Martha Madison. He saw two enlarged photographs of

a strikingly beautiful woman. In one she wore Arctic furs. In the other she wore a sun helmet. She looked at home in both. Near the door stood a small motion-picture projector. Don saw the white square of a screen in the shadows at the far end of the room. Flat tins of movie film were ranged in metal racks. On long library tables lay huge scrapbooks fat with yellowed clippings. There were bound volumes of geographic magazines, and stacks of illustrated postcards heralding trans-continental lecture tours, in the quaint type faces of decades ago. Don picked up one and read at random:

> "... not only missionaries extraordinary, but also the most famous man-and-wife team of writers, photographers, and explorers in history. Their daring expeditions carry not only the Bible and the Flag, but also the microscope and the movie camera into the last blind spots on earth. These co-pilots are also the world's greatest celestial navigators. Their bold discoveries make history in a dozen branches of science. They introduce new food crops everywhere they go. She carries seeds from land to land like the goddess Ceres herself. . . ."

Don dropped it. "Who was their lecture manager?"

"Don't think they had one," said Wood, taking down a can of film.

"I think they did," said Don. "The Madisons wouldn't write such stuff about themselves."

THE old man was happily threading up his projection machine. "Mr. Brook, no pilot taking off upon a distant mission was ever so well briefed as you are going to be in the next few days. First I'll show you ninety reels—"

"Home movies hurt my eyes," said Don. He fled to the books. "Who was their publisher?"

"Bother their publisher," the old man said testily. "These films of theirs are full of clues. I've collected them from visual-education libraries in schools and churches all over the world."

Don took down the Madisons' complete works one by one. He glanced briefly at each colophon. They had stuck to the same minor publisher all their lives. . . . the same fantasy publisher who put out Professor Leigh's visionary works.

Don turned to leave. The lights went out. He collided with someone very solid and very close behind him. The movie projector began to buzz. A bright scene struck the beaded screen. In the reflected light, Don recognized Professor Leigh standing beside him.

"Back better?" Don said pleasantly.

"The sacro-iliac," said the Professor, "slips in, as well as out. Shall we sit down? I'd like to see these pictures too. Surely you weren't leaving?"

"I wouldn't think of it," said Don. They sat down warily on little folding chairs.

The film was of an African expedition, in color, sound, and not a little fury. There were some embarrassing sequences of baptizing seven-foot sepia natives, and some fair shots of the Madisons' famous houseboat floating down a muddy river. In it they had reached many an otherwise inaccessible shore. As the prow passed the camera Don saw that the boat was called *The Question Mark*. He was wondering about that when suddenly there shone out a scene of breath-taking beauty, one of those happy flukes the worst photographer will sometimes hit upon:

AN old-fashioned airplane taxied in and stopped, its fuselage filling the screen. The cabin door opened and Martha Madison climbed out on the wing. Unaware of the camera, she looked about and smiled as if she were glad to be alive, and back on terra firma. She wore tropical shorts and a low-necked sports blouse. Don began to see her husband's side of it; why he kept her in inaccessible localities, and searched for the fountain of youth. Martha overflowed with love in all its forms, like a harmonizing chord.

"Nice-looking woman," said Leigh casually. "Sorry I never got to meet her."

Wood sat entranced some feet ahead of them, closer to the screen. The old man's celluloid dream spun on, evoking colored shadows from the sleeping past. Now Martha was climbing down a swinging ladder from the high old airplane. Her movements were graceful, lithe, and wonderfully natural. Her hair was an exciting shade of reddish gold. Not too red, and not too golden. She was heaven and she was earth in a unity of opposites.

Halfway down the ladder, Martha Madison paused. She must have heard the camera behind her on that long-gone day. She glanced over her shoulder and saw the photographer. Her perfect naturalness remained unchanged. She swung around lithely on the ladder, waved and smiled a smile of love so boundless that it leaped across time, space, and reason to include everyone who ever would see the film. She called in a lively voice whose warmth some sound-recorder long gone to rust had captured perfectly.

"Oh, hel-*lo* there, everybody! This *is* a surprise!" She added something pleasant in Zulu.

Don felt a poignant nostalgia.

Suddenly there was a ripping sound in the projector. A jagged sheet of light flamed across the screen. There was a frantic flapping as of frightened birds. Doctor Wood hastily shut off the projector, turned off the light and sadly surveyed the broken film. "Getting mighty old and brittle," he mused. "Like me." He looked up sharply. "You men aren't leaving? My show has just begun. Ninety reels—"

"I've got to go to Hollywood," said Don.

"And we've got to get back to work, my friend," said Leigh to Wood. "If we go to your study now, and buckle down, we can be finished by midnight. We're nearly through."

Holly appeared in the door, and hung listening like a vine.

The old astronomer stood mournfully holding his torn ribbon of frail celluloid. "Confound you, Pritchard!" he said. "Why are you so anxious to get those quadratures computed? You're not going anywhere."

LEIGH turned away. "Of course not," he said lightly. "As I told you, Burgess, if you will help me with these measurements, I will publish a paper formally confessing my errors of the past. And give you full credit, too. I shall beat my breast with one hand and scratch your back with the other. But how can I correct my own mistakes if you won't help me with those outer orbits? You won the Pelton Prize in this, not I. I'm an ignorant old scientific has-been who haunts the ruins of an abandoned laboratory in a God-forsaken desert, ashamed to show his face. Come on, now. Let's get to work."

"I've got to talk to my detective," said Wood firmly.

"He's leaving," said Don. "I'll think this over and phone you when I can." He hurried toward the patio to find his hat.

At a secluded corner, Leigh overtook him at a trot and drew him aside to the edge of the cliff. "I hate to butt in on a matter that's none of my business," he said apologetically, "but before you take this old man's money, I think you should know that the Madisons have been dead for several years."

"I don't remember reading anything about it in the papers," said Don.

"There was only a line," said Leigh. "A cabled dispatch from Outer Mongolia. Nobody noticed it. Why don't you be a sport, Brook, and drop this wild-ghost chase?"

"Why don't you be a sport and tell your host yourself his love is dead?" Don suggested. "You can see how much this means to him."

"I don't want to hurt him," said Leigh. "He's been such a help to me." He fidgeted. "Besides, he would demand all sorts of proof, and never let me go until I'd dug it up for him." He looked uneasily around, as though unseen eyes were watching him. "I've got to leave," he said half to himself, "quite punctually, this trip."

Don looked at his wrist-watch and was startled. He had no idea that it had grown so late. He looked up impatiently. Leigh was plucking at his sleeve. "All right, then, I'll buy you off," he said bluntly. He had a checkbook in his hands. "Rather than see this ghoulish farce go on! I'm doing this for Doctor Wood's sake, you understand."

Don smiled. "I have a funny rule. I can be corrupted by only one side at a time."

Holly was approaching, with her easy stride. Don said, over Leigh's head to her: "I've got to call a cab."

"I'll be your cab," she said. "No taxi man has ever yet found this address. This hill must be inside a time-twist or a space-warp." Noticing something about his face, she began to take longer steps. She had the motor running before he could snatch his hat off the table and jam it on his head and overtake her.

THE corkscrew curves unwound. "Where to?" she asked, when they hit Colorado Boulevard, with a screech of tires.

"Hollywood and Vine," said Don. "Get there before five o'clock. That's probably when they close.... No, don't ask questions. Just drive. I'll answer your questions without your asking them." He held his hat on with both hands. "We just got a break. What break? Not having to fly to New York tonight. Why not? Because the Madisons' publisher happens to be here. Why publisher? Because their books are still in print. That last edition was printed only five years ago. If anybody on this earth knows where they are, it would be their publisher."

"Couldn't we have—"

"Phoned? Not a chance. The Madisons' forwarding address, if it is known at all, is probably top secret. You'd be surprised how hard it is to find where certain authors live. And yet fan letters reach them promptly. I am now composing one to the Madisons."

His head jerked around. "Holly, you hit that man!"

"Just nicked his astral body. That's how fast he jumped. Don't watch the traffic, please. Scrunch down and contemplate my feet. Or something. And tell me why Leigh got jittery when he heard that Gramps wanted you to find Martha Madison."

"That's one of several odd angles we're going to try to figure out."

"We? Not me! I'm His Majesty's loyal opposition."

"You're certainly driving loyally and well. We may even make it, both alive."

"Oh, I just like to drive fast. You're merely my excuse for speeding. Nothing personal about it. But you'll have to keep telling me fascinating things or I will surely hit a traffic cop. How dangerous is my fat little house-guest, if the chips were down?"

Don sank low in the deep upholstered seat and watched her slim shoes tread the pedals. "According to what I read in *Astronaut*," he said, "Professor Leigh could be about as dangerous as anybody. Because, when Congress stopped his project, they failed to dynamite his laboratories with all that heavy equipment in them. The excuse was that they could not be used for any other type of work. They were out in the middle of a howling desert. And besides, he still had powerful friends in Washington, who believed in him. Still do, in fact. The bill outlawing his activities passed by only seven votes, you may recall, if you weren't too busy dressing dolls at the time. Leigh's inventory was never checked, so he may have hidden materials in those tunnels he was always having drilled into Meteor Mountain." Don winced and stuck his head up over the edge of the door. "What happened then?"

She shoved his head down. "Don't look now. Tell on. What could Leigh do alone?"

"The joker is," said Don from below, in a muffled voice, "that Leigh is not alone. More than a hundred of his scientific staff elected to stay on in New Mexico after the government stopped their salaries. They formed a colony, and farmed and mined. They let their beards grow, wear leather britches, and shoot every head that shows among the rocks. Are they working on something *verboten*? Tut-tut. They are retired Civil Servants, out there for their health." He raised his nose and sniffed. "We're in Hollywood," he said.

It was five minutes after five when the blue roadster came sizzling into North Vine Street. "You can look now," said Holly.

"I want the tall office building on the corner," Don said, tensing. "You park, and—"

"Meet you in the doorway, by and by. Count nothing and pull your rip-cord."

He lit running and caught an elevator's closing door with his forearm. The operator told him the proper floor. Don sprinted down the hall, skidded to a halt, and sedately entered an imposing paneled waiting-room, with cases full of books and book displays. The receptionist was pulling on long black gloves. "You're late," she said.

"Yes, I know," Don began humbly.

Chapter Four

FIVE MINUTES LATER HE CAME out on the sidewalk and found Holly standing where he wented her to be. He took her arm like a fast train taking on a mail-sack. In one stride she was abreast of him.

"Get it?" she asked, opening the car door.

"Yuk."

"How?"

"I was mistaken for a literary agent's messenger boy. It seems the editors were waiting for a manuscript to publish. Then I met a stray secretary, who said the mail clerk had gone home, and for me to do the same. After a while she said all right, she'd look up the address for me, if they had it. She pulled out a drawer of filing cards, looked under the M's, announced firmly they weren't allowed to give out that information. But I had peeked over her shoulder. The Burbank airport, please."

She nodded and flew him up Cahuenga Pass. "Which plane?"

"Anything that lets down at Albuquerque." He bent almost to the floor of the car to light two cigarettes in the gale. He passed one up to her, and asked: "You don't happen to remember Professor Leigh's New Mexico address?"

"It's the kind you can't forget. Route One, Box One—"

"Meteor Mountain, New Mexico," Don finished for her. "That is the Madisons' address too. Their publisher's file-card was smudged and worn and covered with a smear of old notations. They must have been living there for years! If they're still alive—"

She took the fourth groove of the eight-lane superhighway and held it against all counter-attack. "Some people," she said, "think that all Leigh's volunteers may not have died."

He said: "I hope they died. I'd hate to think that any of them were still alive, after what Leigh did to them. A year out there would be bad enough. But ten years, twenty, thirty —*brr!*"

She said: "Leigh may still beat us to the Madisons."

"Us?" said Don. "I thought you were my opposition party."

"I am," she said. "That's why I'm going with you. I want to see exactly how you spend Gramps' money." A four-motor plane droned low across

the highway, tucking up its wheels. She swung into the entrance of the huge air terminal. "Besides," she said, a little differently, "you may need my help."

"The way Martin needed Martha's in the Cannibal Isles?"

"Maybe worse. Pritchard Leigh has pressure cookers." She pulled up at the curb and handed a five-dollar bill to the dispatcher. "Keep this car in the garage until I come for it." He nodded, and slipped in under the wheel as she slipped out, snatching a blue cape from the car. They ran for the steps. How easily she kept up with him, Don noticed. "I thought women always had to go home and pack, and pack," he panted.

"I can't go home. I'll have to live out of my checkbook."

"That won't help at the ticket window. I've barely enough cash for my own ticket."

They took their places in the queue. "I also have," she said on his shoulder, "a burdensome roll of bills that Gramps insisted I bring with me to your office, three hours ago, as a retainer fee. He said you'd be skeptical of checks." Don felt something large, thick and cylindrical being slipped into his side pocket, under cover of her blue cape. "The meaning of this money has now been revealed."

"Now, look—" he began helplessly.

"You'd better pay for everything," she whispered, "or people will think we are married."

The line moved forward. Now they were only one thin man away. "Why can't you go home?" Don asked.

"Because Gramps would know, from looking at me, that you'd found out where Martha is. It is impossible to keep anything from him except in total darkness. He'd confide his joy to Leigh, and Leigh would murder both of us, and wire ahead to his wild men to have you murdered too. They're not working night and day on mechanical quadratures for nothing."

"What the hell are quadratures?"

"It's our turn," she said, nudging him. "I'll tell you in the plane."

The clerk had two no-shows on the El Paso Local, leaving in three minutes. "You see, Don," she laughed, loping along beside him on the runway, "I'm good luck."

"You'd better be," he said. They captured the last double seat, and sank back to catch their breath. The plane rose into the setting sun, swung eastward toward the night. Over San Bernardino, Don drew the telegram pad from the seat pocket and handed it to Holly. "Take two telegrams," he said.

"You are confused," she said. "You are *my* employee. I am *your* employer. You take two telegrams."

"You take your salary out of mine. Now take—"

"Two telegrams," she said, pencil poised. "One to Miss Mosely, saying you'll be out of town until further notice, but are expected momentarily. The other to the Albuquerque airport, ordering a rented car to meet us with its motor running."

Don looked weak. "I'm not used to such efficiency," he said. "It frightens me. Especially the rented car. I hadn't thought of that."

"Then what was your second telegram?"

"I was going to wire your uncle that I'd be delayed a few days in starting on his case."

She shook her head. "Naïve. The telegram will be date-lined Las Vegas, or wherever our first stop is. Leigh might get his hands on it, and guess where we're going. We need all the head-start we can get."

Don looked down. The street lights were coming on in Barstow.

"But what will your uncle think if you just vanish like this, with me? I'm supposed to solve disappearances, not cause them."

"I suppose he'll think we're—oh, you know."

"I'm afraid I don't know, Miss Summers."

"Oh, looking at the moon, or something."

"But isn't that pretty serious—for you?"

"Isn't *that*," she said, "pretty much up to me?"

They let back their seats and reclined side by side. After half an hour she said: "Now tell me about your life inside a barrel, Don."

"All right. Why barrel?"

"Not knowing who the Madisons were."

Don gazed at the ceiling of the plane. "Holly, when I was ten years old, my parents took me to an illustrated, edifying travel lecture by certain pious missionaries at Memorial Hall, in Columbus, Ohio. I went with both feet braced together, skidding, one strong parent pulling on each long, translucent ear. Grooves can still be found on Broad Street. Two hours later I came out walking on thin air, and in love. The Madisons were both lovable, marvelous people. I went back-stage after the lecture to get a closer look at these two demigods. Martha Madison patted me on the cheek, gave me a shark's tooth, and said: 'What a homely little boy!' And that's why I have remained a love-lorn bachelor all my life. Like Gramps."

"I'm glad you told me why," she said. "I was beginning to have my doubts. Well, finding her again should release that boyhood fixation, shouldn't it, according to the rules? Thereby un-penting a pent-up flood of something or other?"

"We'll have to see," said Don. "Usually the rules are lost in the exceptions. My case may be hopeless. Like Gramps'."

"Maybe I can get you on the rebound, Don," said Holly. "Martha must have been a grand old girl—in her day. Such courage! Such composure! Such a sense of humor! You should have read—"

"I have read all their books," said Don. "His as well as hers. Now go to sleep. It may be your last."

"Don't you take your hat off when you go to bed, Mister?"

"If I take my hat off, the passengers will just know I'm the flight steward, and ask me the altitude."

"What is our present altitude, steward?"

"Veddy, veddy high."

"They won't mistake you for flight personnel with your arm around me. Or will they?"

He handed the passing stewardess the two telegrams and two dollars.

"You win," he said. "Let's sleep." He wrenched loose his hat. A folded triangle of typewritten violet paper floated down, into his lap.

Chapter Five

They looked at the violet paper slip. It had been torn off, top and bottom. Then they looked at each other.

"How did that get out of my purse, into your hat?" said Holly.

"Look in your purse," suggested Don.

She looked. "Mine's still there. Are you reduced to writing to yourself? Although I must admit you looked convincingly stupefied, just then."

Don snapped on the little spotlight above their seat. They put their heads close together.

"be of a tangible nature that moth and rust doth corrupt; but spiritual treasure that can never die. What if the Universe is not out there to be plundered by pirates? The stars are votive candles to man's immortality. But because we have materialistic minds . . .

They sat without speaking. Clouds scudded past the airliner's windows. The stars were coming out.

"That crack about the materialist mind was obviously aimed at me," said Don.

"The votive candles sound like Gramps," said Holly.

"Who do you think is writing us these cosmic love-letters?"

"Obviously Leigh. I caught him reading science fiction one day, out

behind the barn. Gramps won't allow it in the house."

"Do you know what I think?"

"*Do* you think?"

"I think you're writing these yourself."

"Oh, hush," she said sleepily, and curled up with her head on his shoulder.

"Hey," he whispered. "You were going to explain mechanical quadratures to me."

"Too sleepy," she murmured. "Jus' imagine playing tic-tac-toe in cubes instead of squares." She closed her eyes. "Plot curves through space that show you where you ought to be, even when you ain't." She was asleep.

Don laid his cheek against her glossy hair, and dreamed.

The mountain road was narrow, rough and dusty. The rented car was stiff and new. The noon sun of southern New Mexico was crystalline fire on their faces. Holly applied a vaseline stick to her chapped lips and passed it to Don, who sat beside her with a fluttering road map open on his knee.

Presently he stood up in the car for a better view ahead. "Well, here is their mailbox. Number One. Drive around the curve, up there. We'll hide the car." He looked down at her and frowned. "That white dress of yours is going to be conspicuous here in the boondocks."

"Are you suggesting that I take it off?"

"Still a bit conspicuous," he said. "You'd get sunburned. —Run the car up this arroyo, out of sight."

They got out and walked back toward the lonely mailbox on its weather-beaten fence-post. Holly carried her cape folded over her arm. The barren desert sloped away into infinity on their left. A dark mountain rose sullenly on their right.

"Now let's find a nice shady place to wait," said Don. "Someone will have to come and get the mail, eventually. Then we'll follow him in to where the Madisons are being held. Easy. Just like that."

He parted the bushes on the high side of the road, crawled up and made a nest for them. "This will have to do," he said. "Watch out for these red ants." Holly spread out her cape and sat on it.

They settled down to wait. A black vulture circled far overhead, against the burning blue.

"Does he see us?" she whispered.

"Why do you think he's hanging around?"

She shifted uncomfortably. "I wish we'd brought something good to read."

"We did. Take that violet prose out of your purse and match it up with these installments." He handed her his two fragmentary messages.

She pieced them together on the sandy hillside and read them through, and sighed. "I hope it's true."

"Is this sun too hot on you?" he asked.

She cocked her head. "Sssh! I hear a car coming."

They crouched down motionless. A jeep proudly painted *"U. S. Mail,"* driven by a Mexican boy in a sombrero, chugged up to the mailbox and stopped. The driver sorted out a stack of magazines and stuffed them into the box. Then he drew a yellow envelope from his shirt pocket, tossed it into the box, and drove on. In a little while the jeep reappeared higher up the road, swinging out to turn a shoulder of the mountain. Then the jeep was gone.

It grew very still. Aromatic with the tang of sagebrush, the dry wind blew silently and steadily. A large rattlesnake slowly crawled across the road.

"Well, who goes and gets it?" said Holly finally. "One of us girls?"

Don shook his head. "It's against the law to monkey with anybody's mail. I don't want to lose my license."

She stood up in the bushes. "You and your license! The whole future of the human race may be at stake. It says so right here." She patted the three typed messages, stacked them in order, and handed them to Don. "Read these majestic thoughts while I scoot down and read Leigh's telegram ordering our execution."

She started to push through the chaparral. Thorns tore her skirt. Don stopped her. "All right, I'll go get it," he said. "But we can't keep it. We'll have to deliver it, no matter what it says about us." He stood up beside her in the bushes. "You wait up here, where you can see farther. If you spot anyone coming, give a bobwhite whistle, and I'll duck."

He dropped down upon the road, crossed to the mailbox, took out the telegram, and looked quickly at the other pieces of mail. They were all scientific journals, addressed simply to the box number, with no addressee named. Among them was the latest issue of the *Astronaut*. He was tempted to take it too. They printed nonsense, of course, but it was good clean fun.

Suddenly he heard heavy footsteps close at hand, below him. In the next second, Holly whistled "bob*white*" from the hillside up above. Don dropped silently over the edge of the road and lay flat against the sloping bank, half hidden behind the thick post that supported the mailbox. The telegram was still clutched in his hand. He pressed his cheek into the sand.

An old couple was coming up the path. At first all Don could see was the woman's beautiful white hair, and the man's iron-gray beard.

"Didn't know there were any bobwhites this far west, Martha," rumbled an old man's voice.

"I don't think it was a quail," replied a woman's voice, soft and fine-textured as old cream-colored lace.

Don felt a shiver go through him. It was the living echo of the golden voice that he had heard on the sound film the afternoon before in Pasadena. His boyhood hero-worship began to stir in his heart. Cautiously he raised his head. They were almost at the road now. He could see them clearly, at close range. Even in their rough outdoor clothes, they were a distinguished-looking couple. Bowed down with age, they bore their years with grace.

Don watched them approach. Martin Madison limped on his right leg. Don remembered reading how it had been mauled by a lion when he was on his honeymoon.

At the edge of the road they paused. With the chivalrous gesture of a bygone age, Martin Madison offered his wife his arm. She took it with a gracious nod of thanks.

Don felt moisture in his eyes. The old gentleman's little gesture of respect, intimate as only formality can be, symbolized to Don the old-fashioned and enduring love that had sustained this magnificent pair through half a century of braving the Unknown together. And as he lay there on the hillside hearing his heart thud into the sand, Don Brook experienced an unaccustomed pang to think how soon these gallant comrades, who had so loved life and so well lived it, must set sail upon their final voyage of exploration over the last horizon, from which there is no return.

Now they were directly above him, standing before the mailbox, taking out the magazines. "Well, I guess this is the last we'll be seeing of these, for a while," said Martin Madison, with a chuckle.

Martha took up a bulky journal thoughtfully. "I wonder what they'll be printing—then?"

"The same self-hypnotic chants, my dear." He took an armload of magazines, and laughed. "These same issues will still be selling on the newsstands, if all goes well with us. Now let's get out of sight."

Martha lingered by the mailbox, her white hair snowy in the sunlight. She stooped and peered inside. "I wonder why we don't hear from Pritchard. The time is getting short. There ought to be a telegram."

"Yes, but we're all ready, dear," he reassured her. He took a long, deep

breath of the scented breeze. "Come, let's go back underground."

Don Brook felt a wave of anger toward whatever evil force had thrust these serene and lovable old people, who had lived such blameless lives, into the orbit of Professor Leigh's murderous experiments. The Madisons obviously were not prisoners, but volunteers. If he could make them change their minds—

Their backs were turned. He raised up to call to them. With the words half-formed on his lips he saw, fifty paces down the trail, two bearded men with rifles. They motioned impatiently to the Madisons. Both riflemen wore faded camouflage suits, helmets, leggings and canteens.

"We're coming," Martha called to them. Then she stopped and looked up at the hillside just above the road. "Martin," she said calmly, "a girl in a white dress is lying in those bushes. Come with me." She crossed the road and slowly climbed the slope.

DON watched tensely, feeling his plans crash about him. Then he relaxed and wryly smiled.

Holly had given a convincing groan, and was sitting up holding her head. "Where am I?" she asked weakly.

Martha Madison bent down to her. "What's happened to you, girl?"

"I'm not sure," said Holly feebly. "Last night—a man—we parked—"

The Madisons helped her to her feet. "We'll take care of you—don't worry," said Martha quietly. "What's your name, child? Where do you live?"

"I can't remember." She began to sniffle.

The armed guards came running up the trail, alarmed. They were respectful toward the Madisons, but resolute. "This won't do," the first guard said.

"We've got to get this girl to a doctor," Martha Madison said firmly.

"That's impossible," the second guard said. "Today's the day."

"But we can't leave her on the road," Martin Madison protested.

"No, not after she's seen you," said the first guard significantly.

"We'll take her inside, Martin," said Martha eagerly. "We've more doctors there than we've got sense."

The two guards exchanged worried glances, then grinned and shrugged. They seemed to have thought of the same thing at the same time. Don wondered what it was.

"She'd only need to stay until tomorrow," said the first, in an undertone.

"After that it wouldn't make any difference what she knew, would it?" agreed the second. He raised his voice. "All right, folks. You can bring the girl inside," he told the Madisons. "Now let's all get out of sight, please."

The five of them descended the winding trail. Holly walked between the Madisons, acting dazed and helpless. As the procession rounded the last corner below, the second guard looked back up the slope straight at Don and raised his rifle.

Don held his breath and closed his eyes.

The rifle cracked. Don felt nothing. Then he did feel something, and opened his eyes. A large rattlesnake, its head shot off, writhed across his outstretched hand, slid down the slope, and died. The guard turned his back and strode out of sight.

Don waited until the sound of their footsteps had been gone for some minutes. Then he gingerly slid down, came out upon the dusty path, and tracked them by their footprints. The small, emphatic point of Holly's heel was clearer than the others.

The trail descended through thickets of scrub oak almost to the sparkling white gypsum sands of the desert, then turned abruptly and dipped into a narrow cañon. Don crawled to the edge and looked over. Far below, Martha and Martin Madison, with Holly still between them, were disappearing into the black maw of a tunnel. The first guard accompanied them. The second stayed outside, sat down on an acetylene tank and rolled a cornhusk cigarette.

Don surveyed the situation. Narrow-gauge railroad tracks ran up and down the hidden cañon between great heaps of furnace slag. Glassy, rainbow-colored slag, unlike any Don had ever seen. Somewhere deep underground a monster dynamo was throbbing like a giant heart. The whole place was permeated with a mounting air of high expectancy, of immanence. Don sensed that he must act quickly, if he was going to act at all. Time was turning on its axis. . . . He crept along the cañon's brink until he found a large, loose rock. He looked at it, and at the guard's head below.

"WHAT's the matter, buddy? Lost?" inquired a voice behind him.

Don nodded and turned around with an agreeable expression. A third guard stood behind him with a submachine gun cradled in his arm. He looked Don up and down. "You're that new radar man we sent for, aren't you?"

Don shrugged modestly. "And I'm off the beam," he confessed.

"Come with me." The third guard marched him down into the cañon to the tunnel's mouth.

The second guard sprang up and scowled. "So you're the guy who threw that poor girl out on the road last night!"

Don hung his head.

The first guard came out of the tunnel, talking. "The Reverend says that if we should catch that fiend—" He stopped at the sight of Don. "Caught him already? Good. I'll take him in." He paused and stroked his unkempt beard. "Isn't it typical of a degenerate's psychology, Doctor Blake, to return to the scene of his crime next morning?" He raised his rifle and poked Don in the ribs. "Stay well in front of me," he warned. "I want a clearly defined target."

Chapter Six

THE TUNNEL ROSE STEEPLY into the mountain, Don discovered. At the upper end they stopped before a tall, curved, shining door of armor plate. It was not attached to the rock, but was separated from the rock by a bottomless black chasm that had to be stepped across. Don had a fleeting, fantastic impression that the tall curved door was only a tiny segment of some huge inner structure delicately suspended within the mountain. From somewhere far below came the sounds of heavy pumps working hard, like labored breathing.

The guard rang a bell. After a long time the door slowly opened with a hiss. It seemed to be self-sealing and immensely heavy. Martin Madison stood inside, operating hydraulic controls.

Don felt the old missionary's piercing gray eyes upon him. "Are you sure this is the man?" Martin Madison inquired. "He doesn't look the part."

"He says he did it," said the guard.

"I did not," said Don. "Doctor Madison, I've just come from your publisher—"

"Come right in!" said Martin Madison hospitably. "I've wanted to have a talk with you for years. You got here just in time." He added to the guard: "You needn't worry. He's all right. Just wait outside. We have private business to discuss."

Don stepped across the black crevice, from rock to metal. He felt a delicate trembling of the new floor beneath his feet. Martin conducted him along a passage. "Now about your January royalty statement," he began. "I've just made my last will and testament—"

Don looked about in wonder and in growing fear. He had a nightmarish feeling that he had been here before—in books. The corridor's walls and ceilings were lined with an intricate tapestry of colored wires and numbered tubes. Every inch of space was utilized. And the atmosphere?

"Old enough to start on a voyage like that! Why, the Madisons will be dead of old age before they pass Mars!" Wood shouted.

Don breathed deeply. The air was more than fresh. It was alive. And the fragrance—it was like a hothouse full of exotic flowers and rare fruit grown out of season.

"You're not listening to me," said Martin Madison. "But I dare say the circumstances are a bit unnerving, even for a publisher. How did you persuade Leigh to give you a pass? The press was not supposed to come till evening."

"I'm just lucky, I guess," Don mumbled. His breath failed him. They were emerging from the mystifying corridor into the most unusual and beautiful living-room that he had ever seen. The vaulted ceiling shone softly with a metallic luster. The furniture was all built in. Deep armchairs were upholstered in foam rubber a foot thick. The carpets were as soft as mattresses. And flowers grew everywhere, climbing up the walls; flowers and fruits and bearing vines, spreading a never-ending feast and freshening the air.

Martha Madison was seated on a divan with Holly. She turned to her husband with her lips compressed. Holly kept her eyes downcast.

Martha said quietly:

"This girl is exaggerating, Martin. She's had a fright. Nothing more. . . . Look up, girl. Tell me, is this the man?"

Holly nodded without looking up.

"Then you're not from my publisher," said Martin Madison indignantly. "Or did you combine business with pleasure, on this trip?"

"I'll marry the girl if you want me to," said Don, looking eagerly at everything but Holly. At both ends of the arched living-room where massive bulkheads, dials and indicators. The whole room was on a slant, but the deep foam-rubber armchairs and the ankle-deep carpets kept them from slipping.

"I don't consider marriage necessary, under the circumstances," Martha said dryly. "Besides, that kind of marriage never lasts."

MARTIN had started to say something emphatic to Don when an orange light winked on an intricate control panel at the upper end of the tilted living-room. Martin waded up the soft-carpeted slope, picked up a mouthpiece, flicked a switch. He spoke in tones too low to be audible. A blue light began to flicker. A red needle crept forward on a luminous dial.

"You've fooled us," Martha was saying tartly. "We thought this was something serious."

"It is serious," said Holly, and raised her eyes to Don.

Martin climbed down the soft floor of the listing living-room. The whole great shell seemed to quiver around them.

"You'll both have to leave immediately," he said. His manner was urgent but calm. "They probably won't let you out of the canon until after midnight." He shook Don's hand, and with the pressure steered him toward the door.

Don twisted his fingers out of the firm, large hand, and stopped. "Just a minute, please," he said, dropping all pretense. "Let's not go any further with this masquerade. We weren't parked on any road last night, or any night. This is strictly business. My name is Don Brook. I am a private investigator, hired to trace your disappearance. This girl is working with me. We're here to find out how you are and what you're doing."

The Madisons exchanged thoughtful looks. "I knew it," said Martha to her husband. "I've told you both a hundred times you couldn't keep this secret. It's too *big*. You should have let the whole world in, as witnesses." She was curiously undisturbed.

"We didn't dare," said Martin. "Pritchard would have been stopped." He turned to Don. "Was it our lecture manager who hired you? He's

been trying to find us for another tour."

Don said: "I am not at liberty to disclose my client's identity."

"Nor am I at liberty to disclose what we are doing—*yet*," said Martin. "As for how we are, we're fine, as you can see."

"How nice to know that someone cares that much about us!" said Martha. "I thought the world had forgotten."

Don took out the telegram. "I stole this from your mailbox," he said. "I don't know what it says." He handed it to Martin, who tore it open, read and smiled—handed it along to Martha, who also read, and also smiled.

"We have only a few minutes left," said Martin. "But we're going to show you around quickly. You'll have to listen fast, and figure it all out later." His voice picked up speed. "The plants—we've collected them from all over the world. Grown by hydroponics under sunlamps, they provide food and oxygen. After years of experimenting, we have succeeded in creating a miniature replica of the plant-animal-plant cycle that sustains life on our planet as a whole."

"We lived all last year in here," said Martha, "hermetically sealed up, except for radio. Like a pair of guppies in a balanced aquarium! Don't ask why. Hurry, Martin. You're so long-winded. Use short words."

"I'm hurrying, dear," he said quickly. "Look sharp, young fellow. These cabinets—ten thousand books on microfilm. Ten thousand musical recordings on micro-wire. The world's great art on ten thousand color film-slides. Dictating machines with mini-cylinders enough to last two lifetimes. Sufficient reserve provisions and supplies to stock an ocean liner on a world cruise." He was climbing toward the upper end of the room, beckoning impatiently.

Don had difficulty in keeping up with him. Signal lights on the control panel were winking frantically. "In there," the old missionary panted, his deep eyes burning with a determined light, "in there are our instruments. Telescopes—cameras—tons of motion-picture film. A complete astrophysical laboratory!"

"Please let me look," Don begged.

"Only for a minute. You must not go in." The thick bulkhead swung back, and a sunlamp came on. There was even more to see than Don expected. But in the middle of all that advanced design, like a jarring note, stood the oldest and most decrepit typewriter he had ever seen.

"That's my lucky typewriter," said Martin defensively. "Wouldn't part with it for the world." He firmly shut the door. "You'll have to get out of here now. Time won't wait." They clambered softly down the sloping carpets. Don looked about again with growing wonder. This inspired interior could have been designed only by a woman who had dreamed all her life of having a model home, and had lived instead in tents. Each square foot combined space-saving conveniences with every comfort of a millionaire's private yacht. So restful was the atmosphere, so sweet the perfumed air, that Don had to fight off an almost irresistible impulse to drop down in the deep soft upholstery and sleep till Judgment Day.

They were approaching the lower end, where Martha was showing Holly her stainless-steel electric kitchen. It was the quintessence of a dozen dream-homes. "Eggs wouldn't break on my rubber floors," she was explaining. As they came up, Don turned to Martin and said huskily:

"But you've both had so many adventures—"

"So many," said Martin, "that for us there is only one sublime adventure left."

His wife silenced him with a warning look and turned back to answer Holly's question: "But, of course, it must be beautiful, my child. We're going to enjoy a well-earned rest in here." Her eyes twinkled at her husband. "This is one trip where we're going to revel in sinful sloth and luxury." She turned Holly toward the door. "We studied the failures of the past. The engineers all laughed at me, but I contended that the whole approach had been too bleak, impersonal. Too *scientific*, in the tiresome sense. I said that it didn't have to look like a submarine on the inside, too. No wonder the others couldn't stand it out there. They had too much time on their hands. Look at the colors in this room." Her fingers played along a keyboard resembling an electric organ. A hundred hidden sunlamps simulated dawn, high noon, a glorious sunset; then darkness, and a silver crescent moon, that waned and waxed.

"Essential to the biologic cycle," Martin explained. When the lights came up, he had his arm around his wife. "I've stood her this long," he chuckled. "I can stand her a while longer." They smiled at each other with a strange and tender radiance of anticipation—yet they were so *old*. Only their dauntless spirit of discovery, shining bravely from their dimming eyes, was unquenched by the rising tide of time, that all-devouring myth which in the last analysis is man's only enemy.

Don and Holly looked at one another in pain and grief; but Martin Madison was proudly showing them a broad double desk stocked with writing materials enough for a small college. "We've always longed to write and illustrate a ten-volume set of books. 'Our Lives,' by Martin and Martha Madison. One for each of our five years together. Now we can."

Martha said. "We won't get started on it if we stand here gabbing. Good-by, children. God bless you." They put their young guests out into the corridor.

Don took out the three violet papers and showed them to Martin Madison. "You wrote these on that old typewriter of yours, didn't you?"

The old missionary glanced at them and nodded. "Notes for an old sermon. Never used them. Tore them up. Too highfalutin. Leigh must have picked them out of my wastebasket. He saves every word I write, poor fellow. Thinks he's going to make a fortune because I'll be a collector's item. Bunk!" As he spoke, he was urging Dan toward the exit, walking with his heavy limp.

Don said, hanging back: "I'd like to read the rest of that sermon, Reverend Madison."

"If I can find it, I'll give it to you—in a little while. Step lively now!"

Martha was handing Holly over the gaping threshold, with its awful crack. Leaving the enchantment of the past few minutes, suddenly aware of what awaited them outside, Don blurted: "Did that telegram say that we were to be silenced after what we've seen?"

"Here, you decide." Martin thrust the telegram into Don's coat pocket. "Good-by, son. We'll be seeing you, I hope."

Martha Madison was in no mood to speed the parting guest. "I'm so glad that everything's right between you and your young man," she told Holly. "How glorious it must feel to be as young as you two are!" For a moment they looked deeply into one another's eyes, the young woman and the old, in wordless understanding.

Holly said impulsively, "I am Burgess Wood's grandniece, Holly Summers."

Martha gave her a little hug. "I'm glad. Now I begin to understand Leigh's wire. Good-by."

Don broke in stubbornly: "But why in God's name at your age—" he burst out.

"Wait and see," said Martin Madison. "All my life that astigmatic astronomer, Burgess Wood, has been calling me a crazy sky-pilot. Now I'll show him who's crazy! Now I'll show him who is *really* a sky-pilot!" He threw back his shaggy gray head and roared with the hearty enjoyment of a man who has the last laugh on an ancient rival.

Martha said mildly: "Burgess was a fine young man. There have been

times in our lives together, my dear, when I—remembered him." The massive door cut off her words with the cold and final silence of the tomb.

Don and Holly found themselves in the empty, echoing tunnel. They moved close together. "They were so *happy,*" Holly said in a trembling voice. "They were so *sure*—of something. Oh, Don—can't we do something to get them out of there?"

A tall new guard with a carbine stepped out of the darkness and touched his helmet politely. "My orders are to invite you to come with me."

Chapter Seven

With a look at the carbine, Don took his hand away from his hip pocket, where his pistol was. The guard conducted them through a short side-passage that opened out into the air. A few steps, and they found themselves standing in the twilight on a small platform about halfway up the rocky slopes of Meteor Mountain. Far down at the bottom they could see a tiny cable car creeping upward like a beetle. Its tracks and cables led past to the peak, towering high and forbidding above them in the cloudless sky.

"You get on this cable car as it comes by," said the guard. He went inside and shut the door, locking them outside on the little platform in the wind. In the west, a blood-red sun was sinking toward a range of rugged mountains.

"Do you mind if I sort of cling to you?" said Holly. "High places make me dizzy."

Don took her in his arms and held her tight. "You gathered what that was, where the Madisons have been living?" The cable car crept slowly toward them.

She nodded. "The biggest ever built." She looked along the mountain. "That must be where it will come out." She pointed to where workmen were removing camouflage netting from a great opening as round as the barrel of a giant cannon.

She put her face against Don's shoulder. "It was so pitiful to hear them talk of the future." He could feel her long slim body trembling from withheld sobs. "Those ten books they think they're going to write. And all that scientific work they've planned.... Oh, how frightening it is, when old people refuse to give up the ghost. The Madisons will both die of old age before they even get *started!*"

Don watched the cable car ascending. There was someone on it—someone who looked very much like someone who could not possibly be on it. Holly's face was still hidden in his arms. "Well, at least they'll get to die together," he told her. "That's the way they'd want to go, I know. With their boots on! But such a fantastic, futile death! So much worse in their case, than in all the other volunteers, because the Madisons have so little time left, anyway. Professor Leigh must be criminally insane."

"It's such a pity they never had any children," said Holly. "That makes death so damned final."

The cable car creaked up and stopped. In it, looking ruffled and indignant, sat Burgess Wood. "Well!" he snapped. "At least this much of what that charlatan says is right. That I would find you two lovebirds here together. Can't believe it—yet it's true." He looked sternly at his niece. "Where did you spend last night, young lady?"

"In a crowded airplane, Uncle," she said demurely. "In separate, adjoining seats. Excuse me, but we were ordered to get in this cable car with you, and go somewhere."

He waved them back with his cane. "You can see there isn't any room," he said. "Not for three. Incidentally, I am so close to being in a state of kidnap, that any distinction is purely academic."

"There's room for two," said Don. He picked up Holly, stepped in, and held her on his lap. The cable car began to crawl again. The horizon expanded, league on league. The sun sank lower. The searching wind grew chill. From deep in the bowels of the mountain below came a symphony of ordered sounds—whistles, winches, sounds of loading, as if a great ship were setting out to sea.

The car stopped with a bump at a platform near the mountain peak. The hemispheric dome of an astronomical observatory loomed up from the solid rock like a great pale mushroom pushing through dark soil. The old astronomer looked reluctantly impressed. "I don't believe it," he grumbled. "There can't be anything inside. I'd have known about it." He clambered out of the swaying cable car and entered the observatory through a door that stood invitingly open.

Don and Holly paused outside. "Pinch me, please," she said. "We'll wake up back in Burbank, waiting for a plane."

"I was going to ask you to pinch me," said Don. "I'm afraid I'll wake up back in my office—as I so often do."

"Careful! Don't let's wake up too far back. Or we won't have met."

He nodded. "Then let's keep on dreaming. I want to see how this dream ends." He took a long last look around the desolate mountain, surrounded by the empty desert. The indigo shadows of the night were deepening their dye. No light of human habitation showed anywhere on the horizon. But in the secluded canon far below there was a bustle of activity and the clatter of a donkey-engine.

From inside the observatory came words of erudite profanity. Don and Holly hurried in. Doctor Wood waved his arm angrily at the huge charts and graphs laid out beneath the telescopes. "These are enlarged copies of my quadratures!" he sputtered. "My corrected measurements have all been entered." He glared at tiers of unfamiliar equipment. "What are all these dial settings? This place looks like a television station that has eloped with a planetarium." He noticed Don and Holly standing arm in arm. "Have you really eloped with her? This human anaconda?"

"What makes you think so?" Don inquired.

"Why, your obliging secretary said you had, when I phoned your office this morning for a progress report. Otherwise, I wouldn't have let Leigh bring me to this God-forsaken place!"

Don gave Holly a sidelong glance. "What did you say in that telegram you sent Miss Mosely?"

"What you wanted said, boss. Naturally, I signed my name, as traveling secretary."

"Telegram," said Don, and slapped his coat pocket as if a live coal were in it. He whipped out the wire which Martin Madison had handed him, and scanned it swiftly. Pritchard Leigh had wired to the Madisons from Pasadena, the night before,

> TRY TO CAPTURE TALL THIN COUPLE WHOM WOOD IS SENDING TO SPY ON US. THEY WILL MAKE CREDIBLE WITNESSES, AS THEY HAVE THE PROPER BACKGROUND. LET THEM IN UNHARMED AND SHOW INTERIOR. AM BRINGING WOOD MYSELF BY FORCE IF NECESSARY AS YOU INSISTED. QUADRATURES COMPLETE. AM NOTIFYING SCIENCE REPORTERS AND NEWSREELS TO COME AT SEVEN.

Don handed it to Holly. She read it, and gave him a wry glance. "What a brilliant team of bold detectives we turned out to be!" she said. "Excuse me while I take care of Gramps. He's sputtering." She took him off to one side and spoke soothingly to him, explaining something earnestly. Feature by feature, his dour expression softened, and he began to nod. Holly left him studying the charts again, and went out on the terrace.

An impersonal voice gritted faintly through a loud-speaker. "Please keep your places. There will be a slight delay. A minor accident. No cause

for alarm. Doctor Geeble, please. Doctor Geeble—"

Don crossed the observatory and squatted down on the immense plotting board where the starry charts were spread. Wood was checking the coördinates of a majestic curve with a look of grudging approval.

"Excuse me," said Don. "Did you ever see these before?" He held out the three violet slips of paper.

Wood looked up and snorted. "Seen them too many times. Leigh calls them his litmus-paper test of people's minds. Claims where cosmology is concerned, there are only two basic types. He tried them on me, surreptitiously—left them lying all around mysteriously. Seems I'm acid." He leaned across the chart, did a little higher mathematics on his cuff, and nodded reluctantly. "Right on the button," he said to himself. Then he noticed Don again, holding out the violet slips with a look of silent accusation. "Now, don't start looking at me like a detective," he said defensively. "I found Leigh's litmus paper so irritating I thought I'd better try you and Holly. Test your mettle. See if I had traitors in my camp. Trouble is, Leigh can't find how the damn' thing ends. Now go away and stop bothering me, young fellow. I'm looking for Pi in the sky, like Martin Madison."

Don went out onto the wind-swept mountain top and looked for Holly. The sun had set. The moon had not yet risen. It was the hour when there is nothing in the sky but stars.

"It was nice of you to offer to make an honest woman of me," Holly said. "But it was just part of the act, of course—wasn't it?"

"Not necessarily," said Don. "You're tall enough for me to dance with, without feeling like a cradle-snatcher. I don't have to dislocate my sacro-iliac to whisper in your ear. We could take it from there, and sort of see what happens."

"That's much too offhand a proposal to consider, Don. Sssh! Something more important is happening, down there."

FAR off in the direction of Highway 70, the headlights of many automobiles were bobbing slowly through the sand dunes. They were at least two miles away.

"Why is it," said Don, "that every time you shush me, you're doing the talking."

"Sssh!"

From the first car an inquiring yellow signal flare arched into the air, a curve with a dot on the end, a burning question mark. From the mouth of the cañon below them, two red rockets soared up in warning answer. The motorcade stopped. Like a row of dominoes falling over, the headlights went out, all along the line.

She slipped her arm through his. "I'm sorry," she said. "I'll stop shushing. It comes from having brought up a houseful of wise old men."

From behind the jagged mountains in the east, the full moon rose, pouring moon-stain down the slopes, bleaching out the stars, and turning the desert below into a silvered wonderland. Mile on rippled mile of snow-white gypsum crystals in the torrid desert seemed an Arctic wilderness of freezing cold, its dunes heaped up like huge sparkling snowdrifts. Somewhere far away, a coyote howled.

Don bent and kissed the tall, cool girl beside him. While their lips met, asking and answering an eager question, the whole mountain began to shake and rumble beneath their feet. Startled, they sprang apart. Doctor Wood ran outside in alarm. "Earthquake!" he cried. Don pointed silently to the huge open pit in the mountainside not far below them.

From the tunnel-mouth emerged, with a majestic slowness, a shimmering pointed shaft. It had the exquisite symmetry of strength. Searchlights played upon its shining surface from a dozen angles, so that the far-off spectators could see the stupendous sight.

From their closer vantage point, the three watchers on the observatory terrace could see the vessel's name: "?" Beside the sign of Man's unanswered question was emblazoned in the celestial heraldry of the astronomers, the symbol of the ship's home port,

Terra, home of a brave, free-minded race. The Madisons' new houseboat, *The Question Mark II,* was spanking new from stem to stern. Quivering with nascent beauty, like a gigantic butterfly emerging from the long preparatory dream of the cocoon, the sleek cruiser slid up the launching ways with her prow lifted toward the stars.

The rumbling grew louder. Meteor Mountain shook so violently that tons of loosened boulders went crashing down the mountain's quaking flanks. Scarlet flames began to spurt out of the launching pit as the slim silvery shape slowly gathered speed. With the sound of a million blowtorches the scarlet flames quickened to bright orange and began to climb the spectrum, hue by fiery hue. Orange was consumed by searing yellow fire. Yellow soared to brilliant green, to burning blue, up the last blinding step into fading violet, and then out into the unimaginable colors that lie beyond the range of the merely human eye.

An incandescent cloud of rainbow flames boiled up miles high into the sky; and with a final roar like all the bass chords of a funeral march struck simultaneously upon a celestial pipe organ, a pillar of fire ascended into heaven.

Chapter Eight

IN A FEW SECONDS THE GIANT ROCKET had vanished straight as an arrow into the western sky. Its twinkling point of light was soon swallowed up in the immensity of icy ink-black space. Then all grew still. The searchlights snapped off, one after another. Soon the only illumination left, other than the pale moonlight, was an infernal crimson glow from the rivers of molten rock that drooled slowly down the smoking face of Meteor Mountain and dripped off into the desert in a man-made lava flow.

Doctor Wood was the first to recover his voice. "That lunatic Leigh!" he gasped. "Trying it again, after it's forbidden. I hope he was in that one."

"I wish I were," said Pritchard Leigh, behind them. Don whirled. The Professor's shirt was torn, his face was blackened by smoke, and his eyes flashed jubilantly.

Wood turned on him furiously. "I'm going to have you arrested for murder, kidnaping and fraud."

"Very well," said Leigh pleasantly. "I'll give myself up in an hour. If you still want me to, then." He ushered them back into the observatory, and hospitably offered chairs.

Wood angrily remained standing. "To which pagan deity did you sacrifice your victims this time?" he demanded.

Leigh pointed to a symbol on the chart. His three involuntary guests stepped close and looked.

The sign was:

Wood whirled and cried: "That's eighty million miles away, you maniac!"

"He's killed them," said Holly, and began to sway. Don caught her and helped her to a bench. His own knees were shaking. He reached for her hand. It was as cold as his.

Leigh went calmly to the washstand and unwrapped a cake of soap. "Colloquialisms like 'millions of miles' are meaningless out there," he said, lathering his hands. "Distance means nothing where there *is* nothing. Only time counts. The time it takes to get out there and back." He washed his hands thoughtfully. "Places you think are very far away may thus be brought very close, in terms of *time.*" He dried his hands on a ragged old Army towel that was none too clean.

"Space is a string of empty zeros," he went on. "Our concept of the cosmos should not be spatial, but temporal. Time, not space, was the only barrier left between man and the stars he's always wanted."

Wood was pounding with his cane. "Time is what I'm speaking of, you fool! The round trip to Saturn will take fifty, sixty, maybe eighty years! Whom did you send, Methuselah?"

Leigh bent double to wash his blackened face. When Wood saw him with the soot off, he went to him grumbling: "You've burned yourself, you bungling ape! Playing Prometheus.... Here, let me put something on it." He took ointment from the medicine cabinet above the washstand and applied it gently on Leigh's reddened face. "Think you're pretty smart, don't you?" he growled. "Doing all this on the sly."

"Like other scientists who have stumbled upon a really basic discovery," Leigh explained, turning the other cheek, "I was forced to work in secret, like a medieval alchemist—" He was trying to be very nonchalant, but Don noticed that he glanced anxiously whenever possible at a huge chronometer overhead. It had three pairs of different-colored hands.

Wood daubed salve scornfully. "What basic discovery did you ever make?"

"Super-photic speed," said Leigh.

"There's no such word," Wood scoffed.

"There will be, after tonight."

Wood flung down the ointment tube in disgust. "Nothing can exceed the speed of light. It says so right in Einstein." Then he cocked a quizzical wise eye at his old rival. "How'd you do it, Pritchard? There isn't enough energy in atomic fuel to boost a rocket into an escape-velocity anywhere near the speed of light."

Leigh shrugged modestly. "I didn't do it. The Master Scientist did it. He put the facts there for us to find. We finally got tuned in on His beam, the cosmic rays. That ship sails before them, the way the *Mayflower* rode the wind."

Wood put his hands in his long white hair and clenched both fists full. "This is scientific heresy!"

Leigh was looking into the mirror. "Science and its mirror-image religion both have risen from the primeval cave on a ladder of the rankest heresies," he said, combing back the two faint wisps of hair above his ears. "I want to look presentable for the news photographers," he added hopefully, and stole a furtive glance at the big clock.

"Why do you keep looking at that Rube Goldberg clock?" Wood demanded. "You act as if you had planted a time-bomb in here. Have you? Anyone who thinks something can travel faster than light is capable of anything. Why, that would punch holes in the Einstein Theory!"

"Einstein's theory punched holes in someone else's theory," said Leigh. "I can't remember whose." He looked long and hard at the colorful clock, reading it like a chain of signal flags. Don noticed that each of the six hands was painted a pure prismatic color. Each hue was gradually finding its right place in the spectrum, the faster colors passing the slower ones.

"We haven't time for a game of chess," Leigh announced. "We might smoke half a short cigar." He went to his desk, took two small panatelas from an onyx humidor and gave Wood a light, carefully letting the sulphur burn off the match before the flame touched the tobacco. The two old enemies sat down together and puffed companionably. Out in the night, a giant searchlight began to sweep restlessly back and forth, questioning the sky.

"How much do you pay for these cigars?" Wood asked, wrinkling his nose.

"I buy them across the border, in old Mexico," Leigh said apologetically. "Five centavos. I've had to economize, these last few years.... You want to know what happened to the others we sent out from here? They were caught and crushed in the frozen seas of time. This last job is an ice-breaker. She'll crash through the barrier of super-photic speed and sail in the clear, just as in the old days daring pilots crashed through the barrier of sound to supersonic speeds, after the experts said that it was heresy to try."

"By the way," said Wood, "where do you get your pilots, Pritchard? On parole from insane asylums?"

Leigh did not answer. He was watching the big clock fixedly, and counting on his fingers. Its six hands were arranging themselves into a rainbow.

"What type of victims did you blow to glory this time?" Wood persisted. "Another crew of Air Force volunteers? Brave men, those."

Don and Holly sat wringing each other's hands.

"No, not this trip," said Leigh carefully. "Tonight we were faced with an entirely new personnel problem. We weren't afraid of mechanical breakdowns. The thing flies herself, with a little trimming here and there on the approaches. What concerned us was the human breakdowns. Our machines can now stand anything. Unfortunately, there seems to be a limit to what our human minds can stand." He blew a wreath of smoke. "We learned to our sorrow that a man alone, even the strong silent type, didn't last long enough to get anywhere. There is a kind of solitude out there, face to face with all Eternity, that no mortal can long endure in loneliness of soul. He must have companionship, or he starts sending garbled messages. One poor chap's last radio message to us read, '*It is not well for man to be alone.*'" He flicked off an ash.

"We further found, to our regret, that crews of trained, disciplined air officers eventually reached a point where they—no longer answered signals. Perhaps they didn't get along well together, in close quarters."

He puffed reflectively. "However, by keeping at it, we discovered that when mature males and females are brought together under ideal circumstances, given proper guidance, and then make the attempt together, some extremely interesting new reactions are obtained."

Wood gave a ribald guffaw. "You call *that* a discovery? You spent millions finding *that* out?"

"I refer to courage," said the Professor loftily. "The only lasting solution to the human equation is love. Not the selfish, shoddy grasping that too often passes for love nowadays, but the genuine, abiding love that inspires great poetry and music, and lasting marriages, which are even harder to create." He nodded happily to himself. "Yes, Burgess, our tests proved that a harmoniously married couple, in perfect agreement as to the historic importance of our work, could sustain each other's morale long after other volunteers had, to use the vulgar expression, cracked up." He sighed. "That left us with only one logical alternative."

Wood examined the fraying tip of his cigar. "Those must have been some tests."

"They were indeed," said Leigh. "In fact, I'm working on a theory that people in love inhabit their own time dimension. Time passes in a different way, for them."

"I've noticed that," said Wood. "There are times when time just seems to stop."

"Why, Gramps," murmured Holly, but she could not smile.

The old astronomer did not hear her. "So you sent a young married couple, did you, Pritchard?" He turned and winked at Don and Holly. "There sit a pair of likely candidates for the next excursion. I have always contended, *ex officio*, that suspended animation is the only solution to the time problem in space travel. These two haven't breathed for the past ten minutes. What's the matter with you, Holly? Have you seen a ghost? Don't tell me love has reared

its tousled head among the cathode tubes!"

Don and Holly sat speechless with grief, unable to meet the old man's twinkling eyes. Wood turned back to Leigh and persisted with rough jocularity:

"Well, who were the poor devils, Pritchard? As Devil's Advocate, I'll send flowers to their next of kin. Pale, waxen *immortelles* should prove appropriate, in the language of the flowers."

Leigh glanced inquiringly toward Don and Holly. "You haven't told him?"

Neither of them could find the strength to reply. They gripped each other's cold hands tightly.

Leigh turned his big bald head and looked straight at Wood. "The volunteers you just saw take off," he said quietly, "were Martin and Martha Madison."

For a minute Wood sat as if he had not heard. Then his ruddy face drained gray. He struggled to stand up, brandishing his cane at Leigh. He slumped back in his chair. The half-smoked cigar fell from his fingers, and rolled across the smooth stone floor.

Holly sprang up and ran to him. "Now you've killed *him* too!" she cried furiously at Leigh.

"He has not killed me," retorted her uncle hoarsely. "He's not man enough. But I'll kill him, as soon as I catch my breath." Wood shook his fist at the Professor. "For this I'm going to put you in a cell, padded or penitentiary, if it takes me the rest of my natural life!" He breathed heavily. "Before, our differences have been professional. Now they're personal." He lurched up to his feet and lunged at Leigh.

HOLLY threw her arms around her uncle and restrained him. Don pulled Leigh back to a safe distance behind a spectroscope of unorthodox design.

Leigh called plaintively to Wood, across the echoing observatory: "Please try to understand, my friend! The Madisons were the only qualified scientists who were *old* enough to go!"

Wood shouted back in fury, his voice ringing hollowly around the vaulted dome: "Old enough to start on a voyage that will last at least fifty years! Why, the Madisons will be dead of old age before they pass Mars!" Wood shook his fists. "Tie him up, Don! He's a murderer!"

Don expertly pinioned Leigh's arms. They were thick and hard.

Ignoring Don, the Professor pleaded: "The speed of the Madisons' ship is so great that they are literally ahead of time. That's why we had to send *old* people, with long lifetimes *behind* them, not ahead of them. The Madisons are traveling *backward* in time, not forward."

"My poor Martha!" Wood groaned. "What a ghastly way to die!"

"She isn't dead" cried Leigh. "She is alive! And I can prove it! Let me go!"

Holly said sharply, "For a man who has failed every time, you seem rather sure of yourself tonight!"

"I am sure," said Leigh. "In fact, I'm positive."

"Of what?" Wood snapped.

"That the Madisons have *already returned from Saturn.*"

There was a sinking silence. At the icy bottom of it, Leigh added, "Relatively speaking. And one must always speak relatively, mustn't one?"

Don Brook and Burgess Wood exchanged significant glances. In a wordless flash of understanding they agreed that the safest course would be to humor this dangerous madman until they were all out of his reach.

At a nod from Wood, Don freed Leigh's arms with an apology and faced him with a smile he did not feel. "Very interesting, Professor. Would you mind telling us where the Madisons are at present?"

"Look in the telescope," said Leigh.

A trick to get me to turn my back, Don thought. He did not move. Doctor Wood was weeping on Holly's shoulder. Somewhere outside, an electric gong began to hammer shrilly.

"Your telescope is aimed to the east," Don politely pointed out, keeping a heavy chair between himself and Leigh. "Our friends the Madisons went west."

"The Madisons will land from the east within seventeen minutes," said the Professor, consulting the complex color clock. "Naturally, they would have been here long ago, if it had not been necessary for them to slow down considerably toward the end."

"Natch," said Don soothingly, edging sidewise toward the telescope. "The velocity of light being a mere one hundred and eighty-six thousand miles per second, it would take some time to decelerate to a safe landing-speed." His hand crept toward his hip pocket. Feeling that he had to keep Leigh entertained at any cost, he went on brightly: "For, as every schoolboy knows, a really hot ship like yours, landing out of control, would punch holes in more than the Einstein theory. It also would punch a large hole straight through the earth, thus altering the political situation on both sides at once."

Leigh nodded vigorously, with approval. "I'm glad to see I did not underestimate your qualifications as an expert witness for tonight's unusual events, Mr. Brook. May I call you Don? You have the face of an open-minded thinker. You also enjoy the immense advantage of being an ignorant layman, free to admit the existence of a new datum when it thumbs its nose at you. Whereas my learned colleague over there"—he looked sadly at Doctor Wood—"is so rigidly disciplined by scientific dogma that he righteously excludes every observation that does not fit in with his preconceived prejudices. What he's going to learn tonight will hurt him more than pulling teeth."

Don smiled agreeably. "Thank you so much. And what new datum will you demonstrate?"

"That for a super-photic rocket, the slowing down takes longer than the trip," said Leigh. "As we measure time, the trip took no time at all. The trip took time-minus."

Holly raised her head from taking care of Doctor Wood. "Minus how much time?" she asked ominously.

"I wish I knew exactly," Leigh replied. "It should take at least minus-fifty years." He went to an intricate control panel. "Maybe minus more than fifty years." He tapped a sending key of curious design. "It all depends upon the accuracy of Doctor Wood's measurements, here on our charts." He threw a switch and waited for an answer. "I don't get any signal from the Madisons," he complained. "Of course, they may be busy at the moment. Two isn't much of a crew."

Wood said savagely to Don, "Don't diddle with that gun, Don. Draw it. Put him under arrest."

RELUCTANTLY, Don pulled out his small, flat automatic, feeling it a futile toy against the forces around them on the mountain.

Leigh looked at the pistol and sighed. "I thought our world was rid of men who shoved guns in scientists' faces rather than face the facts of scientific progress. I dare you to look in that telescope, Burgess! If you don't like what you see, shoot me. But look first, please!" The earnestness about him began to prevail upon them.

"Keep him covered, Don," said Doctor Wood. He crossed the laboratory and squinted into the eyepiece of the telescope. He stared skyward for a full minute, slowly stiffening.

Outside, in the desert night, three green rockets flared and fell.

At last Doctor Wood straightened up and rubbed his eyes, smiling dazedly. He walked across the laboratory, tottering a little. He said to Leigh in a shaken voice:

"I can't believe it, but it's true. Of course you're lying about the Madisons. They couldn't have warped that ship around into so tight a turn about the earth, at *their* speed. And yet there's really something out there." He looked up with new eyes at the

"You found your fountain of youth, after all. Right in the stars."

open sky. "It must be one of your early, lost ships finding its way home at last, from God knows where. That, in itself, is big, good news for everyone on earth. Big enough to put your bullet-head in the hall of fame." Then he remembered, and his face grew stern again. "But though they wreathe your brow with laurel, I cannot forgive what you have done to Martha Madison! For that I shall destroy you, if I can. As you have destroyed her."

"I set her course by your quadratures," said Leigh mildly.

"You used my work to kill her," said Wood in deepening anguish; "you tricked me into killing her myself!"

"If your calculations were correct, Burgess, she will return unharmed," said Leigh reassuringly. "Perhaps *unharmed* may prove to be an understatement.... If you had not worked so hard to prove my life's work wrong, I could not have been right tonight."

Chapter Nine

ABOVE THEM, THE SIX-ARMED CLOCK drew its colored hands together like a closing fan. Outside, far below them, landing-lights blazed on across the desert, as far as the eye could reach.

Don put his gun away and went to the telescope. The eyepiece felt cold. The wrinkled face of the moon came crisply into focus. Silhouetted against the silver disc was a tiny, pencil-shaped splinter. It grew swiftly larger.

As he watched, he also tried to listen to the two scientists arguing behind him, not hearing all they said, not seeing all he looked at. The pointed thing was falling toward the earth at meteoric speed.

"If the Madisons die," Leigh was saying, "it will not be of *old* age."

"How did you get them to go?" Wood raged, paying no attention to Leigh's words. "The Madisons—I mean Martha—had too much sense for a suicidal stunt like this! You must have used torture, hypnosis, and drugs to make them do this."

"THE fact is," Leigh replied, "it was Martin Madison who sought *me* out, urgently, ten years ago."... Don stopped listening, and watched the approaching rocket. Fire was spurting from it, as its braking jets blazed into action. Streams of violet flames shot out a mile ahead, fighting to retard its swift fall toward earth. Like fiery hands, the bow-jets pushed against the first faint traces of the upper air. A faulty jet cut out. The ship began to spin like a flaming pinwheel, hundreds of miles above the earth.

Don shut his eyes until the observatory stopped spinning. He could not bear to watch that fiery dance of death. Leigh's voice swam up at him again: "Martin said he'd given up his search for some way to renew man's lease on life. All he'd found was deceit, and self-deception. Radio-active fountains, yoga, yogurt, serum, cereals and weird baths of one thing or another were all wicked pagan rot, he told me. The most that any of them did was to prolong an obscene caricature of life's outer husk while the jaded spirit died inside, and sank into corruption. And yet, there it was, repeated forty-three times, in the Book he loved and lived by. That man shall find eternal life, if he be worthy. Being a scientist, I tried to explain to him that the Scriptural promise is purely spiritual. Being a medical missionary, he had a practical turn of mind. He wanted to *apply* what he devoutly believed was true."

Don forced himself to look back into the telescope. The rocket had stopped spinning and was falling like a stone. As he watched it in horror, his hearing of Leigh's voice dwindled to a thin and tiny piping, millions of miles away. "And on his seventieth birthday he declared his firm conviction that the truest promise ever made could come true only when man perfected himself enough to turn time backward in its flight, as happens every night in dreams. That, Martin said, would automatically mete out each individual reward and punishment with a poetic justice truly divine. For by having to live his old life over again before he could get a new one, each man would get precisely what he had coming to him, according to the ticket he had written for himself, each passing year.... What could be more fair? And as I happened to be working on the same problem of turning the raveled sleeve of time inside out, we joined forces, pooled our resources. Fortunately we could extract the rare minerals we needed right here inside this mountain." He tapped with the toe of his moccasin against the natural rock floor.

Don grew conscious of Holly standing beside him at the telescope. "Let me look," she begged.

"Better not," said Don. "This rocket is going to crash. It could wipe out a whole city."

She pushed him gently away from the eyepiece and looked. "Not with that hot pilot at the helm," she said presently. "He's nosed her up into a stall, and lost momentum. Want to see for yourself?"

"Sssh," said Don. "I'm listening."

"But where did Martha stand on all this rot?" Wood was roaring. "She had a fine mind of her own. Wrote that preacher's books for him, I'll bet! She was too smart to believe this nonsense."

Leigh stroked his chin and smiled reminiscently. "Martha didn't say much one way or the other. She just pitched in and helped. She and Martin made a perfect team. Their strength was in their dependence upon one another. There are times when one and one add up to more than two, as you will see tonight. Martha had a genius for humoring men with grand obsessions. She held my staff together, with her tact. I don't know yet whether she believed in this experiment or not, but she made both of us believe in ourselves. She tortured, drugged and hypnotized us with her faith—*in us.*" He sighed wistfully. "Martin Madison was the luckiest man on earth—"

A siren screamed. Leigh started violently and looked at the big clock. Its hands had converged to form a perfect rainbow. He sprang up shamefacedly. "We're late," he said sheepishly. "With all these super-gadgets rigged up to remind me of the time, I sit dreaming of a dear little old lady's courage! Please come with me. And hurry! I need all of you as eyewitnesses."

They hesitated; but Leigh seized Wood's arm and hustled him out to

the cable car, protesting. Don and Holly followed, and crowded into the swaying creaking car just as Leigh kicked off the brake.

"I loathe being dragged around," Wood told him coldly, hanging onto his hat and cane as they rocked down the sickening descent. "Even upon occasions of undoubted historic importance, such as this."

"Let me apologize for telling you that your detective had turned criminal and was holding Holly in a desert shack," said Leigh, smiling. "I had to get you here somehow, Burgess, to keep you from denouncing me in front-page interviews tomorrow morning as a science-faker and a pious fraud."

"I didn't believe it," said Wood, "and I don't believe this other story of yours, either. The Madisons aren't in this ship any more than Holly was in that shack. Any mere man who tried to hold Holly anywhere against her will would have his hands full. And as for one-hour flights to Saturn —hooey!"

Don gave Leigh a reproachful look.

"Well, you *are* holding me," Holly murmured in his ear. "But not against my will." Don held her tighter and admired Leigh's bald head shining in the moonlight. Despite the growing chill of the desert night, Leigh's scalp was beaded with perspiration. The man was bearing up under terrific strain. "Yours will be the first opinion skeptical editors will ask for," he reminded Wood.

"I withhold comment," said Doctor Wood, "until we have opened that rocket and have seen what, if anything, is left inside. Something I hope never occurred to Einstein has just occurred to me, unfortunately."

At the bottom of a slope a large, old-fashioned touring car was waiting. Its wheels were fitted with out-sized airplane tires. "Sand buggy," said Leigh. "Unfortunately our landing technique may prove a bit primitive. We've never landed a big one before, in one piece."

Leign took the wheel himself and drove along a sandy road among the dunes, followed by a dozen jeeps carrying his assistants, reporters, and photographers. Don also saw an ambulance, bringing up the rear. Guided by the living star above them, the caravan wound through the desert.

For an anxious minute it appeared that the rocket would fall south of the Rio Grande, in old Mexico. Then, righting itself in a fountain of flame, it swooped to the west over Arizona. A touch of the main jets brought its nose up into a stall, and with most of its momentum lost, it dropped off in a glide toward the three hundred square miles of sparkling white gypsum sands that are one of Earth's most conspicuous landmarks, by day or night.

The Professor pushed the old car to reckless speed. He zoomed over dunes and dipped into gullies like a roller-coaster on a spree.

Leaving a cometlike trail of fiery gasses, the rocket crossed high in front of them, about a mile away, glinting dully like a tarnished metal pencil in the bright moonlight. Its appearance had somehow changed in the short while since they had seen it leave. Now it was roaring past less than a thousand feet above them, settling tail first toward the sand. Parts of it grew incandescent from the friction of the air. A huge tail-vane melted and broke loose and slashed down.

The accident caused the rocket to veer erratically, like a wounded bird. It yawed to the east, toward the city of Alamogordo.

The Professor swung the car around in pursuit. The engine screamed up to sixty miles an hour in second gear. Leaving all semblance of a trail, they careened through a labyrinth of dunes, fighting blindly in the direction the rocket had taken. The following convoy was scattered and confused.

All at once a white wall of sand loomed up. Leigh had run into a dead end, and was going too fast to stop. The car reared up like a broncho, blew both front tires, and buried its radiator deep in the sand. One look was enough. The sand buggy was in the sand to stay. The rocket was lost to sight.

The Professor climbed over the windshield and scrambled up the slope. Don followed him. Holly stayed behind to assist her uncle. "Don't help me," he sputtered. "Help him." He pointed to where Don had slipped to his knees in the shifting sand.

They climbed a crescent dune, floundered to the crest together, and sank down out of breath. From their high point they had a view for a mile or more ahead. The level sands were empty, a lonely sea of silver in the moonlight. "Lost it," said Professor Leigh. "Now we'll have to search by plane. They might need assistance quickly."

With a rushing sound the rocket reappeared less than half a mile away, headed directly toward them, skimming low above the sand. Don flung his arms around Wood and Holly, and threw them to the sand, shielding them with his body.

There was a sound of thunder and a shower of red-hot sand. The dune shook like flour in a sifter. It seemed hours until the burning dust had settled. Then they crept cautiously to the crest of the dune, and looked fearfully down the other side.

Scorched and scarred and spilled on its side, a battered old rocket lay smoking like a husk of burned-out fireworks. No light was visible from its smashed portholes. No sound was audible except the crackling of cooling metal.

Professor Leigh leaped up and ran toward it through the sinking sand. He made little headway. He lifted his feet and put them down with the leaden-footed horror of a nightmare chase. He stopped and sank to his knees.

One by one the others came up abreast of him and looked silently upon this derelict that the tides of time had cast upon our island shore, from out of the deeps of space.

In the general outlines of its radical advanced design, it resembled *The Question Mark*. In details, it could not be, unless the times were out of joint. *The Question Mark* had been new. This thing was old, a relic from the ancient past. Even in the flattering moonlight they could see that insatiable Time, the all-devourer, had eaten into her like acid. Her beauty was burned up in the long, lost race with Time. To blast and sear her shining armor so hideously must have taken eternities of torment in the super-hells of heaven.

Reason said this could not be *The Question Mark*. Reason erred, against the New. There was her name—"?"—still faintly legible across her dented prow. And below it, not yet quite erased, showed the brave insigne of this argonaut's home port, the tight little isle of a proud, seafaring breed who would not give up reaching for the stars. She was Earth's ship, and she had come home to Earth, full circle, back around the breaking-wheel of time.

All about them in the dunes, Don could hear the other cars approaching. Subdued, excited voices called back and forth across the sands. A flash-bulb popped.

Holly said softly, "At least they got to die together."

Don shook off his numbness. "Let's open this thing and get the bodies out," he said dully, and waded grimly forward through the sand.

Chapter Ten

A dozen of Leigh's assistants and a score of newsmen were closing in on the smoldering, silent rocket, shielding their faces from the radiated heat. It was still too hot to touch. They stopped and waited.

A slow pounding, as of a hand-wielded hammer, began to ring inside

the hull. A square plate on the downward curve of the tilted hull began to grit loose, crookedly. With a shower of rust, the hatch fell open and hung down like a broken jaw.

From the dark interior, a bent figure appeared, crawling up the slanting passage on slow hands and knees. Reaching the air, it stood up straight, a shadowy outline. It seemed to be a man. He looked around silently for a long time, breathing deeply. The tense watchers could hear his long, deep respirations. All he seemed to want to do was breathe and look at the surrounding mountains.

Professor Leigh pushed forward. "Ahoy there!" he called. His nonchalance was gone. His voice was frankly shaking.

"Ahoy yourself," said the man, doubtfully. His voice had an unfamiliar ring. Don's heart sank. This was not the voice of Martin Madison as he had spoken but two hours before.

THE shadowy figure lowered a swinging ladder. Its bottom rung dangled high above the moonlit sand. The man hesitated, peering down. "Are you—Professor—Pritchard Leigh?" he asked, speaking with difficulty, in a dazed and distant way, as though awakening with reluctance from a deep, sweet dream.

"I am," Leigh cried.

"Glory be," exclaimed the stranger. "So you are." He came part way down the ladder, turned and looked again. "You must have found the fountain of eternal youth," he said. "You don't look a day older than when I saw you last." He stared about incredulously at Leigh's assistants. "None of you do. I can't believe it!"

More cars were arriving. Their headlights found the ladder, spotlighting a sun-tanned clean-shaven young man, with curly, blond hair. His bare legs were muscular and straight. At the end of the ladder he halted, and for the first time seemed conscious of himself. "Excuse my appearance," he said. "We haven't bothered dressing much. It's been like the Garden of Eden." Newsreel cameras began to grind.

The young Greek god on the swinging ladder made an effort to get his bearings, and failed. Some strange doubt crossed his handsome face. He asked in a low, bewildered voice:

"Is this still the United States of America?"

Don was one of the few who stood close enough to hear. "You bet your sweet life it is," he said proudly.

The golden youth looked relieved. "I'm glad," he said, and dropped lithely to the sand. "I began to worry on the last lap, coming in. When I put on the brakes, my old memories of the past got mixed up with my new memories of the future." He passed his hand across his face in a gesture of confusion. "I remembered disunity, sabotage, Commies—"

A young reporter whispered in Don's ear: "What's he talking about?"

Behind his hand, Don told him quickly, "You're too young to remember. It was long ago. Mentally, this man must be living in the past, to use archaic words."

The young man's hearing was acute. He heard Don's muffled whisper twenty feet away. "I guess you're right," he said, coming closer. "We have re-*lived* the past, not merely remembered it." He slapped his right leg heartily. "Just got this pin back a year ago." He groped for words, smiling at them in a strange new way; with the vigor of youth and the wisdom of great age. "You see, it all comes back to you out there, just the way you lived it: Wisely or foolishly, with every pain and pleasure in its place—" His lost eyes came to rest on Don.

"I don't recall your name," he said slowly, "but your face reminds me that I promised you something, years ago." He reached in the pocket of his shorts and handed Don an ancient, wrinkled, almost illegible torn scrap of violet paper with a few words typewritten on it. "Finally found it," he said. "Had plenty of time to look." Then he turned, tipped back his head, cupped his hands and called to the open hatchway:

"Aren't you *ever* coming?"

A second shadowy figure appeared in the dark opening. "I had to put on something," said a voice. "I couldn't come as I was."

Don felt his head spinning. It was the voice that he had heard on the sound-film the afternoon before. The gay, young voice of Martha Madison, as she had been in her twenties on her honeymoon.

She stepped part way out into the light and paused. Blinded by the spotlights, she could not see the crowd. A sudden silence fell upon the crowd of jostling men. Unaware of watching eyes, she stood looking about, breathing deeply, and smiling to herself, as if she were glad to be alive, and back on terra firma. Then she started nimbly to climb down the swinging ladder. The increasing glare of headlights spotlighted her. Red-gold hair gleamed richly, long glossy hair, tumbling unbound down her back.

Part way down the ladder, she heard the whirring of cameras. She turned around on the ladder and waved cheerily. "Oh, hel-*lo* there, everybody!" she called. "This *is* a surprise!"

An agitated photographer elbowed in beside Don, to take a closer shot. *There goes that same scene again,* Don thought dizzily, *the second time around the reel.*

She dropped lightly to the sand, and stood beside her husband. Leigh's bearded, armed assistants formed a protective ring around them, holding back the growing crowd. On the sand flats beyond, planes were flying in and landing in close order—Army planes and Navy planes and the F.B.I.

Burgess Wood plucked at Leigh's sleeve. "Let me speak to her," he pleaded. His thin white hair blew in the desert wind. "Martha—" he called. She could not hear him in the growing uproar.

Wood looked up at Don with tears in his eyes. "You *did* find Martha Madison for me!"

The press was firing questions at the travelers,

"What did you find out there?" a science writer demanded loudly.

Martin Madison said softly to himself, his eyes shining, "We found the love that is literally the life eternal. Love and the laughter of the stars."

"We said, what did you find on Saturn?" a reporter shouted impatiently.

"Nothing there," he said. "Nothing anywhere."

"Show us the stuff you brought back!" a photographer yelled. "Hold it up to the light!"

Martin put his arm around his bride. "She is all I brought back. She is all I wanted."

"Talk louder!" bellowed a radio engineer, and moved a microphone closer.

YOUNG Martin Madison good-naturedly raised his voice to say: "We brought back a few home movies, to prove where we have been." He waved a hand at the block-long hull. "We exposed one million feet of three-dimensional, one-millimeter color film. With sound effects and telephoto close-ups of every blessed ball of fire we passed." He chuckled at Leigh. "That should keep you scientists out of mischief for the next ten years."

"Nothing else?" cried a columnist. "You found no new elements or unknown creatures?"

"One new element, called Time. One unknown creature. I saw him every morning in the mirror, when I shaved. I see him all around me now."

There was a murmur of disappointment. A leather-lunged radio commentator bayed hopefully, "Then at least you'd definitely state we're not

in any danger from weird enemies out there on other planets?"

"Definitely not. Our enemy is here—on this planet: unregenerate Old Adam." Seeing their falling faces, he relaxed his stern mien, and grinned boyishly. "Of course we'd all rather face a seven-legged monster than ourselves, wouldn't we? It's so much more fun. But all there is out there in space is the projection of our minds. The cosmic joke is on Homo Sap." He pointed to the blackened rocket. "Get in there and go back to your boyhood. If you dare . . ."

There was uneasy muttering among the newsmen. "You're not cooperating with the press, young man," said a reporter. "We can't print sermons." Then he noticed young Martha Madison, standing modestly aside to give her husband the spotlight. He turned eagerly to her. "Ah, you, my dear! How about it? Was it really as bad as all that?"

She smiled enigmatically. "Wouldn't that depend upon what kind of life you'd led? We learned everything in life anew, out there, and yet we had forgotten nothing—"

"The hell with that," called an impatient voice from the rear. "We've got deadlines to meet. Give us the *story,* please."

She colored a little with surprise. Then she remembered where she was, and smiled with tolerant amusement. "All right, I'll try. We had to work hard, every day. That made time pass quickly. We had our ten volumes of memoirs to write. Observations, gardening, and keeping everything shipshape gave us plenty to do. One of us had to stay on duty all the time, to spin the wheel, in case we ran afoul of sunken hulks of old wrecked stars, the asteroids. We slept and worked in six-hour shifts. Sometimes I fudged an hour on the captain. Set my clock back . . . My rank and title? Why, first mate, of course!"

"Stick to what you *saw* with your own eyes," a wire-service reporter pleaded.

She closed her eyes, as if remembering; and then she said slowly: "With our own eyes we saw the rings of Saturn whirling like merry-go-rounds. We saw Jupiter juggling his eleven moons. We saw endless meadows sparkling with star-dust like fields of wild flowers in the spring. We saw bright comets switch their fiery tails like cats. We saw the past lie down beside the future in the cradle of the Now. We sometimes saw little unborn worlds, smiling in their sleep—" She broke off, moved out of the light, stepped close to Holly and whispered: "Lend me your cape—"

They withdrew from the crowd.

A gray-haired newsman said accusingly to Leigh, "You've dragged us out here in the desert for nothing, again. First your rockets didn't come back at all. Now they come back with nothing. What about our vital interests? What profitable purpose do these flights serve?"

Leigh faced his accusers with a defiant gesture. "You're still talking like Eighteenth Century buccaneers, looking for new lands to plunder. Suppose there's nothing out there but immortality, just as it says in the Book. Can't you see they have brought back the most precious cargo of all? Look at them. They're young again."

Uniformed men from the planes were pushing in among the civilians. "What's going on here?" an officer demanded. "Who are these people?"

"A couple of kids we never saw before," the Albuquerque *Tribune* man complained. "Nobody knows who they are. This rocket-shoot was a misfire. The thing fell right back on the earth. We saw it all!"

Burgess Wood raised his quavering voice. "I know who these people are. They are Martha and Martin Madison, the famous missionaries and explorers!"

Sounds of derision arose from the crowd. "The old coot is off his nut," a brash youngster said. "Why, those old fogies died years ago." The crowd began to mill around Martin.

Don and Holly helped Martha Madison slip away to one side, unobserved, disguised in the long cape. Holly gave her an understanding smile. Martha Madison nodded happily. "This was the only joy in life we'd missed. Now we shall be completely happy, knowing what we know, of life and of each other."

Burgess Wood tottered after them, holding out his shaking hands in a piteous appeal. "Martha," he implored. "Don't you remember me at all?"

The beautiful young bride looked closely at him. Studying her from a step away, Don saw that she was radiant with youth; and yet there was now a richer, subtle difference in her smile and eyes. Suddenly he understood: If old age *could;* if youth knew *how.* She had them both. *To have forgotten nothing,* Don thought, *and to have a second chance* at everything . . . That would be a heavenly reward beyond man's fondest hopes of paradise.

Young Martha bent and kissed the old man's withered cheek. "You could do what we did, Burgess," she said softly. "More rockets can be built, now that they know how."

The old astronomer shrank back in horror. "What, live my life over again, backward, in relative time? Aching with the heartbreak of those years without you, Martha? Knowing the disappointments that are coming, every morning I wake up? Foreseeing my bad dreams each night?" He gave a short, harsh laugh. "I'd sooner cut my throat than go through all that again." He held her at arm's length in the moonlight. "Let's leave Father Time alone. He knows what he's doing. Now stand just so, my dear. Let me see the moonlight in your hair. All I want is a last good look at you." He nodded happily, and let her go. "Yes, that's just the way you looked when I first fell in love with you. Divine! This is the way I shall now remember you forever." With a courtly, old-fashioned gesture, he bowed and kissed her warm young hand, then turned his back on her and slowly walked away, leaning on his cane.

Martin Madison detached himself from the noisy crowd and intercepted the slow old man in a few long strides. He stooped and peered curiously into the wrinkled face. "You must be Burgess Wood."

"And you must be feeling mighty cocky," said the old man with a wistful twinkle in his smile. "You found your fountain of youth, after all. Right in my own backyard . . . the stars. Well, enjoy your encore, sonny. It's too strong a drink for me, your time-elixir."

The muscular young man said sympathetically, "I'm sorry—"

"Don't be. You're the one who's going to be sorry, Martin. I'll have the last laugh yet. You see, the trouble with men's lives is not that they're too short, but that men live too long. Outlive their usefulness . . . No, I'll take the proper kind of life eternal, thank you. It's been good enough for mortals up to now. It's good enough for me. Good-by." He turned his back again and plodded off. The moonlight flung his shadow far ahead of him, a black forerunner undulating on the snowy sands.

Looking for his bride, Martin Madison pushed on through the dissatisfied, gesturing crowd. He had the strength of a young giant. He lifted grown men aside. When he found her he said nothing, only smiled, and took her hand.

Don spoke up. "Aren't you bitter about their not believing you?"

The Madisons looked at each other and burst out laughing. "We're used to that," Martin said. "Nobody believed what we tried to tell them, the time before."

Martha corrected him sweetly. "A *few* did, dear. The few who deserve to believe. Well, let's go back and reason with the cannibals. Remem-

ber that night in the Congo? It seems only yesterday."

"It *was* only yesterday," he reminded her, and they both laughed again. Don and Holly watched them push back into the gesticulating crowd, shoulder to shoulder, tall, young, strong and unafraid of scorn and skepticism.

Holly gripped Don's arm. "What about us? Will we have been so happy that we will dare to go around a second time, when we reach the age they were a few hours ago?"

Don kissed her long slim fingers, one by one. "Ask me that again in about fifty years, my love. They may have excursion rates by then. But how many takers? Say, we've got to keep an eye on Gramps. He may get lost in the desert."

They found his dragging footprints in the sands and followed them. From the top of the high dune they saw him trudging far below, waving his cane at his shadow, like a little boy with a stick.

"When he walks like that," said Holly, "it means he wants to be alone." They turned and looked the other way, down at the spotlights and the churning crowd.

The Madisons were trying to climb back into their space-ship, but now their tormentors would not let them go. A few were beginning to believe. Martin hung on the swinging ladder, speaking to the upturned faces.

"Can you hear what the sky-pilot is saying, Holly?"

"Not a word. Let's see that slip he handed you."

"Slip," said Don blankly. "Oh, that." He took the violet scrap of paper out and held it in the moonlight helplessly. "I can't read this without my glasses," he said. "You put yours on first. We've deceived each other long enough."

Holly took out a handsome pair of tortoise-shell-rimmed glasses, studded with tiny rhinestones, and read aloud:

"—You forget that the Kingdom of Heaven is not of this Earth. In reaching for the stars, man can find nothing but his own soul."

Gravely, Don added it to the three other slips in his wallet. They slowly walked along, scuffing thoughtfully at the soft warm sand, sending it splashing in little sprays.

"I like you in your glasses," Don remarked. "Men have to make passes at girls who wear glasses like yours. They sparkle in the moonlight like tiny, unborn stars, or something." He put his arm around her. "I'm satisfied with everything except my solution to this case."

"What does it take to satisfy you? The pearly gates ripped off their hinges?"

"Well, no. But there are at least three known planets out beyond Saturn."

"You mean it isn't settled yet?" she cried in dismay.

"Not for me," he said solemnly. "Uranus, Neptune, Pluto—"

"Oh, shush your mouth," she said. The moon went behind a cloud. The stars looked out.

He regarded her face in the starlight. "I wonder if it's safe to kiss you again without bringing on another earthquake?"

"The scientific approach would be to try and see."

After a long time he raised his head and softly asked, "Did you hear what I heard? A far-off, musical sound."

She nodded, her eyes very bright. "I heard something," she said uneasily.

"Let's try again. Maybe we've made a discovery." They experimented. "It's unearthly," he said.

"What *is* it?" she asked breathlessly. "Wedding bells?"

"What you just heard," he said gravely, "was the laughter of the stars. Look up, and you can see them laughing at us."

Animal Electric Generators

IF we were asked, "What is the most efficient machine for producing electricity?" most of us would doubtless attempt to describe one of the giant electric generators that are to be seen in powerhouses.

But we would be wrong. The most efficient electric generator is a snakelike living creature with a broad flat head and a body several feet long, brown on top and orange underneath—the electric eel.

You don't believe this? Dr. C. W. Coates, who had charge of the tropical-fish department of the old Aquarium says: "The electric eel is a more efficient generator of electricity than any apparatus in use by man." Dr. Coates has spent years studying these creatures and has even made friends with them. But a friend of an electric eel has to be careful. Dr. Coates always wears rubber gloves when he is near them, but many times he has been touched by a careless flip of a tail and knocked three or four feet. Once he received a shock from an eel twenty-eight feet distant.

There are five kinds of fish which generate electricity and it is something no other creature in the world —mammal, bird or insect—can do. Dr. Coates even succeeded in lighting neon lamps with the current generated by the eels.

Their home is in Brazil and in Guiana, and scientists have known about them for a couple of hundred years. Humboldt found the natives more afraid of them than of any of the jungle animals. He tells of a road that could not be used because it was occasionally under water and the eels frequently killed the Indians' horses and sometimes the Indians themselves.

A few years ago the New York Aquarium sent Dr. Richard T. Cox, associate professor of physics at New York University and Robert S. Matthews, anatomist of the American Museum of Natural History, to Brazil to study electric eels on their home grounds.

"We kept a careful record of the electrical discharges of twenty-seven eels," said Dr. Cox, "and we found that the smallest eel, which was only eight inches long, gave off a regular impulse of 110 volts. The most potent discharge recorded was one of 500 volts from an eel which was almost a yard in length."

The most remarkable thing that Dr. Cox and Mr. Matthews discovered about the eels was that they were not only immune to shocks from other eels, but were unharmed by powerful electric currents passed through their tank. In fact, the artificial current attracted the eels; they clustered about the anode.

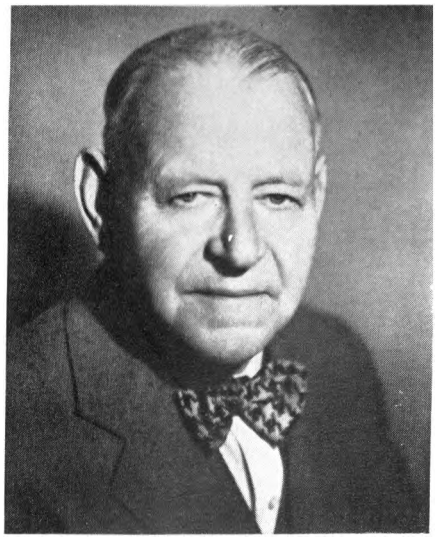
"They can distinguish positive from negative impulses," says Dr. Cox. "In every case they headed for the positive pole when we turned on the current. That is probably because their own heads emit positive discharges while the impulses from their tails are negative."

Electric eels have been dissected by scientists for the past two hundred years. The cells where electricity is generated are known, as are the nerves connected with them. It has been shown that the shocks administered are entirely under the control of the eel. It uses them to stun its prey, or to defend itself as a hunter uses his gun.

But how any of this is possible is as much a mystery to Dr. Cox as it was to scientists two centuries ago. "I am not as yet prepared," he says, "to advance any theory as to the eels' method of generating electricity. When we have had time to study our data more carefully, we may be able to throw more light on the subject."

—By Morrison Colladay

WHO'S WHO IN THIS ISSUE



Samuel Hopkins Adams

"OLD AGE—I Spit in Its Eye!" is the title of an autobiographical article by Samuel Hopkins Adams which recently appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post*. For at seventy-nine, and although, as he says, one hip bone is held together by three shingle nails, he contrives to play golf—on crutches. "It may not be the ideal life," he concludes. "But it is still, I am well persuaded, preferable to the most handsomely graven headstone."

His literary second wind has likewise held out amazingly. Besides "The Mail Goes Through," which we are privileged to publish here, a new novel of old-time New York State entitled "Sunrise to Sunset" has lately been published by Random House. And the many readers who recall "The Unspeakable Perk," "The Piper's Fee," "The Godlike Daniel" and his many other books, know him for one of the ablest authors of our time.

Farley Mowat

BORN in Belleville, Ontario, in 1921 and spent first seven years living literally on milk and honey, due to father's penchant for bees and cows to exclusion of all else. Mowat has never had any use for Old Testament since.

During pre-war years, lived in Saskatchewan learning about drought and depression and keeping magpies in bedrooms of rented houses. As a result of the magpies, the Mowats lived in a large number of rented houses.

In 1935, accompanied an uncle to Churchill, on the south edge of the Barren Lands. Here Mowat caught *"virus Arcticus,"* an obscure disease that drives its victims from the comforts of home, into the frigid arms of the Arctic.

Assisted in invasion of Sicily as a platoon commander with an infantry outfit, and won undying fame when, from the bow of his assault craft, he cried out, "Follow me, men!"—then stepped off, to disappear into twelve feet of water. Needless to add, his men didn't follow him.

In last few months of war, managed to squirm out of the infantry and into a safe little niche as an Intelligence Officer. Was sent—very much against his will—through the German Lines in Holland to Nazi 25 Army Group H.Q., where he was personal guest of General Blaskowitz for final week of the war. Present in underground bunker with German staff when Churchill made Victory Speech, and recalls that top brass of 25 Army Group stood to attention for playing of "God Save the King" over the B.B.C. afterward.

After war was a high-class burglar, engaged in stealing German rocket equipment from Russians, Americans and British, and shipping same to Canada without cognizance of Canadian Government. That is, until a shipload of it arrived at Ottawa, C.O.D.

Retired somewhat precipitately from Army with rank of captain, and felt that the Arctic might be an excellent place for a short holiday. Found his way, by devious routes, to a place called Nueltin Lake in the south Keewatin Barren Lands. Wandered for about twelve hundred miles by canoe, and on foot, over the Barrens, at last stumbling on obscure tribe of inland Eskimos called Ihalmiut. Found these people hostile to missionaries and traders.

In winter of 1947, discovered he could go to University free—as a veteran—and was so spared ignominy of taking a job. In the spring he returned north, leaving an ex-WRCNC (U. S. equals WAVE) bride of two months behind. In Barrens was pressed to accept fabled feminine hospitality of Eskimos, and in panic fled south and got his own wife to protect him. Took her back north again—the first white woman ever to see the central Barrens.

In 1949, the Mowats, encumbered with large Husky pup, returned south and bought ten acres of useless land north of Toronto. Here they built log house, and settled down, trying desperately to earn a living with a typewriter.

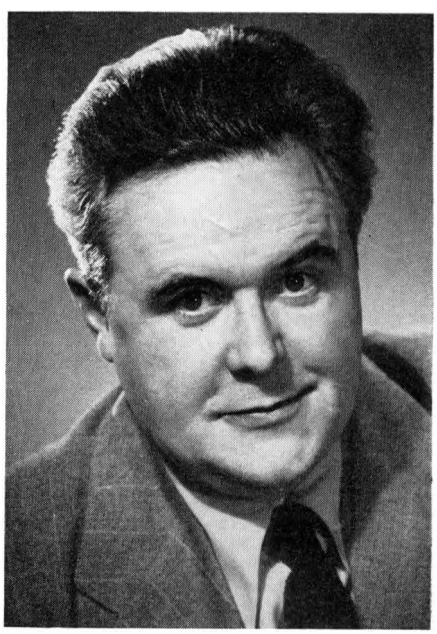
Robert Spencer Carr

IN his twenty-six years of writing religious novels, short stories, guidebooks, and film scenarios, Robert Spencer Carr "keeps circling back" (as he puts it) to science fiction, the genre in which he first appeared in print in 1924. As a fifteen-year-old schoolboy in Columbus, Ohio, he made the front pages by selling imaginative stories to national magazines. At seventeen, his first novel, "The Rampant Age," became a best-seller and brought him a Hollywood contract. Five years of travel far off the beaten tracks produced his second novel, "The Bells of Saint Ivan's," as notable a critical success as his first book had been commercially. In 1948 his third novel, "The Room Beyond," achieved both goals, bringing him serious recognition as a writer on the supernatural life.

Never an ivory-tower writer, Carr has combined his flights of fancy with such down-to-earth jobs as truck-driver, factory hand, newspaper reporter, assistant to a psychoanalyst, tour conductor, assistant in a scientific research foundation, and director of documentary films on long expeditions abroad. During the war he was a sergeant in the infantry.

More recently he has carried the science-fiction flag deep into forbidden territory: into magazines that had not previously published "s.f.," into radio, and into Hollywood, where he is the author of what is soon to be the first major-studio star-studded science-fiction feature film, "Morning Star." He calls science fiction "the Passion Plays of the Atomic Age," and attributes its current rise in popularity to the fact that "modern science is transforming today into tomorrow at such amazing speed that who dares say where fact leaves off and fantasy begins? At this moment, your tax money and mine is being spent by Government scientists on rocket projects aimed in the direction of 'The Laughter of the Stars.'"

At present Carr lives deep in the jungles of southwest Florida, and is working on another novel, a blend of science and mysticism.



ROBERT SPENCER CARR

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