December

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BLUE BOOK

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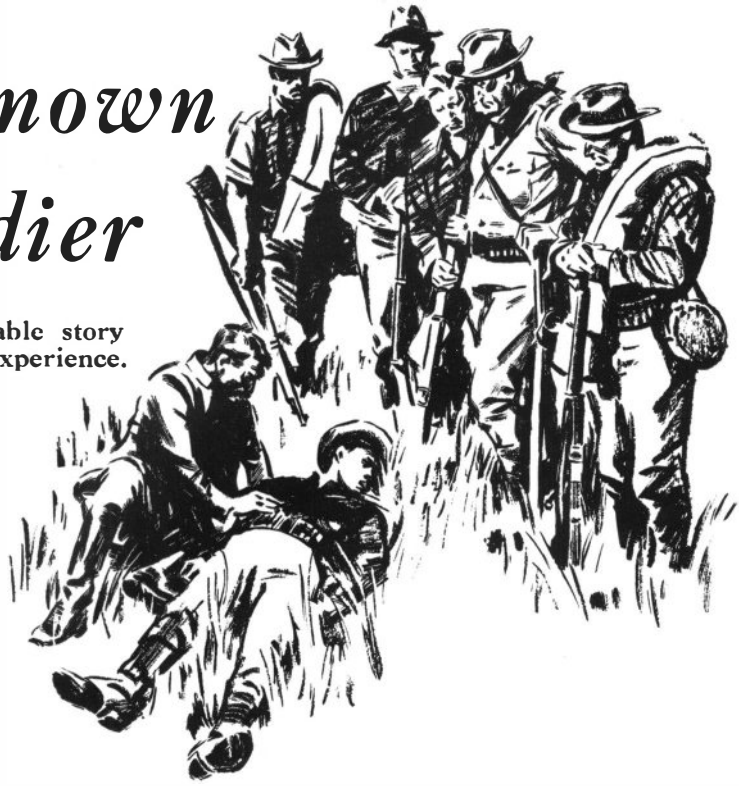
SWORDS *of* MARS, *by the author of Tarzan,* Edgar Rice Burroughs — *also* Beatrice Grimshaw, Conrad Richter, H. Bedford-Jones

DECEMBER 1934 THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE VOL. 60 No. 2

Unknown Soldier

A memorable story of Real Experience.



By GRANVILLE FORTESCUE

Who was wounded at San Juan Hill as a Rough Rider with Theodore Roosevelt, and again as a major of artillery in France; and who during the thirty intervening years fought or served as correspondent in many other wars.

TRUDGING along the Las Guasimas-San Juan trail I first encountered Private X; his real name I never knew.

Picture a face bathed in tropic sweat, noble, shining not with sweat but with battle zeal worthy a crusader. Eyes that struck you sharply like the impact of a firing-pin. Not that I remember their color; blue or gray or black, brown, hazel, green; kaleidoscopic; sometimes dancing, again glinting, somber, steely, soft, ever-changing; eyes unforgetable, unfathomable; in spite of myriad expressions, cryptic; mysterious, lit by a deathless flame, the flame of Youth.

Under his blue flannel shirt, crossed by blanket-roll and cartridge stuffed bandoleer, I made out muscles coiling and uncoiling as I imagine the muscles of the Discus Thrower coiled and uncoiled in action.

I retain a faint memory only of his other physical traits. His hair? Hidden under his campaign hat when I first saw Private X. Was it black? Reddish, perhaps; what matter? His voice? One does not pause to talk when performing breath-taking deeds of valor; yet he did speak once—three words—

After the Las Guasimas skirmish I stood beside the trench where we buried our dead. Looking down on their white rigid faces I wondered upon this abrupt transition from life to death. What were these comrades now? Just bright flames extinguished? Or did their souls still hover by the grave-side? I turned. A few paces distant stood Private X. He

(Continued on page 4)

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BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

DECEMBER, 1934 VOL. 60, NO. 2

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Publisher, The Blue Book Magazine

DONALD KENNICOTT, Editor

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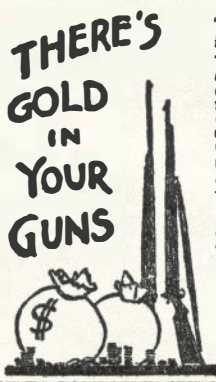

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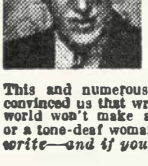

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State of New York, County of New York, ss.

Before me, a Notary in and for the State and County aforesaid, personally appeared John D. Hartman, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Assistant Treasurer of The McCall Company, publisher of The Blue Book Magazine, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 411, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are:
Publisher: The McCall Company, 230 Park Avenue, New York City.
Editor: Donald Kennicott, 230 Park Avenue, New York City. Managing Editor: None. Business Managers: None.

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Sworn to and subscribed before me this 12th day of September 1934. Joseph F. Fox, Notary Public, New York County Clerk's No. 234. New York County Reg. No. 6F215. My commission expires March 30. 1936.

(*Continued from Inside Cover*)

too looked upon the dead. He smiled, strangely. . . .

Some days later my regiment lay below the ridge of San Juan Hill. Prone in the guinea grass we listened to a withering fire of Mauser bullets overhead. A whispered command. Four privates under an officer moved cautiously forward in front of our line, reconnoitering. Strung out twenty yards apart, they darted forward under the bullet rain, then dropped to cover. We watched breathlessly. The second man from the left stumbled, crumpled in the grass. Another dash. Two more men fell sprawling to the ground. Now but one soldier and the officer ran forward, crouching. They slipped over a rise in the ground; tense, we waited for their campaign hats to appear above the gui-

(*Continued from page 4*)

nea grass. An unceasing rain of Mauser bullets plopped into the black earth.

Then dimly we distinguished one blue-shirted figure crawling backward through the grass. He dragged another blue-shirted figure behind him. Squirming over the rise in the ground, he rested. His strength was nearly spent. In a moment he rose unsteadily to his feet. He gathered up his comrade, slung him across his shoulder. Slowly, painfully, as if each step were agony, he stumbled back to our lines. Within twenty yards he staggered, swayed, fell. Impulsively a dozen of the regiment dashed forward. The two lay crumpled in the grass, the officer alive, his hip shattered. His rescuer lay beside him, glassy, unfathomable eyes gazing up at the tropic sky. It was Private X.

That was in '98. I fix the year because it seems important. Yet it may be we place too much importance upon time in life's ultimate valuation.

IN 1907 I was correspondent for the London *Standard,* covering the Spanish-Riff war in Morocco. Spanish General Staff established headquarters in Melilla. This little port on the Mediterranean shore, alive with burnoused Arabs and their masked women, vibrated with the eternal restlessness of the desert, a restlessness imparted to the Spanish Foreign Legion, that picturesque battalion whose fortunes I decided to follow.

East of Melilla a spur of the Atlas mountains stalks across the tawny desert. The Riffs, an undaunted Arab tribe, held this spur and the iron mines over which the war was being fought.

One morning at daybreak I rode out with the Légionnaires to reconnoiter this position. The sun rose, a bronze orb in a turquoise sky. It glinted the sand crystals. Heat-waves quivered up from the sand. At the first halt the men were bathed in sweat. They doffed their kepis, fanning their sweat-moist faces with the cloth neck protection. . . . So these were the men of the Foreign Legion; life-reckless, adventure-thirsty soldiers, set to endure heat, scant rations, iron discipline, all for the thrill of fighting. I studied the lean young faces as they joked and laughed, the youth light in their eyes. I suppose that light lived

in the eyes of young soldiers when they joined Cæsar's legions; will live in the eyes of young soldiers down all the ages that spread before the human race.

Abruptly one face flashed into my consciousness. I gasped. I leaned across my pommel, peering down at it. Those unforgetable eyes were glazed in death! Yet this youth's were the same, his the same supple muscles, lithe limbs, reckless toss of the head—only the uniform was different. As I stared I whispered:

"Private X!"

His eyes met mine—never-to-be-forgotten eyes; glinting, somber, steely, soft, lit with the bright flame of youth.

Impulsively I pointed him out to Captain Cortez. "You have an American in the Legion?"

"Es posible. Todos los Legionarios son estranjeros."

All the Légionnaires foreigners. Not strange then to find an American. But Private X—he was dead. Or was he? True, I had seen him lying in the grass on San Juan Hill, gasping out his life. Still he *might* have won his way back to health . . . but that was ten years ago, and this boy not only resembled the youth who behaved so gallantly in Cuba, but he was *the same age.* Impossible! Yet those eyes—never to be forgotten.

The march-order. He was lost to me as the column shuffled across the sand.

We had been marching an hour when the cavalry rode in reporting the position and numbers of the enemy. Gippy Lewis, correspondent of the London *Times,* Ashmead Bartlett of the *Telegraph,* dismounted and stood with me watching the battle from the shelter of a goat corral. Hardly distinguishable from the sand, the Riff Arabs held an irregular line of

(Please turn to page 142)

VALHALLA

"All I needed, as a boy, to make me bump my head on a cloud, was a gun," said old Eighty-three. "But times is changed. Even the stars look kind of tarnished." Yet there came to him one last glorious chance to use that gun he handled so well—and to win his place, perhaps, in a happy heaven like the Valhalla of the Norsemen, where warriors who died valiant in battle might fight and feast forever.

By CONRAD RICHTER

Illustrated by Monte Crews

YOUNG PEEGY—P. G. Bishop, Jr., —always remembered him by the smell of burning cedar wood. Down here along the border, you had to burn mesquite. Its wood was a dark bitter brown. Its smoke smelled damp and musty, like the odor when you leaned over a hand-dug well at a Mexican *jacal*.

But last Monday, Anselmo had driven supplies to the herders in the low mountains to the west. Yesterday he had come back with red cedar in the truck body. And today blue incense drifted in lazy layers around the ranch-house.

Bathed in the smoke, the boy saw the stranger for the first time, a bent figure moving up the wheel-tracks that led from the world. He was on foot, but he wasn't a Mexican. Little and stiff and very old, he looked to Peegy as if he had been dried up by a hundred years in this desert air. But when he came closer, the boy saw an unshrunken hooked nose. And the bleary old eyes grew suddenly blue as they focused on the child.

"Mawnin'," he drawled. It was late afternoon. "You the bishop?"

Peegy, in new overalls with a red Spanish flare at the cuffs, stiffened with pride.

"Dad!" he shrilled, but his eyes remained buttoned on the old stranger.

In town, where they lived nine school months of the year, he saw plenty of people. Down here on the ranch, the nearest neighbors lived eleven miles away. They were Mexicans. The nearest railroad was at Deming. You grew tired, looking at yucca and cactus—of trying to catch lizards. You got hungry to see people. The sheep were off on the range. The sand-hills were rounded ovens that sent up their wriggling heat-waves all day long. Those far blue hills lay in Chihuahua. And Anselmo said that when you rode up to them, they weren't blue, and they weren't cool.

The boy heard his father come out of the ranch-house. There were times in the lambing season that P. George Bishop spent weeks on end away from the town house. When the boy first saw him after that, his father seemed a kind of stranger—a big stranger with a clipped red mustache from cheek to cheek, and a ram's head, wide at the bottom, with jaws and jowls and cheeks that buried the ears behind them. And then the boy understood why the Deming and El Paso papers called him the sheep king of Luna County.

Peegy was watching closely to see what the old man would do. Most men, he had noticed, flinched before his father. All the Mexicans and some of the Americans took off their hats. But this shrunken old stranger did not change.

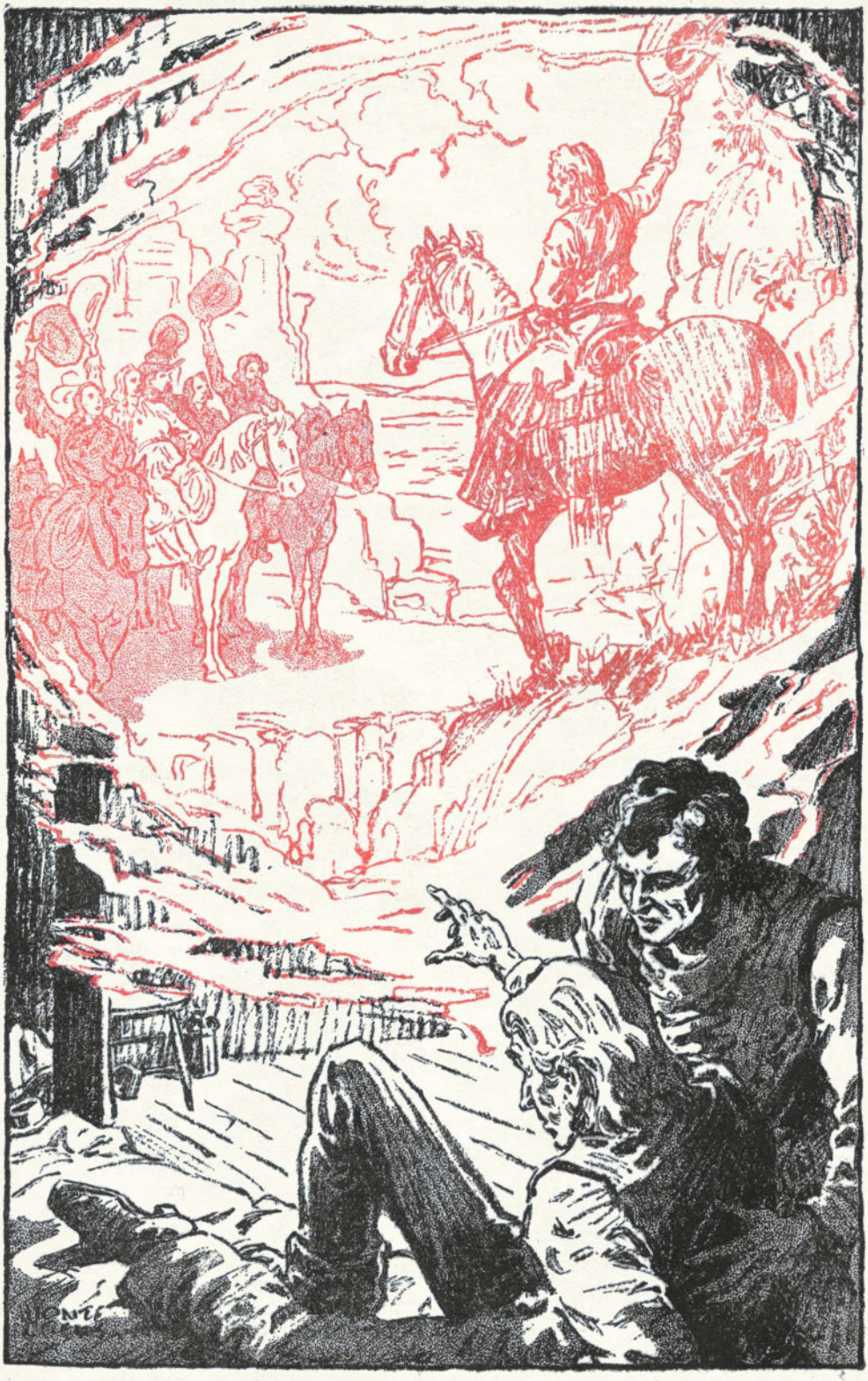
"You George Bishop?" he drawled. "I heard in Columbus you needed Mexican sheep-herders. Now, I'm not a Mexican, and all my life I hated sheep. But I reckon I can tend 'em good as a Mexican."

Peegy had never heard any man talk to his father that way about sheep. He saw his father glance over the shabby visitor coolly, so coolly that even in the hot late-afternoon sunshine everything seemed to freeze and stand still.

"I don't think an old cow-hand like you would get along with the sheep. I advise you to stick to cattle."

The misty old eyes fastened on George Bishop.

"I wouldn't be passin' my hat to a sheep-man, but I got a bad disease—a



"You know, Dick," the triumphant old voice had said, "some folks figure when they die, they're a-goin' to a city with streets of gold. Maybe they are, Dick, but I aint. What I kind of see is a country like she was in Texas when I was a boy."

kind of rawhide constitution. It's kept me eatin' the hen that scratches on my grave till I'm too old for chousin' cattle. But I'm lucky to have a disease that's curable. And I figure sheep-herdin's a quick way to do the curin'."

"You couldn't herd sheep, with your rheumatism," P. G. Bishop said bluntly.

"Who's got the rheumatism?" the old fellow demanded, stiffening. "For fifty years, summer and winter, I've worked all the ground they is between Chihuahua and Kansas. I've slept out in the snow, and when she was rainin' heifers horns-foremost. I've swam all the rivers between the Rio Grande and the Platte. And I've drunk 'em when they was that muddy you had to chew before you could swallow. And no piggin'-string's tied me down yet."

A shadow fell across the boy. He looked up, and saw Dick Wight, his father's foreman. Still young, with a lean, hard body, a coppery face and derisive black eyes, he was a handsome and reckless figure on a horse, and one of the few men Peegy knew who was utterly unafraid of his father.

"We might use a man helpin' Anselmo sack fleeces," Dick suggested. "It'd give him a little stake till he hits the trail again."

The bleary eyes of the hook-nosed stranger had brightened as their gaze rested on the young foreman.

"I'll be glad to help you out, pardner," he said, and added glibly: "I don't savvy much about wool, but I reckon I can catch on. Back in 'eighty-three I didn't savvy much about law, but I got an *amigo* out of a shootin' scrape. They was holdin' court in Tom Talley's saloon in Chloride. I knowed the old judge liked to h'ist 'em some. I was kind of swingin' a wide loop those days, and I stood at the window and plowed some lead in a couple whisky kegs. The juice started to spout, and court was adjourned till them present could save the whisky from a sandy grave. The judge got plumb asphyxiated at his bullet-hole, and by the time he got sober enough again to hold court, my *amigo* and me had jumped the country."

Peegy saw his sister Nan on the gallery look amused. She had come out to listen. Down here on the ranch, she was always running after Dick. Up in town, it was Dick who ran after her. Last winter his old car, burnt-orange with sand-hill dust, had been a familiar sight parked at their curb in Deming.

Peegy saw the old stranger move out of the shadow. "Maybe I can hold up a lantern till you read this brand straight," he drawled.

Only yesterday he had driven to the ranch with the latest, shiniest model to reach the border.

"Your new hand can tell some stories to Peegy, anyhow," George Bishop in a dry voice told his foreman.

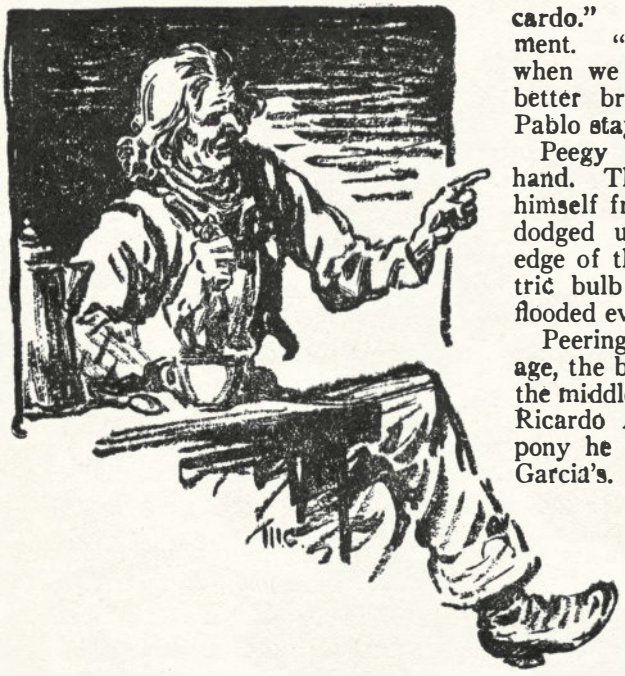
"I aint much of a hand to make 'em up," the old stranger said apologetically. "But I can tell plenty true ones."

Peegy was in bed that evening when he heard the hoofs. After Nan left the room, he always raised the shade by his bed to the very top. He liked to wrinkle his eyes half shut until the dancing beams of light came right down out of a star into his dark room. But he didn't like the scent of the greasewood that drifted through the open window. It smelled like an antiseptic, and took him back in memory to the hospital at El Paso where his mother had died.

All he heard at first tonight was the radio from the living-room, and the dull throbbing undertone of the gasoline engine that ran the dynamo. Then he sat up in bed at the window. Dim forms were riding up to the ranch in the starlight. He heard Dick go to the living-room door to listen, then his father's heavy tread and Nan's sharp heels clicking across the polished floor.

PEEGY slipped out of the hot sheets. The darkness outside the hall door felt cool and sweet. He could see only one of the horsemen. The light from the living-room window streamed like a broad belt over the rider and his gray mount. Peegy saw it was an American who lived at Five Stars.

"Sorry to trouble you tonight, Mr. Bishop." His deferential voice held an



"Reminds me of a little story," said old Eighty-three, dipping a biscuit into his coffee. "But I can't tell it right without a gun in my hand and a few ca'tridges—just to give it long hair and woolly leggin's."

inner excitement. "Did you know old Joe Sandoval was murdered today?"

Peegy threw a convulsive look into the shadows behind him. When he turned, the man on the gray horse was talking again.

"Pablo Garcia stopped at Joe's about two this afternoon. The old fellow didn't answer, and Pablo looked in the window. He saw Joe lyin' on the floor with a knife stickin' out of him. So the boy rode home, and his father came over for me."

Nan at the living-room doorway said, *"Oh!"* and Peegy felt a shiver run up his spine. With admiration he saw in the light from the doorway that his father's face had not changed. It was calm as if some neighbor had ridden up to ask if he could water his herd at one of the Bishop tanks.

"I'm listening, Hodge," he said.

"Bein' I'm deputy sheriff down here," the rider went on, "I got up a few men and rode over. Whoever done it had dug holes all over the floor. You know the money Joe got from you for sellin' his water, Mr. Bishop? The Mexican people say he had it buried somewhere around his place."

"I heard that," George Bishop said. "I think Dick told me."

"Whether the murderer got the money, I don't know," Hodge continued. "But I saw where a herd of sheep had passed south of Joe's place today. We followed the trail and found the herder was Ricardo." The speaker hesitated a moment. "He said some funny things when we cornered him. I thought we better bring him up to talk to you. Pablo stayed with the sheep."

Peegy saw his father reach out a hand. The boy had just time to save himself from being ordered to bed. He dodged under a low tamarisk at the edge of the gallery. Then the big electric bulb on one of the gallery posts flooded everything with white light.

Peering out through the feathery foliage, the boy saw five grim riders, and in the middle sat one of his father's herders, Ricardo Anaya. The yellow Mexican pony he rode looked like young Pablo Garcia's. The herder's hands were tied behind his back, and a lead-rope tethered the yellow pony to the horn of a posseman's saddle.

The boy saw the wide shoulders of his father move among the horses until they came to the yellow pony. The older herders were often abject in front of George Bishop, even before Nan or Peegy. But this one belonged to the younger generation. Scarcely more than a boy, he wore no leather *chaleco*, but cheap American clothes that fitted his back and shoulders like a glove. He was a white Mexican, and sat the yellow horse of Pablo with disdainful eyes.

"WHAT do you know about this, Ricardo?" George Bishop asked.

The young herder shrugged.

"It was not me kill José. I tell this *hombre*, but he don't listen. It was like this way, *patrón*. You know even from the yucca on the hills the sheep can smell the water of José. I walk in front with my arms out like this, to keep them back. On the last hill I can see the water and the house of José, and a horse tied to the acacia tree. Then somebody runs out of the house. Soon I can't see the man and horse for dust."

"A stranger?" George Bishop asked coldly.

"No, *patrón*. Often I have see him before."

"Who was it?" The only emotion

George Bishop showed was the narrowing of his eyes.

The Mexican youth's eyes glittered.

"It is a little far from the hill to the house of José, *patrón*. Maybe I make a mistake on the man. But the horse I know. It was a dun, and I could see plain a big mark on the left hip."

IN the shadows Peegy felt the foundations of his world shake. His father owned a dun horse with a great splash of brown on his left hip. Anselmo called him Pistolero because the mark was the shape of a holster. Nan claimed it looked more like Africa. Peegy himself had seen Dick riding the horse today.

The boy glanced rigidly at the foreman. He was standing under the floodlight with an unreadable face. He did not move or speak, but George Bishop's powerful face had darkened. The deputy sheriff seemed to notice it. He coughed painfully.

"I don't like to have to say this, Mr. Bishop, but I saw where there'd been a horse tied to Joe's acacia tree today, like Ricardo says. He had a broken hind shoe. You understand," he stammered, "I don't think for a minute that any of you did it. And the best way to clear you of this herder's story is to let me look at the hind shoes of that dun with paint on his hip."

"You'll find him in the corral," George Bishop said shortly.

"Wait a minute!" called Dick. He was very cool. "You don't need to look at him. He's got a broken hind shoe. I was at old José's today. I went inside and talked with him for twenty minutes."

There was a strained silence. Peegy saw his father stand perfectly quiet. The herder's eyes burned. Nan, her face white, crossed the gallery.

"This is ridiculous!" she said, and her voice trembled. "What would Dick do a terrible thing like that for?"

All the mounted men except the herder grew extremely uncomfortable. Peegy saw several of the riders turn their heads to gaze silently at Dick's new car. The paint shone through a thin coating of dust. The nickel mountings sparkled in the floodlight like silver. After a moment Nan glanced at the car, then looked swiftly away.

Peegy's bare toes were squeezing the sand when he saw the bent figure of the old stranger move out from the shadow of the adobe warehouse. His

pipe was in his hand. The pale blue eyes telegraphed a look of encouragement to Dick.

"Maybe I can hold up a lantern till you read this brand straight," he drawled. "I reckon I come by this dead Mexican's place today. It must of been the place, because it had a 'dobe house and plenty water. I soaked up some of the water, rode my legs a ways and laid down under some yucca. I was still there when this fellow come along on a dun hoss with paint on his hip. I seen him stop and go in the house."

He nodded toward Dick, and Peegy felt cold. The old fellow drew several times on his pipe, but it was out.

"The rider of the dun come out after while and rode away," he went on glibly. "The old Mexican come out with him. If he had a knife stickin' in him, he sure acted mighty spry. About that time I seen sheep comin' down the hill. The herder left the sheep fightin' for water, and went into the house. Pretty soon I heard a screech. Then it was plenty quiet awhile." The speaker sucked audibly on his fireless pipe, while his eyes strayed to Dick. "About that time I figured I better be movin'."

Peegy felt a surge of relief and gratitude to the old man. Now everybody would know that Dick didn't do it. But somehow the vindicated foreman looked strangely uncomfortable. So did Nan on the gallery.

"If you heard him yell," the deputy said slowly, "why didn't you go in and help him?"

"Got any tobacco?" the old stranger asked. The finger of one hand that was all veins and tendons tamped down his pipe, while his pale blue eyes flickered around the circle. "Much obliged. . . . I'll tell you. I never interfere in other people's business, especially Mexicans'. One time in the Big Bend country, around 'eighty-three, I heard a woman screamin'. I run in a house and seen a drunken Mexican draggin' her around by the hair. Every time he passed the door he give her a beat with the bootjack, to keep track of the rounds. The woman was young and good-lookin', and I threw my gun down on him and busted the bootjack out of his hand. That kind of sobered him. I walked in and started to read off a text, when the woman jumped me. If I'd done her a favor, she didn't know it. I figured for a minute that a panther was clawin' my shirt. I lit a shuck out of there, and I haven't mixed up with Mexicans since."

THE men on horseback were staring cynically at the old stranger. The deputy exchanged a glance with Peegy's father.

"May I ask this man some questions, Mr. Bishop?"

"Fire away!" the old stranger invited, holding a match to his pipe.

"This has gone far enough," George Bishop interrupted quietly. "Hodge, I want you to take Ricardo to Deming and have him locked up. Tell Judge Gunthorp I'll have enough evidence to hang him before the month is out."

The deputy blinked.

"O. K., Mr. Bishop," he said respectfully. "We'll run him up tonight in my car."

The young herder's face had gone livid. Staring fascinated, Peegy saw the Mexican's eyes burn on George Bishop. Black knives with tips of flame were there.

"So you hang me?" he panted. "You want to save your *caporál* because he marries your girl. So you hang an innocent one like me? I don't forget this, *hombre!* Maybe you forget I have friends? You can hang me, but my friends don't sit down and see an innocent one hung. I swear you now, what you do to me, my friends do to you. But they don't stop then. They do it to your baby in arms, and to the old people with canes! Many times you will be sorry you hang an innocent one like me."

IN the shadow of his tree, Peegy shivered. He saw Epifania's face white at the kitchen window, as if already she had seen the whole family wiped out. But his father's face had not changed. When the little cavalcade had become blurred shapes riding beneath the stars, George Bishop turned. His new hired hand was drawing on his pipe in the quick short puffs of an old man.

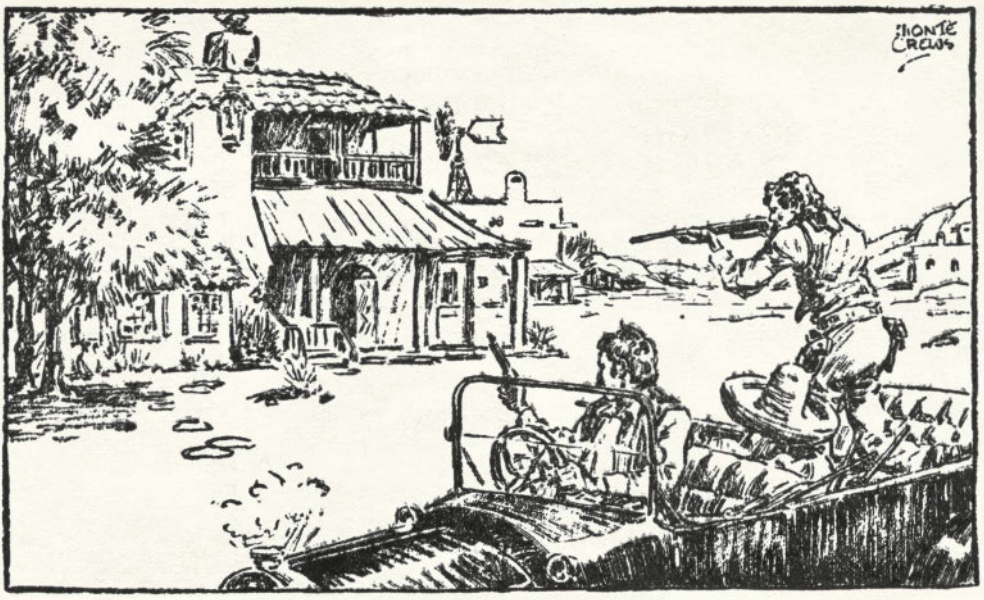
"You say you came from Columbus?" Bishop asked in a peculiar deadly voice. "How did you happen to pass Joe Sandoval's place? It's seven miles off the trail."

"Sure it it," agreed the old cow-hand placidly. "I never stick to trails if I can make better time crossin' country—especially if I can smell water. I was born with a compass in my head like a hoss. The first time I helped drive a herd up the trail to Ogallala, Nebraska, the boss died. I brung his body back to Palo Pinto alone, drivin' two hosses in a Kansas wagon, and sleepin' nights by the copper coffin in the wagon-box. I kept off the trail to miss the Indians. It took me forty-one days, and most of that time I had nobody to ask directions of except the man who was ridin' in the wagon-box. But I fetched up at Palo Pinto straight as a hungry calf findin' its mammy in the herd, the fall of 'eighty-three."

"All right, Eighty-three," George Bishop said. He turned and threw his young foreman a look. "You better keep your windy friend away from Deming, or they're liable to hang you."

Back between his hot sheets, Peegy puzzled over that. The whole scene passed again before his eyes in the darkness: the grim-faced riders, the cool control of his father, the squinting expression of the old stranger. But what he remembered most were the burning sulphur flames in the black eyes of the herder. They were like the eyes of a wild animal he had seen once from the car at night. His father had said it was a coyote or dog, but Peegy was sure it had been a wolf or mountain lion.

HE awoke next morning feeling that something exciting had happened and wasn't over yet. It was like knowing you were going to El Paso, or that Epifania and Nan were baking chocolate cake. Then he remembered: old José had been murdered.



The car had stopped. *"Oyé, patrón!"* a mocking voice called. "We want to see you a little!"

He saw Nan at breakfast. The shadows of a poor night's sleep lay under her eyes. It brought back to the boy how queerly everybody had acted last night when the dried-up old stranger was talking.

PEEGY smelled the wool before he came to the open warehouse door. The warehouse was a long adobe building with a dirt floor. It was piled high with rolled and tied fleeces. Usually the wool was sacked as sheared, but this year the shearer outfit had come before Anselmo had hauled the sacks from El Paso.

In the center of the room a huge sack, three feet square and seven feet high, hung from the frame. Anselmo was tossing a cataract of fleeces into the maw, while in the sack, invisible except for the contortions of the burlap, some one moved about. Peegy climbed up on the platform until he could look down. There in the giant sack, tramping down the wool in a suffocating cloud of fine dust, the sweat pouring from his parchment face, was old Eighty-three.

He looked up and saw the boy.

"Mawnin', Bishop!" Then he called: "Anselmo, turn off that danged Niagara a minute!" He took down his red bandanna and wiped his face. His old eyes squinted up through the dust. "Bishop, the Good Book says you don't go to Hades till you die, but the Lord must of changed His mind since He wrote it. Everybody fat and sassy in the house?"

Peegy nodded, then shook his head. His eyes buttoned very clear and direct on the old cow-hand.

"Why will Dick get hung if you go to Deming?"

Old Eighty-three thoughtfully combed wisps of wool from his face with his fingers.

"Well, for one thing," he said squinting, "I aint a-goin' to Deming. I'm that embalmed with the smell of sheep, that no self-respectin' hoss would take me. Even a cow wouldn't drink out of the same river with me. Maybe you haven't read in the Bible, Bishop, but Noah sure made a mistake when he didn't hire a cow-hand to round up his herd for the ark. The first critters a hand that knowed his business would have left out, would have been the sheep. Does that kind of answer your fire?"

Peegy shook his head, and the old fellow abstractedly pulled down a fleece that had been caught in the nails of the frame. The wool looked white where it had been next to the skin, but the rest was brown, and all of it heavy with oil.

"You figure your paw's got something buttoned up in his vest about Dick?" he drawled. "I don't reckon, Bishop. People just naturally aint happy, like the old days. When I was a boy, I seen a family get nearer to heaven hewin' the logs on one side of their cabin and puttin' in a puncheon floor, than one of these oil-kings that builds hisself a State capitol to live in. Why, all I needed as a boy to

The boy knew a terrible thing was about to happen. The old man seemed unconscious of every

make me bump my head on a cloud, was a gun!"

"My father," Peegy announced, "said he doesn't believe you ever had a gun in your hands."

"I aint lately," Eighty-three agreed solemnly. "Times is changed. It's not like the old days any more. Even the stars look kind of tarnished. Grass don't get so green. The fences killed off the range. Everything's kind of gone to seed. Right where the courthouse stands in Amarillo, I killed a lobo wolf once."

He took off his hat, shook the wool from it and went on:

"You can't tell where you're at any more, Bishop, with all the roads and bridges. When you crossed a river in the old days, you knowed that river next time if it was midnight, and darker than a nigger ridin' ahead of a snowstorm. Now you hop over the Arkansas or the Red like a jack-rabbit over an arroyo. Most the people in this country don't know they got rivers. I buried a couple Comanches once on the Canadian, and if I could find the place today, they'd sure be a garage settin' on one of them skeletons, and a beauty-parlor outfit on the other."

"Who killed the Comanches?" Peegy had pricked up his ears.

Eighty-three sat down on the soft wool, and into his old pale blue eyes there came a far-away look.

"I reckon I done it to the ones I buried. We were camped on the south side waitin' for the river to go down to cross. We had a trail-herd for Wyomin', and I'd took along my night hoss, Pompy. He could see better'n a cat in the dark. Clem Tomkins tried to buy him, and when I wouldn't sell, he rawhided me into shootin' target. I put up the hoss, and he put up twenty dollars he was gettin' after we hit Cheyenne. I was that worried over

thing except what was waiting for him outside.

losin' Pompy, I shot too high and kind of grazed the target. I knew Clem could beat that. He threw up his gun. About that time I told him to look up. He looked, and seen a passel of Comanches ridin' for us like a prairie fire. Well, Clem missed the target by a mile. And then, Bishop, the real shootin'-match started."

Peegy retold the story at the supper-table. He saw Nan glance at her plate, and Dick sat stiffly in his chair. As a rule supper was the big sociable meal of the day, with Peegy's father and Dick back from the range, the radio going, lots of talk, and beefsteak, or mutton swimming in chili.

Tonight the radio was going, and the aroma of supper was there, and yet it wasn't the same. Oh, they talked, and now and then one of them laughed; but they didn't fool Peegy. Underneath he could feel a sort of strain. He couldn't exactly put his stubby finger on it. But he noticed that when everything grew too quiet, his father talked, chiefly about Donaciano, the herder he had seen that day. It was Donaciano this and Donaciano that, and Donaciano quartering the sky with his staff and predicting rain—which wasn't like George Bishop at all.

TWO weeks passed, and now Peegy knew for a certainty something was wrong. Supper had become an ordeal. Nobody mentioned José's murder any more. Nan had begun to visit friends in El Paso and Deming and Cloudcroft. Twice she stayed away for several nights. Dick hardly spoke a word except to Eighty-three. The foreman's face was like tanned leather. His eyes might have been two pieces of obsidian swept up out of the dust.

The day before the trial, George Bishop drove to El Paso. He said he wanted to close a deal before he became tied up in the court-room at Deming. Nan rode along with him in the car. All morning the peculiar smell of the Southwest was in the air, that indescribable desert scent of raindrops—Donaciano's rain—on thirsty sand.

Earlier, Anselmo had taken Mita in the truck to see her mother, who was sick with cancer at Coyote Springs. Epifania was taking care of Baby Ethel for the day. In the warehouse, old Eighty-three was trying to find enough to do to stay for another week.

At lunch Peegy tried the radio. Sunny days, you had trouble getting Albuquerque. Peegy's father said the sun made sparks on the sand, and that was why if you touched a wire sometimes you felt a shock. But today, except for an occasional snap and bank, it came through very clear. A man was talking. Peegy looked bored. At twelve o'clock, and again at six, KOB in Albuquerque broadcast its radio newspaper.

He ate glumly. From time to time the words *London, England; Washington D. C.; New York City,* rang in his ears. Of a sudden he straightened. He had heard the words, *Deming, New Mexico.* Deming! Why, that was home, where he went to school in the winter-time.

"Deming, New Mexico," the rapid radio voice rattled off. "Ricardo Anaya, sheep-herder accused of murder, killed his jailer here today and escaped with two Mexicans, believed confederates. The men visited Anaya in the county prison

this morning, and are thought to have smuggled a revolver through the bars. With Sheriff Gleason and his deputies out, Anaya shot the jailer from his cell, and his confederates released him. A curious crowd watched them flee in an old green car without a top, carrying an arsenal of weapons and ammunition from the sheriff's office. Check of the El-Paso-Phoenix highway revealed no such car, and they are believed to have taken one of the many lonely trails for the border. —*Hollywood, California!*"

PEEGY hastily finished his lunch. The warehouse was empty, but the open door of the camp-house revealed the hook-nosed and ancient parchment face of Eighty-three on the other side of a makeshift table with a blue oilcloth. His bandanna was tucked in his neckband for a napkin.

"Want some sheep-herder biscuits?" he asked, squinting.

A little ashamed of having run, Peegy shook his head. After what he judged a manly interval, he stammered what he had heard on the radio. The shriveled parchment face did not change. Old Eighty-three went on calmly dipping a biscuit into his coffee.

"The sheriff'll get 'em," he said confidently. "Probably has 'em back in the calaboose right now. Reminds me of a little story: But I can't tell it right without a gun in my hand and a few ca'tridges—just to give it some long hair and woolly leggin's."

"We have guns at the house," Peegy informed eagerly.

Eighty-three took his time about pouring out the rest of the coffee. He drank it black. Then he wiped his mouth and lighted his pipe. At the doorway he stopped, and his bleary old eyes strained down along the wheel-tracks that led to the world. He stood a long time, but all Peegy could see was a speck on the cloudy horizon.

"What you want, coming in here?" Epifania bristled suspiciously when Peegy brought the old hand into the ranch-house.

Eighty-three paid her no attention. Mildly he took down a repeating rifle from the mule-deer antlers above the mantel. Epifania retreated into the kitchen, and Peegy chased back into the hall. He reappeared presently from his father's room, dragging a heavy cartridge-belt that George Bishop wore when he went for deer in the Black Range.

The old figure fitted a cartridge into the barrel, then filled the magazine.

"I reckon I can use the gun to tell the story," he decided. "But they's no gun for a young fellow like the cap and ball Long Tom I learned to shoot with. You had to get game on the first shot, or lose it. If they had guns like that today, men would be better shots. Shootin's got to be easy as gettin' married. You don't need to pull down your sights any more. You always got another chance. That's one reason the country's in the shape she is."

"You don't call that a story?" Peegy scoffed.

"I'm scaffoldin' up my hoss right now," Eighty-three promised. "But you got to get in the fireplace. This story's got Indians in it, and when they was Indians around, the kids always had to get in the fireplace. It was a kind of religion."

HE lifted Baby Ethel from her cushioned chair at the table and stood her in the wide stone mouth of the fireplace. Baby Ethel could stand erect, but Peegy's tow head was quickly streaked with soot. He couldn't hear the old man. Stealthily the boy stepped out. He found Eighty-three standing at the door. Framed between him and the doorjamb lay a far stretch of wheel-tracks. And bumping along the distant trail, came a queer-looking car.

"You kids listenin'?" the old fellow began without turning around. "It was the first time I went up the trail with a herd. I was only a button, but everything went smooth as old britches on a new saddle till we got to Kansas. That night the Indians shot and screeched around the beddin'-ground, and we couldn't hold the cattle. Next mawnin' I found myself plumb alone except for eleven steers. I drove 'em all day, and didn't see hide nor hair of my outfit. That evenin' I come on a dugout with nobody to home. You kids savvy what a dugout is?"

"Sure," Peegy said, his eyes fastened on the approaching car. He could see now that it was green, and looked as if it didn't have a top.

"Well," Eighty-three went on, "it had a little stove and a big bed; and bein' I was tired and only a kid, I hobbled my hoss and crawled down in bed. It was kind of dark in the dugout, and I slept plumb into daylight, and never knew it till I woke up and found I had a long-horned steer in bed with me. He was

big as an elephant, and red as your nose in January. He'd figured the sod roof was grass, and come bustin' through. And dang' if he didn't kick me out of bed."

A ripple of gurgles came from Baby Ethel, her face, hands and dress now smudged with soot. Eighty-three turned around.

"Get back in your corral, boy!" he ordered sternly.

Peegy hated to go, because he could see three men in the car. Even in the fireplace he could hear it coming closer. There was a knock in the engine every so often, like Anselmo pounding in the shop, and a rattle like when you jumped up and down on the cots in the camp-house. The car sounded as if it were turning around. The rattling stopped, but the sound of Anselmo's hammer kept on just outside the front door.

"Oye, patrón!" a mocking voice called. "We want to see you a little!"

The boy peered around the edge of the fireplace, and instantly knew that a terrible thing was about to happen. Across the dining-table in the next room he saw Epifania standing in the kitchen doorway. She was crossing herself, and her wrinkled face was the color of unwashed wool.

Stiff with fear, Peegy looked at Eighty-three. The boy caught a glimpse of thin jaws closing like a vise, and of a shriveled parchment face grim and expressionless as a piece of old leather. The old man seemed unconscious of everything except what was waiting for him outside. One hand worked the bolt of George Bishop's rifle. Then with his hooked nose pointing the way, he stepped through the open doorway.

Before Eighty-three had set foot on the gallery, the boy saw him throw rifle to shoulder. The discharge was drowned in a roar like some of Donaciano's thunder. The boy saw a piece of San Ildefonso pottery on the living-room table crumple to pieces, and a great flake of plaster fall from below the picture of the Organ Mountains at Sunset.

FROM that moment everything for Peegy was a little confused. He had a blurred impression of Baby Ethel throwing herself on his neck, of Eighty-three's rifle speaking again, sharply, of the sudden roaring exhaust of the car. When the boy reached the gallery, he found old Eighty-three, pale blue fire in his eyes, watching the topless green car that swayed crazily down the wheel-tracks. As Peegy stared, it swung off the trail, turned in a wide circle and plunged out of sight into the arroyo. After a moment a single figure appeared on the farther bank, running in the direction of the blue hills in Mexico. . . .

"The Good Book tells you to love your enemies, Bishop," Eighty-three said in a peculiar voice. "But it's kind of hard to do when they're shootin' at you."

Only when the old man turned did Peegy see that above the teeth-bitten pipe-stem protruding from his breast pocket, the shabby tan shirt was blotched with red. . . .

Dick rode in at a gallop soon afterward. He said he had heard the shooting from Ignacio's herd on Kelso's Ridge.

It was late afternoon when George Bishop and Nan arrived home from El Paso. Before they were out of the car, Peegy and Epifania and Baby Ethel, still streaked with soot, were on the running-board, all talking and crying at once.

A grave young figure came up slowly from the camp-house. His black eyes looked somber.

"So that old-timer," he mocked bitterly, "never had a gun in his hands?"

Peegy saw his father's face go faintly red. But Nan stood up and ran from the car into the foreman's arms.

"Oh, Dick!" she begged him.

IT was hard for Peegy to fall asleep that evening. The sheets had never felt so hot.

He knew that Epifania was still in the kitchen. The scent of cedar-smoke drifted through the open window. When he smelled it, Peegy could hear in his mind the drawl of old Eighty-three after Dick had carried him down to the camp-house.

"You know, Dick," the triumphant old voice had said, "some folks figure when they die, they're a-goin' to a city with streets of gold. Maybe they are, Dick, but I aint. What I kind of see is a country like she was in Texas when I was a boy: Lots of water, no fences and plenty of grass. And the grass is plumb green like the old days when we'd round up in the spring. The skies is brighter'n you can see 'em, pardner. The air's sweet, like she used to be. And they's no wool to stomp down in a greasy sack—" He started to cough.

It was here that Dick, with a silent gesture and stricken face, had sent the boy out of the camp-house.

SWORDS of MARS

INVENTION has progressed far on the planet Mars—even to an airship controlled by a mechanical brain. But they have their murders and kidnapings and paid assassins; and they duel with swords. . . . The second thrill-filled installment of a fascinating novel by the author of "Tarzan."

By EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

The Story Thus Far:

THE land of my birth is cursed with its gangsters, its killers and its kidnapers; but these constitute but a slight menace as compared with the highly efficient criminal organizations which flourish upon Mars. Here assassination is a profession, kidnaping a fine art. Each has its guild, with its laws and customs and code of ethics.

Ever since I—John Carter of Virginia, an emigrant from Earth—had become War Lord of Mars, I had been seeking to extirpate the noxious system. With this end in view, I finally decided to go alone, secretly and in disguise, to the city of Zodanga, which lies nearly two thousand miles from my capital Helium—and which serves as headquarters for the most powerful guilds of assassins on Mars. For I proposed to teach these assassins a severe lesson.

My wife Dejah Thoris and my son Carthoris sought to dissuade me from the dangerous undertaking; but my purpose was fixed; and so one night I set forth in a fast one-man flyer. I covered my body with red pigment so that I might pass for a Martian; and I had provided myself with Zodangan harness and weapons. Yet entering any Martian city at night is dangerous, and I had no proper credentials as a Zodangan; however, taking advantage of the heavy air-traffic next forenoon, I contrived to evade the patrol planes, slipped into the city and landed at an unpretentious public hangar.

My flyer safely sheltered, I found lodgings for myself in a public house. And here I had a stroke of luck; for occupying the sleeping platform next to mine was a shifty-eyed fellow with whom I contrived to strike up an acquaintance, with the result that we dined together—and that he drank too much. Thus I learned that his occupation was that of an assassin, and that his name was Rapas the Ulsio (the Rat). And when I explained that I too was a fighting man, and that I had been compelled to flee my own city because of a murder, he offered to introduce me to his employer, a wealthy inventor named Fal Sivas.

That night a slave admitted us to a great walled mansion; and presently I found myself in a room of Sybaritic luxury, answering the questions of Fal Sivas. He had many enemies, he explained, chief of whom was a rival inventor who sought to steal his inventions and destroy him, and who had employed the assassins' guild headed by Ur Jan for that purpose. Fal Sivas therefore required several bodyguards. To test my ability, he proposed a fencing match between me and Rapas. In the duel which followed, I twice disarmed the Rat and earned his hatred; but Fal Sivas was pleased, and hired me at once.

That night I was inspecting the commodious quarters assigned me, when a girl burst in and begged me to hide her. I concealed her under my sleeping-robes. Afterward she told me a dreadful story.

"Fal Sivas," she told me, "is not so great an inventor as he is a murderer and a thief. He steals ideas from other inventors and then has them murdered in order to safeguard what he has stolen. . . . His greatest invention is a ship that will travel through interplanetary space. And it is to be controlled by a mechanical brain. In his effort to duplicate the

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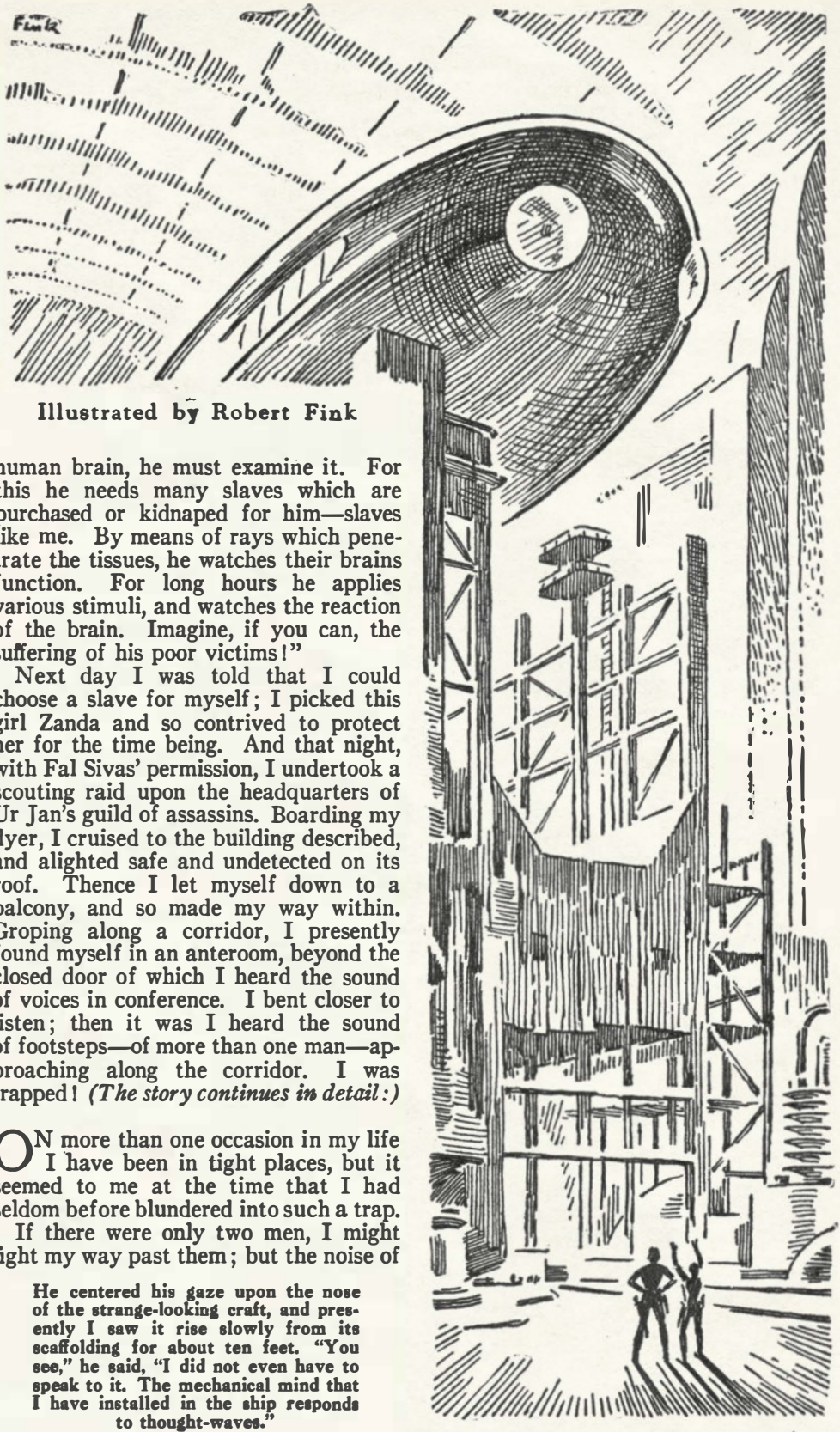


Illustrated by Robert Fink

human brain, he must examine it. For this he needs many slaves which are purchased or kidnaped for him—slaves like me. By means of rays which penetrate the tissues, he watches their brains function. For long hours he applies various stimuli, and watches the reaction of the brain. Imagine, if you can, the suffering of his poor victims!"

Next day I was told that I could choose a slave for myself; I picked this girl Zanda and so contrived to protect her for the time being. And that night, with Fal Sivas' permission, I undertook a scouting raid upon the headquarters of Ur Jan's guild of assassins. Boarding my flyer, I cruised to the building described, and alighted safe and undetected on its roof. Thence I let myself down to a balcony, and so made my way within. Groping along a corridor, I presently found myself in an anteroom, beyond the closed door of which I heard the sound of voices in conference. I bent closer to listen; then it was I heard the sound of footsteps—of more than one man—approaching along the corridor. I was trapped! *(The story continues in detail:)*

ON more than one occasion in my life I have been in tight places, but it seemed to me at the time that I had seldom before blundered into such a trap.

If there were only two men, I might fight my way past them; but the noise of

He centered his gaze upon the nose of the strange-looking craft, and presently I saw it rise slowly from its scaffolding for about ten feet. "You see," he said, "I did not even have to speak to it. The mechanical mind that I have installed in the ship responds to thought-waves."

the encounter would attract those in the room behind me, and certainly any sort of fight whatever would delay me long enough so that those who were attracted by it would be upon me before I could escape.

Escape! How could I escape if I were detected? Even if I could reach the balcony, they would be directly behind me; and I could not climb out of reach toward the roof before they could drag me down.

My position seemed rather hopeless, and then my eye fell upon the cupboard standing in the corner just beside me and the scant foot-wide crack between it and the wall.

The footsteps were almost opposite the doorway. There was no time to be lost. Quickly I slipped behind the cupboard and waited.

NOR was I a moment too soon. The men in the corridor turned into the room almost immediately, so soon, in fact, that it seemed to me that they must have seen me; but evidently they had not, for they crossed directly to the door to the inner chamber, which one of them threw open.

From my hiding-place I could see this man plainly and also into the room beyond, while the shadow of the cupboard hid me from detection.

What I saw beyond that door gave me something to think about. There was a large room in the center of which was a great table, around which were seated at least fifty men—fifty of the toughest-looking customers that I have ever seen gathered together. At the head of the table was a huge man whom I knew at once to be Ur Jan. He was a very large man, but well proportioned; and I could tell at a glance that he must be a most formidable fighter.

The man who had thrown open the door I could see also, but I could not see his companion or companions as they were hidden from me by the cupboard.

Ur Jan had looked up as the door opened.

"What now?" he demanded curtly. "Who have you with you?" And then, "Oh, I recognize him."

"He has a message for you, Ur Jan," said the man at the door. "He said it was a most urgent message, or I would not have brought him here."

"Let him come in," said Ur Jan. "We will see what he wants, and you return to your post."

"Go on in," said the man, turning to his companion behind him, "and pray to your first ancestor that your message interests Ur Jan; as otherwise you will not come out of that room again on your own feet."

He stood aside and I saw a man pass him and enter the room. It was Rapas the Rat.

Just seeing his back as he approached Ur Jan told me that he was nervous and terrified.

I wondered what could possibly have brought him here, for it was evident that he was not one of the guild. The same question evidently puzzled Ur Jan, as his next words indicated.

"What does Rapas the Ulsio want here?" he demanded.

"I have come as a friend," replied Rapas. "I have brought word to Ur Jan that he has long wanted."

"The best word that you could bring to me would be that some one had slit your dirty throat," growled Ur Jan.

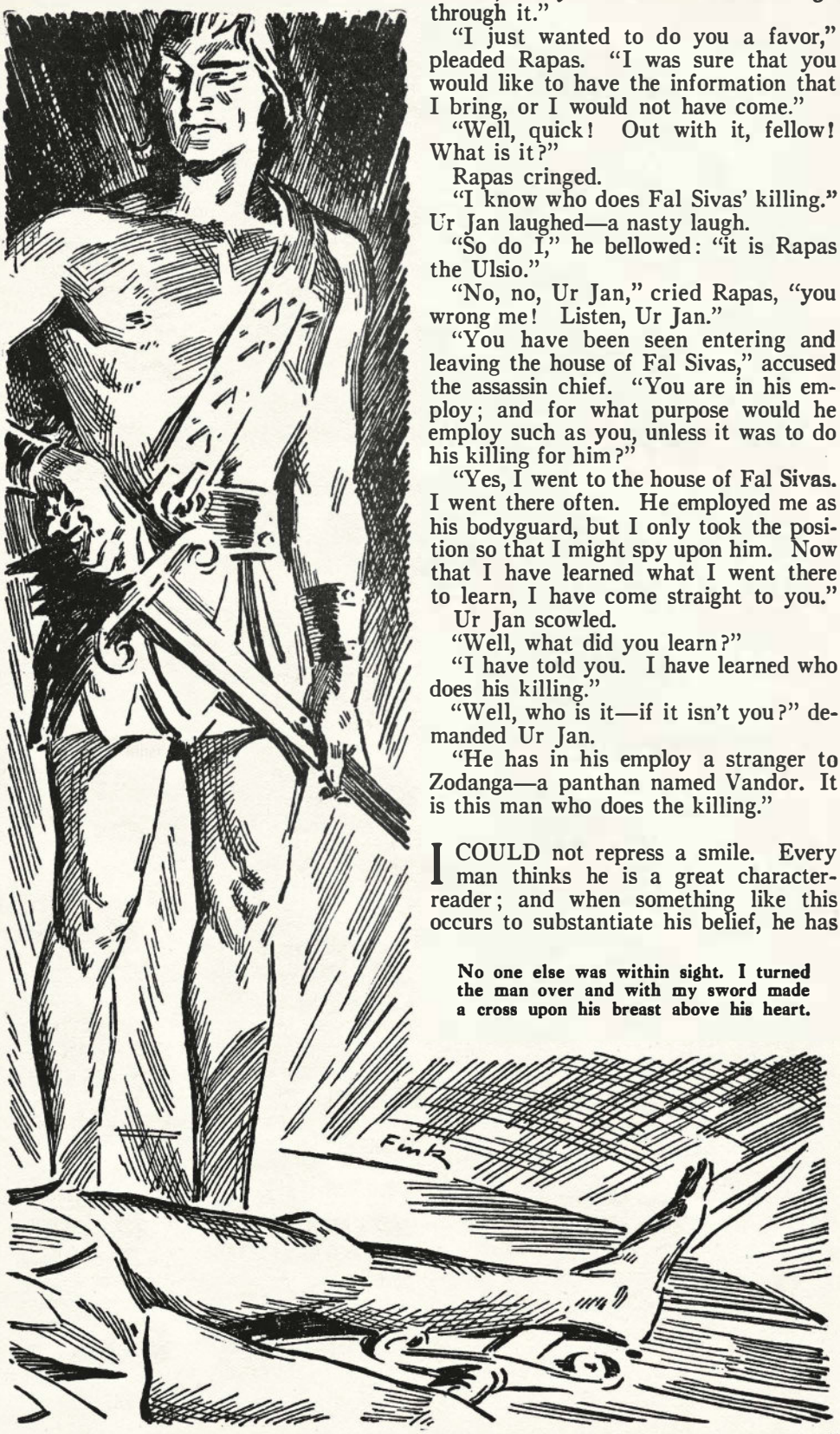
Rapas laughed—it was a rather weak and nervous laugh.

"The great Ur Jan likes his little joke," he mumbled meekly.

The brute at the head of the table leaped to his feet and brought his clenched fist down heavily upon the solid sorapus wood top.

"What makes you think I joke, you miserable little slit-throat? But you had better laugh while you can, for if you haven't some important word for me, if you have come here where it is forbidden that outsiders come, if you have interrupted this meeting for no good reason, I'll put a new mouth in your

If I were to carry out my plan I could not let him live. I leaped and ran my sword through his heart. Uldak lay dead.



throat; but you won't be able to laugh through it."

"I just wanted to do you a favor," pleaded Rapas. "I was sure that you would like to have the information that I bring, or I would not have come."

"Well, quick! Out with it, fellow! What is it?"

Rapas cringed.

"I know who does Fal Sivas' killing." Ur Jan laughed—a nasty laugh.

"So do I," he bellowed: "it is Rapas the Ulsio."

"No, no, Ur Jan," cried Rapas, "you wrong me! Listen, Ur Jan."

"You have been seen entering and leaving the house of Fal Sivas," accused the assassin chief. "You are in his employ; and for what purpose would he employ such as you, unless it was to do his killing for him?"

"Yes, I went to the house of Fal Sivas. I went there often. He employed me as his bodyguard, but I only took the position so that I might spy upon him. Now that I have learned what I went there to learn, I have come straight to you."

Ur Jan scowled.

"Well, what did you learn?"

"I have told you. I have learned who does his killing."

"Well, who is it—if it isn't you?" demanded Ur Jan.

"He has in his employ a stranger to Zodanga—a panthan named Vandor. It is this man who does the killing."

I COULD not repress a smile. Every man thinks he is a great character-reader; and when something like this occurs to substantiate his belief, he has

No one else was within sight. I turned the man over and with my sword made a cross upon his breast above his heart.

reason to be pleased; and the more so because few men are really good judges of character, and it is therefore very seldom that one of us is open to self-congratulation on this score.

I had never trusted Rapas, and from the first I had set him down as a sneak and a traitor. Evidently he was all these.

Ur Jan glowered at him skeptically. "And why do you bring me this information? You are not my friend. You are not one of my people, and as far as I know you are the friend of none of us."

"But I wish to be," begged Rapas. "I risked my life to get this information for you because I want to join the guild and serve under the great Ur Jan. If that came to pass, it would be the proudest day of my life. Ur Jan is the greatest man in Zodanga—he is the greatest man on all Barsoom. I want to serve him, and I will serve him faithfully."

All men are susceptible to flattery, and oftentimes the more ignorant they are, the more susceptible. Ur Jan was no exception. One could almost see him preening himself. He squared his great shoulders and threw out his chest.

"Well," he said in a milder voice, "we'll think it over. Perhaps we can use you, but first you will have to arrange it so that we can dispose of this Vandor." He glanced quickly around the table. "Do any of you men know him?"

There was a chorus of denials—no one admitted to knowing me.

"I can point him out to you," said Rapas the Ulsio. "I can point him out this very night."

"What makes you think so?" asked Ur Jan.

"Because I have an engagement to meet him later on at an eating-place that he frequents."

"Not a bad idea," said Ur Jan. "At what time is this meeting?"

"About half after the eighth zode," replied Rapas.

Ur Jan glanced quickly around the table.

"Uldak," he said, "you go with Rapas; and don't return while this Vandor still lives."

I GOT a good look at Uldak as Ur Jan singled him out; as I watched him come toward the door with Rapas on his way to kill me, I fixed every detail of the man's outward appearance indelibly upon my mind, even to his carriage as he walked; and though I saw him for but a moment then, I knew that I should never forget him.

AS the two men left the larger chamber and crossed the anteroom in which I was concealed, Rapas explained to his companion the plan that he had in mind.

"I will take you now and show you the location of the eating-place in which I am to meet him. Then you can return later and you will know that the man who is with me is the man whom you seek."

I could not but smile as the two men turned into the corridor and passed out of earshot. What would they and Ur Jan have thought, had they known that the object of their criminal purpose was within a few yards of them?

I wanted to follow Rapas and Uldak, for I had a plan that it would have been amusing to carry out; but I could not escape from behind the cupboard without passing directly in front of the doorway leading into the room where sat Ur Jan and his fifty assassins.

It looked as though I would have to wait until the meeting ended and the company had dispersed before I could make my way to the roof where I had left my flyer.

Although I was inclined to chafe at the thought of this enforced inactivity, I nevertheless took advantage of the open door to familiarize myself with the faces of all of the assassins that I could see. Some of them sat with their backs toward me, but even these occasionally revealed a glimpse of a profile.

It was fortunate that I took early advantage of this opportunity to implant the faces of my enemies upon my memory, for but a moment or two after Rapas and Uldak had left the room, Ur Jan looked up, noticed the open door and directed one of the assassins sitting near it to close it.

Scarcely had the lock clicked when I was out from behind the cupboard and into the corridor.

I saw no one and heard no sound in the direction that the assassins had used in coming into and going from the anteroom; and as my way led in the opposite direction, I had little fear of being apprehended. I moved rapidly toward the apartment through the window of which I had entered the building, as the suc-

cess of the plan I had in mind depended upon my being able to reach the eating-place ahead of Rapas and Uldak.

I reached the balcony and clambered to the roof of the building without mishap, and very shortly thereafter I was running my flyer into the hangar on the roof of the public house where I stored it. Descending to the street, I made my way to the vicinity of the eating-place to which Rapas was conducting Uldak, reasonably certain that I should arrive there before that precious pair.

I found a place where I could watch the entrance in comparative safety from discovery, and there I waited. My vigil was not of long duration, for presently I saw the two approaching. They stopped at the intersection of two avenues a short distance from the place; and after Rapas had pointed it out to Uldak, the two separated, Rapas continuing on in the direction of the public house where I had first met him, while Uldak turned back into the avenue along which they had come from the rendezvous of the assassins.

It still lacked half a zode of the time that I was to meet Rapas, and for the moment at least I was not concerned with him—my business was with Uldak.

As soon as Rapas had passed me upon the opposite side of the street, I came out of my hiding-place and walked rapidly in the direction that Uldak had taken.

As I reached the intersection of the two streets, I saw the assassin a little distance ahead of me. He was walking slowly, evidently merely killing time until he might be certain that the hour had arrived when I was to meet Rapas at the eating-place.

KEEPING to the opposite side of the street, I followed the man for a considerable distance until he entered a quarter that seemed to be deserted—I did not wish an audience for what I was about to do.

Crossing the avenue, I increased my gait; and the distance between us rapidly lessened until I was but a few paces behind him. I had moved very quietly, and he was not aware that anyone was near him. Only a few paces separated us when I spoke.

"You are looking for me?" I inquired.

He wheeled instantly, and his right hand flew to the hilt of his sword. He eyed me narrowly. "Who are you?" he demanded.

"Perhaps I have made a mistake," I said. "You are Uldak, are you not?"

"What of it?" he demanded.

I shrugged. "Nothing much, except that I understand that you have been sent to kill me. My name is Vandor."

As I ceased speaking, I whipped out my sword. He looked utterly astonished as I announced my identity, but there was nothing for him to do but defend himself, and as he drew his weapon he gave a nasty little laugh.

"You must be a fool," he said. "Anyone who is not a fool would run away and hide if he knew that Uldak was looking for him."

EVIDENTLY the man thought himself a great swordsman. I might have confused him by revealing my true identity, for it would take the heart out of any Barsoomian warrior to know that he was facing John Carter; but I did not tell him. I merely engaged him and felt him out for a moment to ascertain if he could make good his boast.

He was, indeed, an excellent swordsman and, as I had expected, tricky and entirely unscrupulous. Most of these assassins are entirely without honor; they are merely killers.

At the very first he fought fairly enough because he thought that he could easily overcome me; but when he saw that he could not, he tried various shady expedients and finally he attempted the unpardonable thing—with his free hand, he sought to draw his pistol.

Knowing his kind, I had naturally expected something of the sort; and in the instant that his fingers closed upon the butt of the weapon I struck his sword aside and brought the point of my own heavily upon his left wrist, nearly severing his hand.

With a scream of rage and pain, he fell back; and then I was upon him in earnest.

He yelled for mercy now and cried that he was not Uldak; that I had made a mistake, and begged me to let him go. Then the coward turned to flee, and I was forced to do that which I most dislike to do; but if I were to carry out my plan I could not let him live; so I leaped close and ran my sword through his heart from behind.

Uldak lay dead u on his face.

As I drew my sword from his body, I looked quickly about me. No one was within sight. I turned the man over

upon his back and with the point of my sword made a cross upon his breast above his heart.

CHAPTER V

The Brain

RAPAS was waiting for me when I entered the eating-place. He looked very self-satisfied and contented.

"You are right on time," he said. "Did you find anything to amuse you in the night life of Zodanga?"

"Yes," I assured him. "I enjoyed myself immensely. And you?"

"I spent a most profitable evening. I made excellent connections; and, my dear Vandor, I did not forget you."

"How nice of you," I said.

"Yes, you shall have reason to remember this evening as long as you live," he exclaimed, and then he burst into loud laughter.

"You must tell me about it," I said.

"No, not now," he replied. "It must remain a secret for a time. You will know all about it soon enough. And now let us eat. It is my treat tonight; I shall pay for everything."

The miserable rat of a man seemed to have swelled with importance now that he felt himself almost a full-fledged member of Ur Jan's guild of assassins.

"Very well," I said, "this shall be your treat." I thought it would add to my enjoyment of the joke to let the poor fool foot the bill, and to make it still more amusing I ordered the most expensive dishes that I could find.

When I had entered the eating-place, Rapas had already seated himself facing the entrance; and he was continually glancing at it. Whenever anyone entered, I could see the look of expectation on his face change to one of disappointment.

We spoke of various unimportant things as we ate; and as the meal progressed, I could not but note his growing impatience and concern.

"What is the matter, Rapas?" I inquired after a while. "You seem suddenly nervous. You are always watching the entrance. Are you expecting someone?"

He got himself in hand then, very quickly; but he cast a single searching glance at me through narrowed lids. "No, no," he said, "I was expecting no one; but I have enemies. It is always necessary for me to be watchful."

His explanation was plausible enough, though I knew of course that it was not the right one. I could have told him that he was watching for some one who would never come, but I did not.

Rapas dragged the meal out as long as he could, and the later it grew, the more nervous he became and the more often his glance remained upon the entrance. At last I made a move to go, but he detained me.

"Let us stop a little longer," he said. "You are in no hurry, are you?"

"I should be getting back," I replied. "Fal Sivas may require my services."

"No," he told me, "not before morning."

"But I must have some sleep," I insisted.

"You will get plenty of sleep," he said; "don't worry."

"Well, if I am going to, I had better start for bed," I said, and with that I arose.

He tried to detain me, but I had extracted about all the pleasure out of the evening that I thought it held for me, and so I insisted upon leaving.

Reluctantly he arose from the table. "I will walk a little way with you," he volunteered.

WE were near the door leading to the avenue when two men entered. They were discussing something with rather evident excitement as they greeted the proprietor.

"The Warlord's agents are at work again," said one of them.

"How is that?" asked the proprietor.

"They have just found the body of one of Ur Jan's assassins in the Avenue of the Green Thoat—the cross of the Warlord was above his heart."

"More power to the Warlord," said the proprietor. "Zodanga would be better off if we were rid of all of them."

"By what name was the dead man known?" asked Rapas, with considerably more concern, I imagine, than he would have cared to reveal.

"Why, some man in the crowd said that he believed the name was Uldak," replied one of the two men who had brought the news.

Rapas paled.

"Was he a friend of yours, Rapas?" I asked.

The Ulsio started. "Oh, no," he said. "I did not know him. Let us be going."

Together we walked out into the avenue and started in the direction of the

house of Fal Sivas. We walked shoulder to shoulder through the lighted district near the eating-place. Rapas was very quiet and seemed nervous. I watched him out of the corner of my eye and tried to read his mind, but he was on guard and had closed it against me.

Oftentimes I have an advantage over Martians in that I can read their minds, though they can never read mine. Why that is, I do not know. Mind-reading is a very commonplace accomplishment on Mars, but to safeguard themselves against its dangers, all Martians have cultivated the ability to close their minds to others at will—a defense-mechanism of such long standing as to have become almost a universal characteristic; so that only occasionally can one be caught off his guard.

As we entered the darker avenues, it became quite apparent that Rapas was trying to drop behind me; and then I did not have to read his mind to know what was in it—Uldak had failed, and now the Rat had an opportunity to cover himself with glory and win the esteem of Ur Jan by carrying out the assignment of Uldak. . . .

If a man has a sense of humor, a situation such as this can be very enjoyable, as, indeed, it was to me. Here I was walking along a dark avenue with a man who intended to murder me at the first opportunity, and it was necessary for me to thwart his plans without letting him know that I suspected them; for I did not want to kill Rapas the Ulsio, at least not at present. I felt that I could make use of him in one way or another without his ever suspecting that he was aiding me.

"Come," I said at last, "why do you lag? Are you getting tired?" And I linked my left arm through his sword-arm, and thus we continued on toward the house of Fal Sivas.

AFTER a short distance, at the intersection of two avenues, Rapas disengaged himself.

"I am leaving you here," he said; "I am not going back to the house of Fal Sivas tonight."

"Very well, my friend," I said; "but I shall be seeing you soon again, I hope."

"Yes," he replied, "soon."

"Tomorrow night, possibly," I suggested, "or if not tomorrow night, the night after. Whenever I am at liberty, I shall come to the eating-house; and perhaps I shall find you there."

Fal Sivas called my attention to the spherical object. "This," he said, "is the brain."

"Very well," he said; "I eat there every night."

"May you sleep well, Rapas."

"May you sleep well, Vandor." Then he turned into the avenue at our left, and I proceeded on my way.

I thought that he might follow me, but he did not, and so I came at last to the house of Fal Sivas.

Hamas admitted me, and after passing a few words with him I went directly to my quarters where, in answer to my signal, Zanda admitted me.

The girl told me that the house had been very quiet during the night, and that no one had disturbed her or attempted to enter our quarters. She had prepared my sleeping-silks and furs for me; and as I was rather tired, I soon sought them. . . .

Immediately after breakfast the next morning, I went on duty again at the door of Fal Sivas' study. I had been there but a short time when he summoned me to his presence.

"What of last night?" he asked. "What luck did you have? I see that you are here alive; so I take it that you did not succeed in reaching the meeting-place of the assassins."

"On the contrary, I did," I told him. "I was in the room next to them and saw them all."

"What did you learn?"

"Not much. When the door was closed, I could hear nothing. It was open only a short time."

"What did you hear while it was open?" he asked.

"They knew that you had employed me as your bodyguard."

"What!" he demanded. "How could they have known that?"

I shook my head. "There must be a leak," I told him.

"A traitor!" he exclaimed.

I DID not tell him about Rapas. I was afraid he would have him killed, and I did not want him killed while he might be of use to me.

"What else did you hear?" he demanded.

"Ur Jan ordered that I be killed," I admitted.

"You must be careful," said Fal Sivas. "Perhaps you had better not go out again at night."

"I can take care of myself," I replied, "and I can be of more service if I can get about at night and talk to people on the outside than I can by remaining cooped up here when I am off duty."

He nodded. "Perhaps you are right," he said, and then for a moment he sat in deep thought. Finally he raised his head. "I have it!" he exclaimed. "I know who the traitor is."

"Yes?" I asked politely.

"It is Rapas the Ulsio—Ulsio! He is well named."

"You are sure?" I asked.

"It could be no one else," replied Fal Sivas emphatically. "No one else has left the premises but you two since you came. But we will put an end to that as soon as he returns. When he comes back, you will destroy him. Do you understand?"

I nodded.

"It is a command," he said; "see that it is obeyed." For some time he sat in silence, and I could see that he was studying me intently. At last he spoke. "You have a smattering of the sciences, I judge, from the fact of your interest in the books in your quarters."

"Only a smattering," I assured him.

"I need such a man as you," he said, "if I could only find some one whom I might trust. But who can one trust?" He seemed to be thinking aloud. "I am seldom wrong," he continued musingly. "I read Rapas like a book. I knew that he was mean and ignorant and at heart a traitor."

He wheeled suddenly upon me. "But you are different. I believe that I can take a chance with you, but if you fail me—" He stood and faced me, and I never saw such a malevolent expression upon a human face before. "If you fail me, Vandor, you shall die such a death as only the mind of Fal Sivas can conceive."

I could not help but smile. "I can die but once," I said.

"But you can be a long time at the dying, if it is done scientifically." But now he had relaxed, and his tone was a little bantering. I could imagine that Fal Sivas might enjoy seeing an enemy die horribly.

"I am going to take you into my confidence—a little, just a little," he said.

"Remember that I have not asked it," I replied, "that I have not sought to learn any of your secrets."

"The risk will be mutual," he said, "your life against my secrets. Come, I have something to show you."

He led me from the room, along the corridor past my quarters, and up the ramp to the forbidden level above. Here we passed through a magnificently appointed suite of living-quarters and then through a little door hidden behind hangings, and came at last into an enormous loft that extended upward to the roof of the building, evidently several levels above us.

SUPPORTED by scaffolding and occupying nearly the entire length of the enormous chamber, was the strangest-looking craft I have ever seen. The nose was ellipsoidal; and from the greatest diameter of the craft, which was just back of the nose, it sloped gradually to a point at the stern.

"There it is," said Fal Sivas proudly; "the work of a lifetime, and almost completed."

"An entirely new type of ship," I commented. "In what respect is it superior to present types?"

"It is built to achieve results that no other ship can achieve," replied Fal Sivas. "It is designed to attain speed beyond the wildest imaginings of man. It will travel routes that no man or ship has ever traveled.

"In that craft, Vandor, I can visit Thuria and Cluros. I can travel the far reaches of space to other planets."

"Marvelous," I said.

"But that is not all. You see that it is built for speed. I can assure you that

it is built to withstand the most terrific pressure, that it is insulated against the extremes of heat and cold. Perhaps, Vandor, other inventors could have accomplished the same end. In fact, I believe Gar Nal has already done so, but there is only one man upon Barsoom, doubtless there is only one brain in the entire solar system, that could have done what Fal Sivas has done. I have given that seemingly insensate mechanism a brain with which to think. I have perfected my mechanical brain, Vandor, and with just a little more time, just a few refinements, I can send this ship out alone; and it will go where I wish it to go and come back again.

"Doubtless you think that impossible. You think Fal Sivas is mad; but look; watch closely."

HE centered his gaze upon the nose of the strange-looking craft; presently it rose slowly from its scaffolding for about ten feet and hung there poised in mid-air. Then it elevated its nose a few feet, and then its tail, and finally it settled again and rested evenly upon its scaffolding.

I was certainly astonished. Never in all my life had I seen anything so marvelous, nor did I seek to hide my admiration from Fal Sivas.

"You see," he said, "I did not even have to speak to it. The mechanical mind that I have installed in the ship responds to thought-waves. I merely have to impart to it the impulse of the thought that I wish it to act upon. The mechanical brain then functions precisely as my brain would, and directs the mechanism that operates the craft precisely as the brain of the pilot would direct his hand to move levers, press buttons, open or close throttles.

"Vandor, it has been a long and terrible battle that I have had to wage to perfect this marvelous mechanism. I have been compelled to do things which would revolt the finer sensibilities of mankind; but I believe that it has all been well worth while. I believe that my greatest achievement warrants all that it has cost in lives and suffering.

"I, too, have paid a price. It has taken something out of me that can never be replaced. I believe, Vandor, that it has robbed me of every human instinct. Except that I am mortal, I am as much a creature of cold insensate formulas as that thing which you see resting there before you. Sometimes, because of that, I hate it; and yet I would die for it. I would see others die for it, countless others, in the future, as I have in the past. It must live. It is the greatest achievement of the human mind."

CHAPTER VI

The Ship

EVERY one of us, I believe, is possessed of two characters. Oftentimes they are so much alike that this duality is not noticeable, but again there is a divergence so great that we have the phenomenon of a *Dr. Jekyll* and *Mr. Hyde* in a single individual. The brief illuminating self-revealment of Fal Sivas suggested that he might be an example of such wide divergence in character.

He seemed immediately to regret this emotional outburst and turned again to an explanation of his invention.

"Would you like to see the inside of it?" he asked.

"Very much," I replied.

He concentrated his attention again upon the nose of the ship, and presently a door in its side opened and a rope ladder was lowered to the floor of the room. It was an uncanny procedure—just as though ghostly hands had performed the work.

Fal Sivas motioned me to precede him up the ladder. It was a habit of his to see that no one ever got behind him; it bespoke the nervous strain under which he lived, always in fear of assassination.

The doorway led directly into a small, comfortably, even luxuriously furnished cabin.

"The stern is devoted to storerooms where food may be carried for long voyages," explained Fal Sivas. "Also aft are the motors, the oxygen and water-generating machines, and the temperature-regulating plant. Forward is the control room. I believe that that will interest you greatly,"—and he motioned me to precede him through a small door in the forward bulkhead of the cabin.

The interior of the control room, which occupied the entire nose of the ship, was a mass of intricate mechanical and electrical devices.

On either side of the nose were two large, round ports in which were securely set thick slabs of crystal.

From the exterior of the ship these two ports appeared like the huge eyes of some gigantic monster; and, in truth, this was the purpose they served.

Fal Sivas called my attention to a small, round metal object about the size of a large grapefruit that was fastened securely just above and between the two eyes. From it ran a large cable composed of a vast number of very small insulated wires. I could see that some of these wires connected with the many devices in the control room, and that others were carried through conduits to the after part of the craft.

FAL SIVAS reached up and laid one hand affectionately upon the spherical object to which he had called my attention. "This," he said, "is the brain." Then he called my attention to two spots, one in the exact center of each crystal of the forward ports. I had not noticed them at first, but now I saw that they were ground differently from the balance of the crystals.

"These lenses," explained Fal Sivas, "focus upon this aperture in the lower part of the brain,"—calling my attention to a small hole at the base of the sphere,—"that they may transmit to the brain what the eyes of the ship see. The brain then functions mechanically precisely as the human brain does, except with greater accuracy."

"It is incredible!" I exclaimed.

"But nevertheless true," he replied. "In one respect, however, the brain lacks human power. It cannot originate thoughts. Perhaps that is just as well, for could it, I might have loosed upon myself and Barsoom an insensate monster that could wreak incalculable havoc before it could be destroyed, for this ship is equipped with high-power radium rifles which the brain has the power to discharge with far more deadly accuracy than may be achieved by man."

"I saw no rifles," I said.

"No," he replied. "They are encased in the bulkheads, and nothing of them is visible except small round holes in the hull of the ship. But, as I was saying, the one weakness of the mechanical brain is the very thing that makes it so effective for the use of man. Before it can function, it must be charged by human thought-waves. In other words, I must project into the mechanism the originating thoughts that are the food for its functioning.

"For example, I charge it with the thought that it is to rise straight up ten feet, pause there for a couple of seconds, and then come to rest again upon its scaffolding.

"To carry the idea into a more complex domain, I might impart to it the actuating thought that it is to travel to Thuria, seek a suitable landing-place, and come to the ground. I could carry this idea even further, warning it that if it were attacked it should repel its enemies with rifle-fire and maneuver so as to avoid disaster, returning immediately to Barsoom, rather than suffer destruction.

"It is also equipped with cameras, with which I could instruct it to take pictures while it was on the surface of Thuria."

"And you think it will do these things, Fal Sivas?" I asked.

He growled at me impatiently. "Of course it will. Just a few more days and I will have the last detail perfected. It is a minor matter of motor gearing with which I am not wholly satisfied."

"Perhaps I can help you there," I said. "I have learned several tricks in gearing during my long life in the air."

He became immediately interested and directed me to return to the floor of his hangar. He followed me down, and presently we were poring over the drawings of his motor.

I soon found what was wrong with it and how it might be improved. Fal Sivas was delighted. He immediately recognized the value of the points I had made.

"Come with me," he said; "we will start work on these changes at once."

He led me to a door at one end of the hangar and, throwing it open, followed me into the room beyond.

HERE, and in a series of adjoining rooms, I saw the most marvelously equipped mechanical and electrical shops that I have ever seen; and I saw something else, something that made me shudder as I considered the malignity of this man's abnormal obsession for secrecy in the development of his inventions.

The shops were well manned by mechanics, and every one of them was manacled to his bench or to his machine. Their complexions were pasty from long confinement, and in their eyes was the hopelessness of despair.

Fal Sivas must have noted the expression upon my face; for he said quite suddenly, and apropos of nothing else than my own thoughts: "I have to do it, Vandor; I cannot take the risk of one of them escaping and revealing my secrets to the world before I am ready."

"And when will that time come?" I asked.

When I had completed my investigation of the motor room, I walked all around the ship, viewing it from every angle in pretended admiration. Fal Sivas accompanied me watchfully.

"Never," he exclaimed, with a snarl. "When Fal Sivas dies, his secrets die with him. While he lives, they will make him the most powerful man in the universe. Why, even John Carter, Warlord of Mars, will have to bend the knee to Fal Sivas."

"And these poor devils, then, will remain here all their lives?" I asked.

"They should be proud and happy," he said, "for are they not dedicating themselves to the most glorious achievement that the mind of man has ever conceived?"

"There is nothing, Fal Sivas, more glorious than freedom," I told him.

"Keep your silly sentimentalism to yourself," he snapped. "There is no place for sentiment in the house of Fal Sivas. If you are to be of value to me, you must think only of the goal, forgetting the means whereby we attain it."

Well, I saw that I could accomplish nothing for myself or his poor victims by antagonizing him, and so I deferred with a shrug.

"Of course, you are right, Fal Sivas," I agreed.

"That is better," he said, and then he called a foreman and together we explained the changes that were to be made in the motor.

As we turned away and left the chamber, Fal Sivas sighed. "Ah," he said, "if I could but produce my mechanical brain in quantities, I could do away with all these stupid humans! One brain in each room could perform all the operations that it now takes from five to twenty

men to perform and perform them better, too—much better."

Fal Sivas went to his laboratory on the same level then, and told me that he would not require me for a while but that I should remain in my quarters and keep the door open, seeing that no unauthorized person passed along the corridor toward the ramp leading to his laboratories.

WHEN I reached my quarters, I found Zanda polishing the metal on an extra set of harness that she said Fal Sivas had sent to me for my use.

"I was talking with Hamas' slave a little while ago," she remarked presently. "She says that Hamas is worried about you."

"And why?" I asked.

"He thinks that the master has taken a fancy to you, and he fears for his own authority. He has been a very powerful man here for many years."

I laughed. "I don't aspire to his laurels," I told her.

"But he does not know that," said Zanda. "He would not believe it, if he were told. He is your enemy and a very powerful enemy. I just wanted to warn you."

"Thanks, Zanda," I said. "I shall be watchful of him; but I have a great many enemies, and I am so accustomed to having them that another, more or less, makes little difference to me."

"Hamas may make a great difference to you," she said. "He has the ear of Fal Sivas. I am so worried about you, Vandor."

"You mustn't worry; but if it will make you feel any better, do not forget that you have the ear of Hamas through his slave. You can let her know that I have no ambition to displace Hamas."

But she still seemed worried.

"That is a good idea," she said, "but I am afraid that it will not accomplish much; and if I were you, the next time I went out of the building, I should not return. You went last night, so I suppose that you are free to come and go as you will."

"Yes," I replied, "I am."

"Just as long as Fal Sivas does not take you to the floor above and reveal any of his secrets to you, you will probably be allowed to go out, unless Hamas makes it a point to prevail upon Fal Sivas to take that privilege away from you."

"But I have already been to the level above," I said, "and I have seen many of the wonders of Fal Sivas' inventions."

She gave a little cry of alarm, then. "Oh, Vandor, you are lost!" she cried. "Now you will never leave this terrible place."

"On the contrary, I shall leave it tonight, Zanda," I told her. "Fal Sivas has agreed that I should do so."

She shook her head. "I cannot understand it," she said, "and I shall not believe it until after you have gone."

Toward evening Fal Sivas sent for me. He said that he wanted to talk to me about some further changes in the gearing of the motor, and so I did not get out that night; and the next day he had me in the shops directing the mechanics who were working on the new gears, and again he made it impossible for me to leave the premises.

In one way or another, he prevented it night after night; and though he didn't actually refuse permission, I began to feel that I was, indeed, a prisoner.

However, I was much interested in the work in the shops and did not mind much whether I went out or not.

EVER since I had seen Fal Sivas' wonder-craft and had heard his explanation of the marvelous mechanical brain that controlled it, it had been constantly in my thoughts. I saw in it all the possibilities of power for good or evil that Fal Sivas had visualized, and I was intrigued by the thought of what the man who controlled it could accomplish.

If that man had the welfare of humanity at heart, his invention might prove a priceless boon to Barsoom; but I feared that Fal Sivas was too selfish and too mad for power to use his invention solely for the public good.

Such meditation naturally led me to wonder if another than Fal Sivas could control the brain. The speculation intrigued me, and I determined to ascertain at the first opportunity if the insensate thing would respond to my will.

That afternoon Fal Sivas was in his laboratory, and I was working in the shops with the poor manacled artisans. The great ship lay in the adjoining room. Now, I thought, presented as good a time as any to make my experiment.

The creatures in the room with me were all slaves. Furthermore, they hated Fal Sivas; so it made no difference to them what I did.

I had been kind to them and had even encouraged them to hope, though they

could not believe that there was any hope. They had seen too many of their number die in their chains to permit them to entertain a thought of escape. They were apathetic in all matters, and I doubt that any of them noticed when I left the shop and entered the hangar where the ship rested upon its scaffolding.

Closing the door behind me, I approached the nose of the craft and focused my thoughts upon the brain within. I imparted to it the will to rise from its scaffolding as I had seen Fal Sivas cause it to do and then to settle down again in its place. I thought that if I could cause it to do that, I could cause it to do anything that Fal Sivas could.

I am not easily excited; but I must confess that my every nerve was tense as I watched that great thing above me, wondering if it would respond to those invisible thought-waves that I was projecting into it.

Concentrating thus upon this one thing naturally curtailed the other activities of my mind, but even so I had visions of what I might accomplish if my experiment proved successful.

I presume that I had been there but a moment, yet it seemed a long while; and then slowly the great craft rose as though lifted by an invisible hand. It hovered for a moment ten feet above its scaffolding, and then it settled down to rest again.

As it did so, I heard a noise behind me; and, turning quickly, I saw Fal Sivas standing in the doorway of the shop.

CHAPTER VII

The Face in the Doorway

NONCHALANCE is a corollary of poise. I was thankful at that moment that the poise gene of some ancient forebear had been preserved in my line and handed down to me. Whether or not Fal Sivas had entered the room before the ship came to rest again upon its scaffolding, I did not know. If not, he had only missed the sight by a matter of a split second. My best momentary defense was to act on the assumption that he had not seen, and this I determined to do.

Standing there in the doorway, the old inventor was eying me sternly. "What are you doing in here?" he demanded.

"The invention fascinates me; it intrigues my imagination," I replied. "I stepped in from the shop to have another look at it. You had not told me that I should not do so."

He knitted his brows in thought. "Perhaps I didn't," he said at last; "but I tell you now. No one is supposed to enter this room, unless by my express command."

"I will bear that in mind," I said.

"It will be well for you if you do, Vandor."

I walked then toward the door where he stood, with the intention of returning to the shop; but Fal Sivas barred my way.

"Wait a moment," he said, "perhaps you have been wondering if the brain would respond to your thought-impulses."

"Frankly, I have," I replied.

I WONDERED how much he knew, how much he had seen. Perhaps he was playing with me, secure in his own knowledge; or perhaps he was merely suspicious and was seeking confirmation of his suspicion. However that might be, I was determined not to be trapped out of my assumption that he had not seen and did not know.

"You were not, by any chance, attempting to see if it would respond?" he asked.

"Who, other than a stupid dolt, once having seen this invention, would not naturally harbor such a thought?" I asked.

"Quite right, quite right," he admitted; "it would be only natural—but did you succeed?" The pupils of his eyes contracted; his lids narrowed to two ominous slits. He seemed to be trying to bore into my soul; and, unquestionably, he was attempting to read my mind; but that, I knew, he could not accomplish.

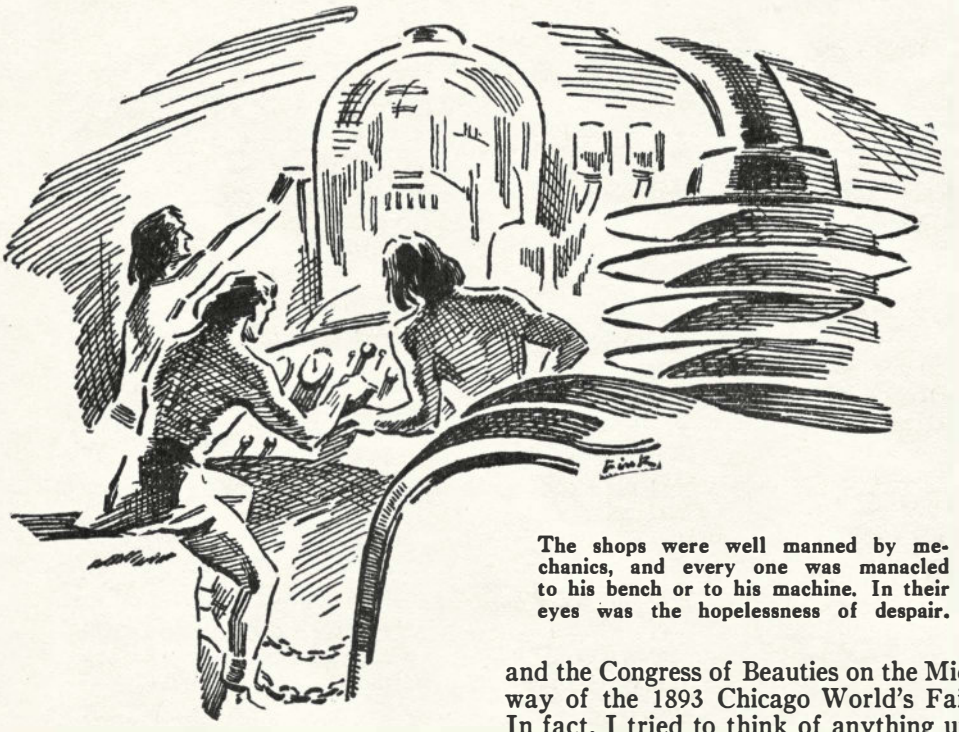
I waved my hand in the direction of the ship. "Has it moved?" I asked with a laugh.

I thought that I saw just a faint hint of relief in his expression, and I felt sure then that he had not seen.

"It would be interesting, however, to know whether the mind of another than myself *could* control the mechanism," he said. "Suppose you try it."

"It would be a most interesting experiment. I should be glad to do so. What shall I try to have it do?"

"It will have to be an original idea of your own," he told me; "for if it is my idea, and I impart it to you, we cannot



The shops were well manned by mechanics, and every one was manacled to his bench or to his machine. In their eyes was the hopelessness of despair.

be definitely sure whether the impulse that actuates it originated in your brain or mine."

"Is there no danger that I might unintentionally harm it?" I asked.

"I think not," he replied. "It is probably difficult for you to realize that that ship sees and reasons. Of course, its vision and its mental functioning are purely mechanical, but none the less accurate. In fact, I should rather say, because of that, more accurate. You might attempt to will the ship to leave the room. It cannot do so because the great doors through which it will eventually pass out of this building are closed and locked. It might approach the wall of the building, but the eyes would see that it could not pass through without damage; or, rather, the eyes would see the obstacle, transmit the impression to the brain, and the brain would reason to a logical conclusion. It would, therefore, stop the ship or, more likely, cause it to turn the nose about so that the eyes could seek a safe avenue of exit. But let us see what you can do."

I HAD no intention of letting Fal Sivas know I could operate his invention, if he did not already know it; and so I tried to keep my thoughts as far from it as possible. I recalled football games that I had seen, a five-ring circus, and the Congress of Beauties on the Midway of the 1893 Chicago World's Fair. In fact, I tried to think of anything under the sun rather than Fal Sivas and his mechanical brain.

Finally, I turned to him with a gesture of resignation. "Nothing seems to happen," I said.

He appeared vastly relieved. "You are a man of intelligence," he said. "If it will not obey you, it is reasonably safe to assume that it will obey no one but me."

For several moments he was lost in thought, and then he straightened up and looked at me, and his eyes burned with demoniac fire. "I can be master of a world," he said; "perhaps I can even be master of the universe."

"With that?" I asked, nodding toward the ship.

"With the idea that it symbolizes," he replied: "with the idea of an inanimate object energized by scientific means and motivated by a mechanical brain. If I but had the means to do so—the wealth—I could manufacture these brains in great quantities, and I could put them into small flyers weighing less than a man weighs. I could give them means of locomotion in the air or upon the ground. I could give them arms and hands. I could furnish them with weapons. I could send them out in great hordes to conquer the world. I could send them to other planets. They would know neither pain nor fear. They would

have no hopes, no aspirations, no ambitions that might wean them from my service. They would be the creatures of my will alone, and the things that I sent them to do they would persist in until they were destroyed.

"But destroying them would serve my enemies no purpose; for faster than they could destroy them, my great factories would turn out more.

"You see," he said, "how it would work?" He came close and spoke almost in a whisper. "The first of these mechanical men I would make with my own hands, and as I created them I would impel them to create others of of their kind. They would become my mechanics, the workmen in my factories; and they would work day and night without rest, always turning out more and more of their kind. Think how rapidly they would multiply."

I was thinking of this. The possibilities astounded and stunned me. "But it would take vast wealth," I told him.

"Yes, vast wealth," he repeated; "and it was for the purpose of obtaining this vast wealth that I built this ship."

"You intend to raid the treasure-houses of the great cities of Barsoom?" I asked, smiling.

"By no means," he replied. "Treasures vastly richer lie at the disposal of the man who controls this ship. Do you not know what the spectroscope tells us of the riches of Thuria?"

"I have heard," I said, "but I never took much stock in it. The story was too fabulous."

"It is true, nevertheless," he said. "There must be mountains of gold and platinum on Thuria and vast plains carpeted with precious stones."

It was a bold enterprise; but after having seen this craft, and knowing the remarkable genius of Fal Sivas, I had little doubt but that it was feasible.

Suddenly, as was his way, he seemed to regret that he had confided in me and brusquely directed me to return to my duties in the shop.

THE old man had told me so much now that I naturally began to wonder if he would think it safe to permit me to live, and I was constantly on my guard. It seemed highly improbable that he would consent to my leaving the premises, but I determined to settle this question immediately; for I wanted to see Rapas before he could visit the establishment of Fal Sivas again, thereby compelling me to destroy him. Day after day had passed and Fal Sivas had contrived to prevent my leaving the house, though he had accomplished it so adroitly that it was never actually apparent that he did not wish me to leave.

As he dismissed me that evening, I told him that I was going out to try to locate Rapas and attempt again to contact the assassins of Ur Jan.

He hesitated so long before he replied that I thought he was going to forbid my going out, but at last he nodded in acquiescence.

"Perhaps it will be as well to do so," he said. "Rapas does not come here any more, and he knows too much to be at large, unless he is in my service and loyal to me. If I must trust one of you, I prefer that it be you, rather than Rapas."

I did not go to the evening meal with the others, as I intended eating at the place that Rapas frequented and where we had planned to meet when I was at liberty.

BUT it was necessary to inform Hamas of the fact I was leaving, as only he could open the outer door for me. His manner toward me was not quite as surly as it had been the past few days. In fact, he was almost affable; and this change in his manner put me even more on my guard, for I felt that it boded me no good—there was no reason why Hamas should love me any more today than he had yesterday. If I induced pleasant anticipations in him, it must be because he visualized something unpleasant befalling me.

From the house of Fal Sivas, I went directly to the eating-place; and there I inquired of the proprietor regarding Rapas.

"He has been in every evening," replied the man. "He usually comes about this time and again about half after the eighth zode, and he always asks me if you have been here."

"I will wait for him," I said, and I went to the table the Rat and I usually occupied.

I had scarcely seated myself before Rapas entered. He came directly to the table and seated himself opposite me.

"Where have you been keeping yourself?" he demanded. "I was commencing to think that old Fal Sivas had made away with you or that you were a prisoner in his house. I had about made up my mind to go there tonight and call on

the old man, so that I could learn what had happened to you."

"It is just as well that I got out tonight before you came," I said.

"Why?" he demanded.

"Because it is not safe for you to go to the house of Fal Sivas," I told him. "If you value your life, you will never go there again."

"What makes you think that?" he demanded.

"I can't tell you," I replied, "but just take my word for it, and keep away." I did not want him to know that I had been commissioned to kill him. It might have made him so suspicious and fearful of me that he would be of no value to me in the future.

"Well, it is strange," he said; "Fal Sivas was friendly enough before I took you there."

I saw that he was harboring in his mind the thought that, for some reason, I was trying to keep him away from Fal Sivas; but I couldn't help it, and so I changed the subject.

"Has everything been going well with you, Rapas, since I saw you?" I asked.

"Yes, quite well," he replied.

"What is the news of the city? I have not been out since I saw you last, and of course we hear little or nothing in the house of Fal Sivas."

"They say that the Warlord is in Zodanga," he replied. "Uldak, one of Ur Jan's men, was killed the last night that I saw you, as you will recall. The mark of the Warlord's agent was above his heart, but Ur Jan believes that no ordinary swordsman could have bested Uldak. Also he has learned from his agent in Helium that John Carter is not there; so, putting the two facts together, Ur Jan is convinced that he must be in Zodanga."

"How interesting," I commented. "And what is Ur Jan going to do about it?"

"Oh, he'll get his revenge," said the Rat; "if not in one way, then in another. He is already planning; and when he strikes, John Carter will wish that he had attended to his own affairs and left Ur Jan alone."

SHORTLY before we finished our meal, a customer entered the place and took a seat at a table across the room. I could see him in a mirror in front of me. I saw him glance in our direction, and then I looked quickly at Rapas and saw his eyes flash a message as he nodded his head very slightly; but without that, I would have known why the man was there, for I recognized him as one of the assassins that had sat at the council with Ur Jan. I pretended not to notice anything; and my glance wandered idly to the doorway, attracted by two customers who were leaving the place at the time.

Then I saw something else of interest—of vital interest. As the door swung open, I saw a man outside looking in. It was Hamas.

The assassin at the table across the room ordered only a glass of wine; and when he had drunk it, he arose and left. Shortly after his departure, Rapas also arose.

"I must be going," he said; "I have an important engagement."

"Shall I see you tomorrow night?" I asked.

I could see him attempt to suppress a grin. "I shall be here tomorrow night," he said.

We went out then onto the avenue; and Rapas left me, while I turned my steps in the direction of the house of Fal Sivas. Through the lighted districts I did not have to be particularly on my guard; but when I entered the darker sections of the city, I was watchful; and presently I saw a figure lurking in a dark doorway. I knew it was the assassin waiting to kill me.

CHAPTER VIII

Suspicion

CLUROS, the farther moon, rode high in the heavens, lighting dimly the streets of Zodanga like a dusty bulb in a huge loft; but I needed no better light to see the shadowy form of the man awaiting my coming.

I knew precisely what was in the man's mind, and I must have smiled. He thought that I was coming along in total ignorance of his presence or the fact that anyone was planning upon murdering me that night. He was saying to himself that after I had passed he would spring out and run his sword through my back; it would be a very simple matter, and then he would go back and report to Ur Jan.

As I approached the doorway, I paused and cast a hasty glance behind me. I wanted to make sure, if I could, that Rapas had not followed me. If I killed this man, I did not want Rapas to know that it was I who had done it.

Now I resumed my way, keeping a few paces from the building so that I would not be too close to the assassin when I came opposite his hiding-place.

When I did come opposite it, I turned suddenly and faced it. "Come out of there, you fool," I said in a low voice.

FOR a moment the man did not move. He seemed utterly stunned by his discovery and by my words.

"You and Rapas thought that you could fool me, didn't you?" I inquired. "You and Rapas and Ur Jan! Well, I will tell you a secret—something that Rapas and Ur Jan do not dream. Because you are trying to kill the wrong man, you are not using the right method. You think that you are attempting to kill Vandor, but you are not. There is no such person as Vandor. The man who faces you is John Carter, Warlord of Mars." I whipped out my sword. "And now if you are quite ready, you may come out and be killed."

At that, he came forth slowly, his long sword in his hand. I thought that his eyes showed a trace of astonishment and his voice certainly did, as he whispered, "John Carter!"

He did not show any fear, and I was glad of that, for I dislike fighting with a man who is really terrified of me, as he starts his fight with a severe handicap that he can never overcome.

"So you are John Carter!" he said, as he stepped out into the open, and then he commenced to laugh. "You think you can frighten me, do you? You are a first-class liar, Vandor; but if you were all the first-class liars on Barsoom rolled into one, you could not frighten Povak."

Evidently he did not believe me, and I was rather glad of it, for the encounter would now afford me far richer sport as there was gradually revealed to my antagonist the fact that he was pitted against a master swordsman.

As he engaged me, I saw that, while in no respect a mean swordsman, he was not as proficient as had been Uldak. I should have been glad to have played with him for a while, but I could not risk the consequences of being discovered.

So vicious was my attack that I soon pressed him back against the wall of the building. He had had no opportunity to do more than defend himself, and now he was absolutely at my mercy.

I could have run him through on the instant, but instead I reached out quickly with my point and made a short cut upon his breast and then I made another across it.

I stepped back then and lowered my point.

"Look at your breast, Povak," I said. "What do you see there?"

He glanced down at his breast, and I saw him shudder. "The mark of the Warlord," he gasped, and then, "Have mercy upon me; I did not know that it was you."

"I told you," I said, "but you wouldn't believe me; and if you had believed me, you would have been all the more anxious to kill me. Ur Jan would have rewarded you handsomely."

"Let me go," he begged. "Spare my life, and I will be your slave forever."

I saw then that he was a craven coward, and I felt no pity for him but only contempt.

"Raise your point," I snapped, "and defend yourself, or I shall run you through in your tracks."

Suddenly, with death staring him in the face, he seemed to go mad. He rushed at me with the fury of a maniac, and the impetuosity of his attack sent me back a few steps, and then I parried a terrific thrust and ran him through the heart.

At a little distance from me, I saw some people coming, attracted by the clash of steel.

A few steps took me to the entrance of a dark alley-way into which I darted; and by a circuitous route, I continued on my way to the house of Fal Sivas.

Hamas admitted me. He was very cordial. In fact, far too cordial. I felt like laughing in his face because of what I knew that he did not know that I knew, but I returned his greeting civilly and passed on to my quarters.

ZANDA was waiting up for me. I drew my sword and handed it to her.

"Rapas?" she asked. I had told her that Fal Sivas had commanded me to kill the Rat.

"No, not Rapas," I replied. "Another of Ur Jan's men."

"That makes two," she said.

"Yes," I replied; "but remember, you must not tell anyone that it was I who killed them."

"I shall not tell anyone, my master," she replied. "You may always trust Zanda."

She cleaned the blood from the blade and then dried and polished it.

I watched her as she worked, noticing her shapely hands and graceful fingers. I had never paid very much attention to her before. Of course, I had known that she was young and well-formed and good-looking; but suddenly I was impressed by the fact that Zanda was very beautiful and that with the harness and jewels and hairdressing of a great lady, she would have been more than noticeable in any company.

"ZANDA," I remarked at last, "you were not born a slave, were you?"

"No, master."

"Did Fal Sivas buy you or abduct you?" I asked.

"Phystal and two slaves took me one night when I was on the avenues with an escort. They killed him and brought me here."

"Your people," I asked, "—are they still living?"

"No," she replied; "my father was an officer in the old Zodangan Navy. He was of the lesser nobility. He was killed when John Carter led the green hordes of Thark upon the city. In grief, my mother took the last long journey on the bosom of the sacred Iss to the Valley Dor and the Lost Sea of Korus.

"John Carter!" she went on musingly, and her voice was tinged with loathing. "He was the author of all my sorrows, of all my misfortune. Had it not been for John Carter robbing me of my parents I should not be here now, for I should have had their watchful care and protection to shield me from all danger."

"You feel very bitterly toward John Carter, don't you?" I asked.

"I hate him," she replied.

"You would be glad to see him dead, I suppose."

"Yes."

"You know, I presume, that Ur Jan has sworn to destroy him?"

"Yes, I know that," she replied; "and I constantly pray that he will be successful. Were I a man, I should enlist under the banner of Ur Jan. I should be an assassin and search out John Carter myself."

"They say he is a formidable swordsman," I suggested.

"I should find a way to kill him, even if I had to descend to the dagger or poison."

I laughed. "I hope, for John Carter's sake, that you do not recognize him when you meet him."

"I shall know him all right," she said. "His white skin will betray him."

"Well, let us hope that he escapes you," I said laughingly, as I bade her good night and went to my sleeping-silks and furs.

THE next morning, immediately after breakfast, Fal Sivas sent for me. As I entered his study, I saw Hamas and two slaves standing near him.

Fal Sivas looked up at me from beneath lowering brows. He did not greet me pleasantly as was his wont.

"Well," he snapped, "did you destroy Rapas last night?"

"No," I replied; "I did not."

"Did you see him?"

"Yes, I saw him and talked with him. In fact, I ate the evening meal with him."

I could see that this admission surprised both Fal Sivas and Hamas. It was evident that it rather upset their calculations, for I judged that they had expected me to deny having seen Rapas, which I might have done had it not been for the fortunate circumstance that had permitted me to discover Hamas spying upon me.

"Why didn't you kill him?" demanded Fal Sivas. "Did I not order you to do so?"

"You employed me to protect you, Fal Sivas," I replied; "and you must rely upon my judgment to do it in my own way. I am neither a child nor a slave. I believe that Rapas has made connections that will be far more harmful to you than Rapas himself; and by permitting him to live and keeping in touch with him, I shall be able to learn much that will be to your advantage, that I could never learn if I destroyed Rapas. If you are not satisfied with my methods, get some one else to protect you; and if you have decided to destroy me, I suggest that you enlist some warriors. These slaves would be no match for me."

I could see Hamas trembling with suppressed rage at that, but he did not dare say anything or do anything until Fal Sivas gave him the word. He just stood there fingering the hilt of his sword and watching Fal Sivas questioningly, as though he awaited a signal.

BUT Fal Sivas gave him no signal. Instead, the old inventor sat studying me intently for several minutes. At last he sighed and shook his head. "You are a very courageous man, Vandor," he said; "but perhaps a little overconfident

and foolish. No one speaks to Fal Sivas like that. They are all afraid. Do you not realize that I have it within my power to destroy you at any moment?"

"If you were a fool, Fal Sivas, I might expect death this moment; but you are no fool. You know that I can serve you better alive than dead, and perhaps you also suspect what I know—that if I went out I should not go alone. You would go with me."

Hamas looked horrified and grasped the hilt of his sword firmly, as though about to draw it; but Fal Sivas leaned back in his chair and smiled.

"You are quite right, Vandor," he said; "and you may rest assured that if I ever decide that you must die, I shall not be within reach of your sword when that sad event occurs. And now tell me what you expect to learn from Rapas and what makes you believe that he has information that will be of value to me?"

"That will be for your ears alone, Fal Sivas," I said, glancing at Hamas and the two slaves.

Fal Sivas nodded to them. "You may go," he said.

"But, master," objected Hamas, "you will be left alone with this man. He may kill you."

"I shall be no safer from his sword if you are present, Hamas," replied the master. "I have seen and you have seen how deftly he wields his blade."

Hamas' red skin darkened at that; and without another word he left the room, followed by the two slaves.

"AND now," said Fal Sivas, "tell me what you have learned or what you suspect."

"I have reason to believe," I replied, "that Rapas has made connections with Ur Jan. Ur Jan, as you have told me, has been employed by Gar Nal to assassinate you. By keeping in touch with Rapas, it is possible that I may be able to learn some of Ur Jan's plans. I do not know of course, but it is the only contact we have with the assassins, and it would be poor strategy to destroy it."

"You are absolutely right, Vandor," he replied. "Contact Rapas as often as you can, and do not destroy him until he can be of no more value to us. Then—" His face was contorted by a fiendish grimace.

"I thought that you would concur in

With death staring him in the face, he rushed at me with the fury of a maniac; the impetuosity of his attack sent me back a few steps, and then I parried a terrific thrust and ran him through.

my judgment," I replied. "I am particularly anxious to see Rapas again tonight."

"Very well," he said, "and now let us go to the shop. The work on the new motor is progressing nicely, but I want you to check over what has been done."

Together we went to the shop; and after inspecting the work, I told Fal Sivas that I wanted to go to the motor room of the ship to take some measurements.

He accompanied me, and together we entered the hull. When I had completed my investigation I sought an excuse to remain longer in the hangar, as there was half-formed in my mind a plan that would necessitate more intimate knowledge of the room in the event that I found it necessary or feasible to carry out my designs.

In pretended admiration of the ship, I walked all around it, viewing it from every angle; and at the same time viewing the hangar from every angle. My particular attention was riveted upon the great doorway through which the ship was to eventually pass out of the building. I saw how the doors were constructed and how they were secured; and when I had done that, I lost interest in the ship for the time being at least.

I spent the balance of the day in the shop with the mechanics, and that night found me again in the eating-place on the Avenue of Warriors.

Rapas was not there. I ordered my meal and had nearly finished it, though I was eating very slowly; and still he had not come. Still I loitered on, as I was very anxious to see him tonight.

AT last, when I had about given him up, he came. It was evident that he was very nervous, and he appeared even more sly and furtive than usual.

"Kaor!" I said, as he approached the table. "You are late tonight."

"Yes," he said; "I was detained."

He ordered his meal and fidgeted about uneasily.

"Did you reach home last night all right?" he said.

"Why, yes, of course."

"I was a little bit worried about you," he said. "I heard that a man was killed on the very avenue through which you must have passed."

"Is that so?" I exclaimed. "It must have happened after I had passed by."

"It is very strange," he said; "it was one of Ur Jan's assassins, and again he had the mark of John Carter upon his breast."

He was eying me very suspiciously, but I could see that he was afraid even to voice what was in his mind. In fact, I think it frightened him even to entertain the thought.

"Ur Jan is certain now that John Carter himself is in the city."

"Well," I said, "why be so upset about it? I am sure that it does not concern either you or me."

CHAPTER IX

On the Balcony

EYES speak the truth more often than the lips. The eyes of Rapas the Ulsio told me that he did not agree with me that the killing of one of Ur Jan's assassins was of no concern to either him or me, but his lips spoke otherwise.

"Of course," he said, "it is nothing to me; but Ur Jan is furious. He has offered an immense reward for the positive identification of the man who killed Uldak and Povak. Tonight he meets with his principal lieutenants to perfect the details of a plan which, they believe, will definitely and for all time end the activities of John Carter against the guild of assassins. They—"

He stopped suddenly, and his eyes registered a combination of suspicion and terror. It was as though for a moment his stupid mind had forgotten the suspicion that it had held that I might be John Carter and then, after exposing some of the secrets of his master, he had recalled the fact and was terrified.

"You seem to know a great deal about Ur Jan," I remarked casually. "One would think that you are a full-fledged member of his guild."

For a moment he was confused. He cleared his throat several times as though about to speak, but evidently he could not think of anything to say, nor could his eyes hold steadily to mine. I must admit that I enjoyed his discomfiture greatly.

"No," he disclaimed presently; "it is nothing like that. These are merely things that I have heard upon the street. They are merely gossip. It is not strange that I should repeat them to a friend."

Friend! The idea was most amusing. I knew that Rapas was now a creature of Ur Jan's and that, with his fellows, he had been commissioned to kill me; and I had been commissioned by Fal Si-

vas to kill Rapas; yet here we were, dining and gossiping together. It was a most amusing situation.

As our meal drew to an end, two villainous-looking fellows entered and seated themselves at a table. No sign passed between them and Rapas, but I recognized them both and knew why they were there. I had seen them both at the meeting of the assassins, and I seldom forget a face.

The presence of these two men was a compliment to me and an admission that Ur Jan realized that it would take more than one swordsman to account for me.

I should have been glad to put my mark upon their breasts, but I knew that if I killed them, the suspicion that Ur Jan harbored that I might be John Carter would be definitely confirmed. The killing of Uldak and Povak and the marking of their breasts with the sign of the Warlord might have been a coincidence; but if two more men, sent to destroy me, met a similar fate, no doubt could remain even in a stupid mind but that all four had come to their end at the hands of John Carter himself.

THE men had scarcely seated themselves when I arose. "I must be leaving, Rapas," I said; "I have some important work to do tonight. I hope you will forgive me for running off like this, but perhaps I shall see you again tomorrow night."

He tried to detain me. "Don't hurry away," he exclaimed; "wait just a few moments. There are a number of things I should like to talk to you about."

"They will have to wait until tomorrow," I told him. "May you sleep well, Rapas," and with that I turned and left the building.

I went only a short distance along the avenue in the opposite direction to that which led toward the house of Fal Sivas. I concealed myself in the shadows of a doorway then and waited, nor had I long to wait before the two assassins emerged and hurried off in the direction in which they supposed I had gone. A moment or two later Rapas came out of the building. He hesitated momentarily and then he started walking slowly in the direction taken by the assassins.

When all three were out of sight, I came from my hiding-place and went at once to the building on the top of which my flyer was stored.

The proprietor was puttering around one of the hangars when I came onto the roof. I could have wished him elsewhere, as I did not particularly care to have my comings and goings known.

"I don't see much of you," he said.

"No," I replied; "I have been very busy." I continued in the direction of the hangar where my ship was stored.

"Going to take your flyer out tonight?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Watch out for the patrol-boats," he said, "if you are on any business you wouldn't want the authorities to know about. They have been awfully busy the last couple of nights."

I didn't know whether he was just giving me a friendly tip, or if he were trying to get some information from me. There are many organizations, including the government, that employ secret agents. For aught I knew, the fellow might be a member of the assassins' guild.

"Well," I said, "I hope the police don't follow me tonight." He pricked up his ears. "I don't need any help; and, incidentally, she is extremely good-looking." I winked at him and nudged him with my elbow as I passed, in a fashion that I thought his low mentality would grasp. And it did.

He laughed and slapped me on the back.

"I guess you're worried a little more about her father than you are about the police," he said.

"Say," he called after me, as I was climbing to the deck of my flyer, "aint she got a sister?"

As I slipped silently out over the city, I heard the hangar man laughing at his own witticism; and I knew that if he had had any suspicions of me I had lulled them.

IT was quite dark, neither moon being in the heavens; but this very fact would make me all the more noticeable to patrol-boats above me when I was passing over the more brilliantly lighted portions of the city, and so I quickly sought dark avenues and flew low among the dense shadows of the buildings.

It was a matter of only a few minutes before I reached my destination and dropped my flyer gently to the roof of the building that housed the headquarters of the Assassins' Guild of Zodanga.

This vividly imagined adventure beyond the stars becomes even more exciting in the next, the January, installment.

You're Young but Once

PHILIP CASTLE shrugged his big shoulders into a dressing-gown that cost more than a college boy should be able to afford, and grinned in a small-boyish and self-conscious way as he looked around, for the hundredth time, at his apartment. It wasn't, of course, quite like a fraternity house, but then of course freshmen didn't get into fraternity houses their first day in college.

There was an imported roadster sitting around the corner in the garage, and that wasn't strictly the regular collegiate equipment either. But then, those gray hairs of his weren't exactly the boyish coiffure; nor was a coat of tan, the color of an old and mottled saddle, standard equipment for the campus; and he guessed that maybe the apartment and the car would cancel the gray hair and the tan.

Pete Small would have got a kick out of this. But—Philip's face went sober—Pete was dead. Even so, he was sitting up some place now, probably, with his wings and his bridgework lying on a table beside him, and strumming a celestial harp—or more likely whetting a celestial machete—and lisping out a story about how he and Philip Castle had helped win the republic of something-or-other for the rebels and had earned fifty grand doing it. . . .

He saw Marian emerge from the library. He said: "May I take you where you're bound?"

The door-bell rang, and it snapped Castle out of his reverie. He walked over and opened the door. Four boys filed in.

"You're Philip Castle," the big curly-haired one, who seemed to be the leader, said. "Freshman?"

"That's right," Phillip admitted, grinning. Gee, it was pretty nice, some boys coming around to see you, your first day in school.

"I'm Arnold Marcum," the big one said—sort of like, "I'm Jack Dempsey."

"I'm glad to know you," Philip said. He stuck out his hand. There was an instant's hesitation; then Marcum took his hand, and introduced the three with him.

They stood uneasily, shifting from foot to foot for a moment, eying the apartment covertly, and casting quick, slightly awed glances toward Philip.

Arnold Marcum cleared his throat. "Freshman," he said, "did you read the bulletin-board when you were up at the Ad. Building enrolling today?"

"No," Philip said. "I didn't know there was one. Should I?"

"No," Marcum answered. "It doesn't matter now. I mean—" He seemed a little at sea. "I mean, we came over to tell you what was on it. About freshmen."

"Well, thanks—" Philip began.

"There is a little printed form on the board," Marcum said. "It gives the rules that freshmen have to abide by here at Eastminster. Rules that we all abide by."

"Gee," Philip said, "I'm sorry I missed it. It's white of you to come over."

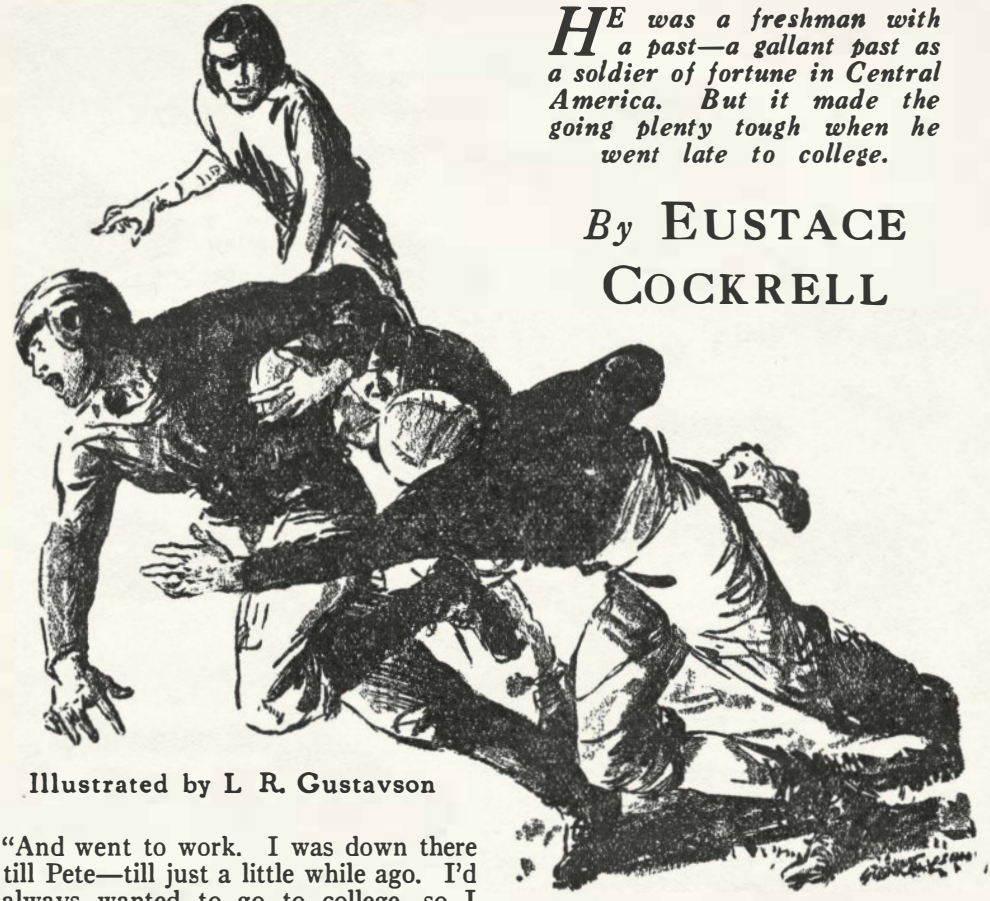
"Freshmen," Arnold Marcum said, "don't drive cars. They wear green caps. They address all upper-classmen as *sir*. They don't have dates. They don't—"

"Oh," Philip interrupted, "I see."

THE four boys stood silently watching him. Finally Philip said: "I didn't know, you see. I just came to college for one year, to sort of have some fun. I never got to go to college when I got out of high school. My old man died. I went down to the Tropics." He paused a minute, and looked at Arnold Marcum.

HE was a freshman with a past—a gallant past as a soldier of fortune in Central America. But it made the going plenty tough when he went late to college.

By EUSTACE COCKRELL



Illustrated by L R. Gustavson

Buckham's fullback took the ball up the field. Philip brought him down jarringly.

"And went to work. I was down there till Pete—till just a little while ago. I'd always wanted to go to college, so I thought I'd come back up here, and go a year just for fun."

"I guess you came to the wrong school," Arnold Marcum said. "Hazing is a tradition here. We all went through it. We can't let you off."

"I'm twenty-six," Philip said. "I'm too old for that sort of thing. I just want to go one year. I want to have some fun—" What was it Pete Small had told him? It had been hot, and the bush was green and dank around them, and the mosquitoes were hell. It had been a good show, but it was over now. Pete was bleeding to death inside, though Philip hadn't known it. "They'll pay off; you take my share, kid, and go back to the States and have some fun." Pete had died then.

The palms of Philip's hands felt wet. "I really—couldn't you make sort of an exception? I just want to go one year. You see," he finished, sounding a little desperate, "I'm twenty-six—" Twenty-six! He was a hundred and twenty-six! He'd seen so many people die. Quinine, heat, suffering. Dumb frightened natives driven to fight, a fear of their commander greater than a fear of their enemy, driving them. And Pete Small, holding his voice even, bleeding to death inside—"Go back to the States, kid, and have some fun."

ARNOLD MARCUM'S voice cut the silence now, a bit contemptuous.

"We know you've been a soldier of fortune. We've heard about you. I even met Peter Small once, and he told me about you. But you're a freshman here. A plain frosh, if you go to Eastminster."

Philip brightened up. "You knew Pete?" he said. "He was a great—"

"Yes, I met him once; but then—" Marcum's voice became a little edged. He could see that his companions were impressed by this Castle; that was bad. Wasn't Arnold Marcum the big shot on this campus, quarterback on the football team, president of the Blade and Scabbard? "But then, how do I know that all this stuff Peter Small told me about you—how do I know he wasn't lying?"

Philip stood up swiftly and hit the big curly-haired one. He was almost immediately ashamed. Hell, this kid didn't know—he was trying to impress the punks. Pete would have laughed. Pete would never have hit a kid like that because he was trying to show off a little. Then Philip forgot to think. He acted from instinct, for the three boys with Marcum were closing in. Marcum was struggling to his feet.

PHILIP had been in this spot too often; he knew what to do. He drew back his right foot and kicked Marcum in the head. He could handle three, when they were in front of him. He reached with his heavy tanned hands for the two nearest heads. His hands crunched into two necks, and he swung the heads together brutally. Unexpectedness made it effective. He dropped the two, and reached for the fourth member of the party, but he was gone out of the door. Philip pulled the three reviving figures out onto the little veranda of his apartment, then locked the door and sat down heavily. . . .

Eight whole years, ever since he had got out of high school, he had dreamed of going to college. Going to college collegiately. Maybe getting into a fraternity, going to dances, having dates with pretty girls. Doing the things that had been denied him as a boy of eighteen, and would have been denied him as a man of twenty-six except for eight years down there in the Tropics. . . . And what had happened?

Because this young fellow mentioned Pete Small, said something about Pete Small, he ruined the whole thing. And he had kicked him. That was worse. You had to kick a man when he was down sometimes, for a man can shoot as well lying down as any other way—but to these kids, kicking a man when he was down—that was something against some childish code. They didn't really fight; they wanted to play at fighting. Pete would have laughed.

He couldn't square this. There wasn't anything he could do about this. He guessed that the thing to do was to quit school. He'd manage to find some other school to go to—one where they didn't have hazing. Pete would have got a laugh out of this. . . . Would he? Would he have thought it funny to quit something you wanted to do, because some kid said that they were going to treat you like everybody else?

Philip knew the answer—knew, that for some reason—some really unreasonable reason that he connected with Pete, he couldn't—wouldn't—quit. It distressed him—the realization that he would go to school here, that he sort of *had* to go to school here—that he couldn't quit. . . .

There was a lot of discussion that night around in various places adjacent to the campus. Arnold Marcum, handicapped by a badly swollen lip, told his group of listeners: "We can't let him get away with this. It would make us look terrible. We've got to let him have it."

"That's right," said Red Smith, a big tackle on the team. "He kicked Marc. He's a heel, and dirty along with it."

"Get on the phone," Marcum directed. "We've got to get him, and we've got to get him tonight. Get all the football squad."

They got him, all right. Fifty boys can get any one man.

They painted one of his legs with green enamel, while ten huskies held him. They beat him with belts and paddles. They took him five miles into the country and threw him into a lake. He laid out four of them as they came in the door, but school spirit, or what have you, won. They gave Philip Castle the works.

THE next week was the worst Philip had ever experienced; and experiencing bad weeks had been his life, though he had never had to go against anything like this. He was ostracized. Even the professors were cool to him. He felt like doing anything but going on to school. But he went.

Then some one spoke to him—a girl. She was in his Spanish class. She said, walking down the hall after class: "Hello."

Philip knew who she was, and didn't like her for it. She was Arnold Marcum's girl. He glowered at her, suspecting something—he didn't know what.

She didn't seem to notice, though. He said: "Hello."

The next day they walked down the hall together, and Philip blurted out, unthinking: "Won't you ride downtown with me and have a drink?"

"All right," she said. "I'd like to."

They sat in a booth in the local confectionery. Her name was Marian McCoy. She was a senior, and lovely; more important, she was apparently entirely unfamiliar with his college career. Philip knew that this couldn't be so, but under her calm acceptance of him as he was at

Philip had been in this spot often; he knew what to do. His hands crunched into two necks and he swung the heads together brutally.

that moment, he thawed out. She was the first human being he had met since he had been here. She was swell.

He told her about his dream. He was still eighteen in a lot of ways.

She didn't say anything. She just sat and looked at her empty glass. And the doubt and uncertainty and the miserableness that was his, came over Philip like a great engulfing wave. He said, a bit truculently: "You mustn't ever mention what I've just told you, to anyone. I put you on your honor."

She said absently: "Is it honorable to kick a man when he's down?"

Philip lit a cigarette, and his hands trembled. He had straightened out a jam in a machine-gun once, with the enemy coming over a hill in thick bunches, and his hands hadn't trembled then. He said now flatly, with an almost noticeable effort to keep the despair out of his voice: "Okay." And then because he couldn't help it, he added: "I guess last week wasn't so bad, after all. If it's any satisfaction, I think you've made the future look a good deal worse."

She looked up, startled. She groped for something to say, but his face looked pretty dark. It scared her a little. She jumped up. "I've got to run," she said. "Thanks." She left him sitting there.

Sitting there glumly, feeling sorry for himself, feeling like hell, he kept running into things to explain—but which he couldn't explain. He should have made her understand. She was smart. She could get his slant. But no—he had to get tough. Make things even worse! He'd quit school. But—he couldn't quit.

That night, sitting in his apartment, he heard a knock at the door. He moved a couple of chairs in case he needed to move around—he had tripped on one the last time he'd had callers!—and called: "Come in."

A short, grizzled man opened the door, walked in. He picked out a chair and sat down. "I'm Matt Wood," he said. "The football coach."

Philip, standing, said: "Well?"

Matt Wood pulled his chair a little nearer the fireplace, cocked his feet up, hauled out a stogie and lit it.

Philip remained standing. He said again, his voice edged: "Well?"

Matt Wood said easily, conversationally: "Sit down, son. I'm just folks."

Philip sat down gingerly. "I don't give a damn what you are," he said.

Pete Small—bleeding to death inside, though Philip hadn't known it—had said: "Go back to the States, kid, and have some fun."

"You might win from me," the coach said, looking directly at Philip for the first time. "But not this time."

"And why not?" Philip's voice was dangerous. "I've won from better guys than you'll ever be."

"Not when the guys were as close to that big poker as I am, and you twelve feet away."

Philip looked at him a long moment, calculatingly. Matt gazed abstractedly into the empty fireplace.

PHILIP grinned, stood up slowly. "Right," he said. "I guess you're not a college boy."

Matt Wood agreed. "No," he said. "I'm a good while ex."

Philip walked into the kitchen and came back with a bottle of whisky. He poured two drinks, straight. He held one out. "Here's how," he said. Then he grinned and added: "To the school."

"Take a good one, son," Matt told him. "It's the last you're gonna get for a while." He puffed his cigar a minute, then, as if talking to himself, added: "With a big fast center, I got this conference race sewed up."

Philip laughed. "Any openings on the tiddly-winks team?" he asked. "I don't fancy the boys would play football very harmoniously with me."

"No," Matt said. "They wouldn't play very harmoniously with you."

"I see," Philip said. "Just out fulfilling social engagements. Well, it's all right with me. Have another drink."

"No," Matt answered. "I don't mean no to the drink—you're wrong. You'll fit all right."

He got up and accepted the drink from Philip, then looked at it absently.

"Listen," he said slowly: "I like a winner. Just as you fight to win, I want to win with my teams. But before I try to tell you anything, I want you to know that my motives are pure. I think you'll help my football team, and I think I'll help you. I know these lads around here think you're plenty dirty. I think I know better. They want to make a fight a sportin' event, and they don't know about people who have fought when they *had* to win. A guy they call a dirty fighter might be the cleanest boxer in the world. They don't understand that.

"I think you'll play clean football—if I didn't, I wouldn't try to get you out. I also know that you look like a good prospect to me, and ought to help my team. We've got four-year eligibility here. We have only a few students, and a small squad. But we got plenty of spirit."

"Spirit!" Philip broke in contemptuously. "These kids! What do they know about—"

"I aint gonna argue with you," Matt told him. "I asked you to come out for football, and you wouldn't come. That's my story. They think you are phony on your Central American stuff, anyway."

"Let 'em think what they like," Philip said. "Two or three of them know I'm not afraid to go."

"Well," Matt said, "I'm sorry. I sort of hoped you'd like to play with them. You might show a few of them up."

"If I was smart," Philip told him slowly, after a moment, "I'd tell you to go to hell."

Matt Wood stretched luxuriously and walked to the door.

"Thanks, kid," he said. "I'll see you at the gym tomorrow. Don't let people see you smokin', and cut out the liquor. Promise?"

Philip smiled at him. "All right, Doctor," he said. "I promise."

Philip got a lot of funny looks when he checked out a suit the next day, but nobody said anything. He stripped down pretty, though he had a little fat around his stomach, and he could see the others eying him covertly as he pulled on his togs.

The rest of the squad had been out for a couple of weeks and looked to be in fair condition. Philip noticed this as he dressed, the unfamiliar feel of cleats on his feet bringing back sharp memories of his high-school football days.

WHEN the squad had trotted out on the field, Matt Wood came over and took Philip off by himself. He had divided up the rest into three teams and had set them to running signals, hitting the dummy and the like. Philip noticed that what appeared to be the varsity was in charge of Arnold Marcum. Matt told him Marcum was the captain, as he showed him how to set himself over the ball.

"I want you to pass the ball back to me," he told Philip. "I want you to pass the ball back to me—I'm gonna put myself in every position a ball-lugger of mine will ever be in—I want you to pass the ball back until you can lay it in there unconscious."

Philip got a ball and started snapping it back, usually poorly, but later with more precision, for two solid hours. He ached all over. His hands hurt, his back hurt and the sweat from the little roll of fat around his stomach fed into little trickles down under his pants every time he straightened up. Matt worked with him an hour, and then sent over a scrawny sub as a receiver, who eyed him distrustfully and volunteered nothing.

Matt scrimmaged his two teams for a while, ran his varsity through a dummy scrimmage and sent them in. Then he came back to Philip. They worked another half-hour.

"That's all," he said finally. "Three laps."

Those three laps were real torture. Philip's wind was terrible; his back was one big ache. He staggered in after the third one, a catching stitch in his side, and venom in his heart. The rest of the squad had showered and gone when he got in. He had the trainer rub him down, took a warm shower, and dragged himself into his clothes.

As he climbed into his roadster outside the gym, he saw a figure emerge from the library. It was Marian.

He fiddled with the ignition-switch a minute, stalling. She came down the walk quite close. He said: "May I take you where you're bound?"

She came over, and as he opened the door she said: "That's nice. I'm tired."

He jammed his foot on the starter; and as the motor caught, he felt the muscles of his left calf come into an agonizing knot. He bent over, and as if fumbling with a garter, kneaded viciously until the cramp eased and he could move his foot.

They rolled down the drive, gray in the growing dusk of late September. The girl said, casually: "I like your self-control. Cramps like that are painful as the devil. Matt must have put you through."

Philip hid his surprise. "Where may I take you?" he asked.

"Home," she said after a moment. "You turn right at the corner."

He drove slowly until, even to him, used to silences, this one became painful. He said casually: "The campus is pretty now, the vines and all. It looks reassuringly permanent."

"Yes," she agreed. "I like it. I hate to think of anyone not liking it."

He let her out at her sorority house, and she thanked him. He didn't see her then, except in class, for a month. But he thought of her a lot.

HE learned to snap the ball back. The second game of the season, Matt put him in for the last quarter. He played a grand defensive game—bang-up! He was competent on offense. The rest of the team played better too. They'd be damned if they were to be shown up by any cheap yellow imitation soldier of fortune!

Eastminster won—twenty-one to nothing.

Matt Wood, as he noticed the shaded increase in tempo when Philip went in, grinned to himself. Marian McCoy, trying to watch line play with no special knowledge of football, even so caught the change, and looked a little sad.

Philip Castle played football—as best he could. That was the implied bargain with Matt Wood, and he was trying to live up to it; and he played cleanly because it was natural.

Matt came over to his apartment that night after the game. Philip was sitting in front of the fireplace doing nothing—looking at the fire; he did a lot of that. He had seen Marian with Arnold Marcum

As Philip pushed himself up with his good hand, Marcum stormed back up the field. "You dirty yellow double-crossing rat!" he yelled.

after the game. Marcum was the hero. A really great broken-field runner, and a daring field general, he had scored all three touchdowns.

Matt sat down and said, after a pause: "You did all right, son. Except there's one thing I would like to tell you now."

Philip answered vaguely: "Fire away."

"I want you to experiment a little. I want you to become a really great center. You are that already on defense. I want you that way on offense too, now. I want you to start leading the ball-carrier a little. It's a finely drawn thing. You can't have the backfield in motion, but you can have the ball-carrier with his weight right—leaning the right way." He paused and lit a cigar. "You see what I mean?"

Philip told him that he did—expressionlessly. But a still small voice said something inside of him, and something in his heart that had been fading came back to life.

Matt Wood was going on. "You see, a great snapper can make a fast man slow and a slow man fast. He can start the runner off with the ball just coming to him as he gets under way, or he can hold him on the wrong foot until the play is really started. Rhythm and split-second advantages make great football teams. The center sets the tempo of the backfield."

"Yes," Philip said again. "I see."

He started the next game, and in it he experimented with his passes back from center as Matt Wood had told him to.

He could, he found, make Arnold look ordinary with a bad pass, one that didn't look bad from the sidelines but wasn't quite in there. He also found that he could make him look great—which he was.

It didn't matter, though. Eastminster's opponent, a small college in their own conference, was no match for Matt

Woods' smooth machine. It wasn't even close.

He saw Marian after that game, the first time since he had taken her home after his first day out for football. Again he asked her to ride. She accepted.

"You played a nice game, Mr. Castle," she said.

"Don't you think," he asked, "that 'Mr. Castle' sounds a little too austere? After all, I'm just middle-aged."

"Yes," she agreed quickly. "I'll call you Philip. You played a nice game, Philip."

"Thank you, Miss McCoy," he said.

They both laughed.

He didn't take her straight home. She didn't seem to mind. They talked a little, too, this time—about football, and about the school. They laughed at his taking Spanish, when he knew it so much better than the instructor.

When they stopped in front of the sorority house, Philip, mustering his courage, asked:

"May I come over and see you tonight?"

"I'm sorry," she told him. "I'm going to a show tonight with Arn—" She stopped.

Philip felt his heart subside suddenly.

She said hastily: "Perhaps some other time."

He agreed abstractedly. "Yes, perhaps some other time."

He didn't walk up to the house with her. She took a couple of steps, turned, and came back to the car. "I'm sorry," she said softly, "about what I said downtown that time." She turned and walked quickly away.

Philip drove home slowly, almost afraid to let himself think how much he hated Arnold Marcum.

But it didn't matter. For five successive games Arnold Marcum was the elusive wraith that really great broken-field runners are. And in three of these games he was individually responsible for a Eastminster victory. They couldn't stop him. He returned two kick-offs for touchdowns, and his return of punts was sensational. He did the kicking; he ran the team—and he was good.

SO also was Philip, but in a different way. He was a mainstay of defense. Playing a roving center, grubbing in, plugging holes in the line, he was a tremendous power. A cold, fast diagnostician, a vicious tackler. Robbing opposing backs of yardage and first downs —too entirely competent to be spectacular.

Twice during this period Philip had taken Marian McCoy home after practice. But somehow, it wasn't the way it had been that one time. They talked, and really got to know each other fairly well—or so it seemed to Philip; but he didn't ask her for any more dates.

AND then Eastminster arrived at the final game of the season—the game with Buckham.

Buckham had been on Eastminster's schedule for forty years. It was a throwback to a distant day when they had been schools of equal size, before Buckham went into the big Valley Conference and started putting itself on the football map. But they still played on Thanksgiving day. This would be the last game, though, for Buckham had taken Eastminster off their schedule. Eastminster hadn't won from Buckham in nine years.

Philip had a funny tense feeling when they trotted out on the field against that team—that big red team that had won the Valley Conference, and was pretty much the pride of the Middle West. Matt hadn't given them any pep talk. He had told them to play their best; he'd told them that if they lost, to lose hard. To Philip, this was disquieting. Matt was usually so confident.

Eastminster kicked off. Buckham's big powerhouse fullback—two-twenty on the hoof—took the ball straight up the field for twenty yards, disdaining to dodge a stiff-arm. Philip brought him down, and it jarred him to his heels.

Then the Buckham quarterback sang out—without a huddle, without signals: "All right, gang, let's clip the first one off right through old Pancho Villa. Let's carry the mail!"

The big fullback hammered off five yards right through the center of the line.

Philip dragged himself to his feet, and as the Eastminster line went dazedly back into position, he said cruelly: "All right, you lily-livered heels, they've run two plays, and I've made two tackles. They made the crack at me, but every time they gain, they gain through you *too!*"

It worked. It worked like a charm. Eastminster's line rose up and held. They would be double-damned if they would be shown up by their center.

There was an exchange of punts, and as Eastminster held for the second time,

—though they couldn't gain themselves, and holding that Buckham team was cruel, bruising business,—Philip felt in his soul that, but for the quicksilver in the cleats of Arnold Marcum, this game would be a scoreless tie.

He felt it in his soul, and he was right.

And so it came to him. It came to him in a rush of bitter thought: Arnold Marcum, the hero—the man that beat Buckham. He could almost see the headlines: *"Marcum Beats Champs with Sensational Run."* Marcum, the man who must have Philip Castle wear a green cap. The man who had dates with Marian McCoy. The man who had shattered his dream. Well, this was the end. Arnold Marcum wouldn't be a hero this day if he could help it—and he knew he could.

MARCUM, standing on his own twenty-five-yard line, called an end run from punt formation. It was a play designed to shake him loose, dangerous on a third down, but smart, daring football.

Philip's pass from center floated lazily, a little to the right. Marcum, half under way with that beautiful springing bound with which he could throw himself into full speed so astoundingly, slumped back flat-footed, reaching carefully to avoid a fumble. Buckham's big forwards swarming through tossed him for a seven-yard loss. On the next play he kicked out of danger.

"Damn!" he exclaimed after the ends had brought down the Buckham safety man. "Watch your passes."

Philip grinned. "Don't cry," he said. "Just because these boys haven't read about you in the papers, don't blame me."

Philip was crafty. You couldn't tell from the stands. It simply looked as if Arnold Marcum couldn't go in fast company. But Philip knew he was cutting Arnold Marcum's throat, knew he was making him look just like any other back.

Even Marcum didn't know what was wrong. He knew something was wrong, but he was only a kid. He wouldn't think of anyone doing a thing such as Philip Castle was doing with his passes back from center.

And so the first half ended—ended nothing to nothing. It was a grand show if you like to see bang-up defensive football—and Philip Castle was the best man on the field.

Matt Wood gave them no pep talk between halves. He was strangely silent. He said: "We'll get 'em this half. Use Sixty-seven, Arnold." He looked then directly at Philip. "Get your pass in there, Castle." As they walked out for the second half, he took Philip by the arm.

"For God's sake, don't get hurt, son. They'd ruin us if you came out of there."

And that was one of the reasons Philip Castle broke—reverted to himself, under a piled-up jumble of emotions that he couldn't analyze. Pete Small had told him something about winning once. It didn't apply to the fight in the parlor of his flat, and it didn't apply here, because Pete Small didn't know a football from a pineapple. He couldn't remember it, but it didn't matter. All his troubles had started defending Pete Small's honor—or was that the reason? Certainly Pete Small wouldn't do what he was doing.

In the middle of the third quarter Philip called time out. He called Marcum aside.

"I hate your guts," he said quickly, evenly. "But I don't like to lose. I'm not used to it. I've been stopping you back there with bad passes. I'm through, though. We'll shake you loose and win this ball-game."

Marcum looked at him silently. Finally he said: "I'm sorry for what I said. Pete Small must have been a pretty right guy."

Philip's throat felt a little funny then, and he couldn't say anything for a second. At last, looking away, he said: "You keep your trap shut about this." He paused. And then, because it was like getting out from under a blanket on a hot night, and he felt a lot better than he had for a long time, and really pretty swell, even if he was a wash-out collegiately, he grinned. "Or I'll kick you in the other eye," he added.

THEY went then. They started outplaying Buckham, and the stands caught the change and gave them vocal credit. But Marcum couldn't get away. He couldn't do it. But he had Sixty-seven up his sleeve, and he hoped that would prove a scoring play. He thought it would.

The fourth quarter was two-thirds over before he found a spot where he thought the play would work. They were to line up, run a regular line play, then without signals line up again. Then there would be the argument. Red Smith, who could

throw a football a mile, would walk back, checking signals to argue with the fullback—walk back twelve yards out of the line. Marcum, to keep seven men on the line of scrimmage, would step up. Philip then would stand up, hands on his hips, exasperated—then stoop quickly, snap the ball to Red, and Red cut loose.

Arnold Marcum with the wings on his heels would catch that pass. . . . Touchdown!

Old stuff, in itself. But a man as fast as Marcum is new in any league. He'd be away before the tired Buckham team could orient itself. Philip felt it couldn't miss.

They ran the preliminary play, making no gain. Philip charged forward halfheartedly; his foot slipped; somebody crashed down onto his shoulder. He jabbed his right hand down to save himself, and heard a snap like a dry stick breaking underfoot.

PAIN ran up his arm in hot streams. He felt suddenly sick. But he lined up over the ball, rose, and stood with his hands on his hips. There was Red back there now. It was still all right. One big effort—he could do it. He had to do it now. He stooped swiftly, snapped the ball.

He knew the pass was sour, knew it was wrong as he saw Marcum, like a frightened doe, sprint wide down the field.

Red Smith, tackle, unused to handling the ball, who had to have a perfect pass from center, dived awkwardly, a look of pained incredulous surprise wrinkling his face.

Buckham's forwards swarmed through joyfully, and beat him to the fumble.

It was Buckham's ball in the middle of the field.

Philip had fallen on his face. He pushed himself up with his good left hand as Marcum stormed back up the field.

"Beautiful," he yelled. "Swell! You dirty yellow double-crossing rat!"

Philip heard those words. Then he knew they were directed at him. He had thought he hated Arnold Marcum; now he knew he hadn't. For now he really hated him.

Marcum had asked for no explanation, hadn't even given him a chance to offer one. He'd turned like a rat and believed that he, Philip Castle, would pull a double-cross like that. Okay, then, to hell with him! To hell with everything! But by God, he'd check out with *his* slate clear. And even if they couldn't win this football game, they wouldn't lose it.

Eastminster as a team gave up then. When they heard Marcum yell, they caught on. They figured it all out, and the ones that didn't figure it out at once, had it told to them quickly. Castle had sold out to show up Marcum—and so they gave up. They figured they couldn't win against twelve men. They quit.

All but Philip Castle. He didn't quit. He played the whole line, making almost all the tackles, raging, his one hand dangling, using his right elbow as a hook —creating searing, tearing pain, with every tackle.

And though Buckham marched, they marched slowly. They turned their big fullback loose against that wilted line in a race against the gun, and hammered, hammered Philip Castle, groggy, white, almost crying.

But the gun caught them—caught them on the five-yard line.

Philip ran when he heard the gun. He ran for his car, football-suit and all. Things were blurring now; some one—he thought it might be Matt—tried to stop him, but he pushed him aside. He drove awkwardly, with one hand, to his apartment, phoned a doctor, and fainted. Cold.

He came to when some one pounded on the door, and got up and let the doctor in. He got his clothes off, and the doctor set his hand. He had the bone of his right thumb broken well back in his hand.

He bathed and dressed then, the sweat running down his face in rivulets as he strove with tie and shirt one-handedly. Then, as he finished dressing, he heard another knock on his door. He pushed the bandaged hand into his jacket pocket and opened the door.

Marian McCoy walked in.

FOR a minute they stood, neither saying anything, just looking at each other.

Then the girl said slowly, trying to hide the anxiety in her voice:

"Let me see your hand."

Philip sat down. His knees felt funny. "How did you know?"

"You hurt your hand when we lost the ball," she said. "It's broken, isn't it?"

"Let's have a drink," Philip said weakly.

"No. . . . Well, yes," she amended.

"Then you must get dressed. I'll get Matt to come over and help you."

"Dressed?"

"Yes," Marian said. "You're taking me to the dance."

"The what?"

"The dance, silly—you know, hop, function, ball."

Philip didn't say anything. He sat in his chair and looked dazed.

"You will, please, won't you, Mr. Castle?" she said finally.

They laughed together. "I don't care if I do," he said. . . .

Matt, nipping at the Scotch as he helped Philip into his dinner jacket that night, looked pleased. Fatuously so. "Smart niece," he said. "Smart gal, Marian. I didn't think about it myself—I mean your hand. They about had me thinking you had sold dear old Eastminster down the river."

Philip agreed. "Discerning and intelligent girl," he said.

He hid his bandaged hand under the scarf she wore, as they danced in the dimly lighted old gymnasium. He danced a lot better, Philip discovered, with Marian, than he had ever danced before. The orchestra was swell; the lights were low; he had the best-looking girl on the campus in his arms.

"Isn't this just a little like your dream?" she asked.

"No," he said a little gruffly. "It was a nightmare compared to this."

"Do you know," she said irrelevantly, "the Blade and Scabbard picks the outstanding freshman at this dance tonight. They make him an honorary member."

"I don't care whether they pick a hog-calling champion. I don't—"

Somebody swung him around, was fumbling at his coat. He pushed Marian aside. It was Marcum. He drew back his right hand—then remembered, just in time. He couldn't hit him. His hand was broken.

Suddenly he looked down. Something glinted on his coat-lapel. It was undoubtedly a little blade and scabbard. He said, smiling tightly: "I damn' near popped you then—if hadn't been for my hand—"

"I know," Arnold Marcum said quickly. "I know about that. But if you want me to, I'll lie down and you can kick me."

"To hell with you, son!" Philip Castle said. "I wouldn't kick a man when he's down."

He turned back to Marian.

Wings over

Lost in the fog with seven air-sick passengers, he had a bit of luck. . . . A fine story by the pilot-writer who gave us "Ship of Prey."

DEAK PERRY growled: "If I don't get out of here before long, I won't get to bed tonight, I tell you." And standing at a window on the lee side of the room, he sniffed deeply of the damp, clean air. "I can smell weather. I've done it for ten years. It isn't going to fog in here. I know damn' well I can get back."

Young Harry Haines, the Richmond dispatcher, grinned across the room and said: "I expect your nose is good, all right, but I'd better hold you till we get a last report. . . . Listen to that rain!"

A gust of wind whined eerily across the hangar eaves, and in the white glare of the gas-pit floodlights, rain laid a pattern of slanting crystal lines against the window-panes. Beyond the lights, darkness shut down thickly. Deak Perry's plane, standing on the loading ramp with engines hugged tight in their covers, rocked gently from successive blasts, and the corrugations of its bright aluminum fuselage sent dancing light-shafts back into the office here.

The teletype machine clanged twice unhurriedly, and its type bars lifted to a quick rhythmical thudding. Yellow tape sliced through a slot, looping down into the basket on the floor, bearing black numerals and letters in a long, unhopeful sequence. Deak Perry cursed beneath his breath. He straightened his long, spare frame and paced across to see this new report. Haines, letting tape cascade from his fingers, said: "It looks as if you have to stay here, now. . . . And will these passengers be sore! Newark has a hundred feet, with moderate fog and heavy rain."

Deak Perry yawned, stretched violently, and rubbed thin palms harshly down across his narrow, faintly hawkish face. A gritty weariness was in his eyes. All the way from Jacksonville he had fought this blustering northeaster. Normally, he was relieved here by another pilot.

Washington

By LELAND JAMIESON

Illustrated by Austin Briggs

But tonight, because the runs were all mixed up in weather, he was supposed to take the ship on through to Newark, if he could.

Well, he thought grimly, if Haines had let him clear two hours ago, as soon as he'd got in, he could have done so. But Haines had made him sit here, "watching" weather. He resented that as a reflection on his judgment. He knew when it was safe to fly; he could judge the weather as well as any weather man. He could, he maintained, detect the trend by smell. How this was possible he was unable exactly to explain, but when he sniffed the air and said, "It'll fog in here, tonight," it nearly always did.

Tonight, he thought with hard-boiled irascibility, was just another illustration that the good old days were gone forever. All the happiness, the "kick" he used to get from flying, seemed replaced now by a glowering dissatisfaction. He couldn't get used to flying passengers, after ten years on a parachute, riding the night mail. He'd been at this a month—a month of delays because of ceiling regulations, a month of feeling conspicuous in a hated uniform, a month of being curbed on every hand.

The teletype still thudded out its figures. Watching them, Perry exclaimed: "Hey! See this? Washington has six hundred now. Let's go!"

Haines answered with a note of caution: "It's been variable tonight." But he was hopeful. At this hour, the passengers were in no gentle mood.

Perry said: "Sure it's been variable. But it isn't going to close in tight. We'll get that far okay. So let's get out of here, at least."

Harry Haines lifted the microphone on his desk and his voice boomed out through the loud-speaker system: "Northbound plane departing in five minutes. Attention—Johnny Burrows and Miss Holloway!"

Deak Perry stood in frowning study of the last sector weather-map that was pinned on the board above the teletype machine. A "high" was centered in the east St. Lawrence Valley, and these blustering March winds were howling out of it, filled with a cold rain that would be sleet if the temperature went down another four degrees. A Gulf "low" was causing the precipitation. It was shallow, and therefore, there should be no great amount of wind aloft—but what there was would be from the southwest.

He had seen this same condition a dozen or more times, and had always gone on through. But this was the first occasion he had faced it with a load of passengers, knowing that his judgment must protect them from disaster. Standing there, he longed for an open cockpit plane and a parachute. If he had them, he'd go on through to Newark, without trying to make his stops *en route*. And standing there, for the first time in his life he had a queer, subconscious nervousness about this thing. Yet he was sure; he'd done it before, and he'd do it again.

THE passengers, responding sluggishly to the loud-speaker, roused themselves and sleepily began to collect personal belongings. Outside, working in drenching rain, two mechanics started pulling off the motor covers. A moment later the first of the three engines barked heavily to life.

Johnny Burrows, the co-pilot, came into the office from the pilot's room. A well-proportioned, black-haired youngster with a square, full face, he was still groggy with interrupted sleep. He said morosely, "Some day I'm going to get

As the descent continued, his nerves tightened almost to the breaking point.

myself a day run, so I can really pound my ear!"—and started picking up his flight-reports and weight-charts.

Deak Perry, yawning, said: "You can stand another hour without cracking, can't you? Step on it, so we can roll."

Bette Holloway, smart blue hat cocked over one eye, brown fur coat thrown loosely about sturdy shoulders, came through the waiting-room. She was not pretty, if you analyzed her features, but there was about her somehow a perennial cheerfulness that nothing seemed able to defeat. He could see now that she was very tired.

"Sorry to drag you out again," he said, slipping on his raincoat. "I tried to get a mail ship and go on alone," he added, heavily sarcastic, "but the passengers 'are a pilot's first consideration,' don't you know? We're canceling in Washington, instead of here."

She said in her rich, deep voice: "I don't mind, Deak. You look as if you need some rest yourself."

"Try and get it, in this business now," he returned bitterly, and swung through the door. Outside, wind and rain sliced at him. This was a night you earned your money. The weather wasn't difficult, but passengers kept you worried all the time, and complicated things. He could not become adjusted to the idea of accepting their responsibility; his ideas were fixed and hard to change. But he knew he had to change, or his job would not last long. Head down, he sprinted to the plane.

The mechanic moved from the pilot's seat, saying: "Okay, Deak; this place is wet as hell." Perry sat down, idling the starboard engine. The cockpit did leak; cold water dribbled down his neck, and he pulled his collar tight. Rain writhed across the windshield in twisting cords. It was cold, and the air was clammy with a penetrating dampness. Perry shivered, thinking, "Another hundred miles against this gale!"

The passengers ran from the waiting-room, singly and in pairs, coats over heads. Johnny Burrows, uniform blotched dark with rain, came up the aisle and took his place, shouting, "What a night for ducks!" Bette Holloway climbed through the door and bolted it. Harry Haines, in slicker and rubbers, moved wetly to the guard-rail and waved his flag.

Perry gunned the plane from the concrete ramp, creeping cross-wind to the north-south runway. He swung into the wind; then Johnny held the brakes, and Perry ran the engines singly to check the mags. He was very careful, revving the center one until the turn-and-bank and artificial horizon were functioning, and then walking the rudder in quick jerks that swung the tail and made the turn needle arc across its dial in smooth reaction. "Okay!" he yelled to Johnny Burrows, and turned down the cockpit lights until only the instruments were dimly visible.

IT was a wild take-off. The runway was a narrow lane of muddy water spraying from the wheels. When they hit a deep place the plane slowed sluggishly, like a car plowing through an area of sand. In this rain, they couldn't see much, even with the windshield open. The wheels hit a little ridge and bounced off. The plane settled heavily, then struggled off again—and that time Perry held it off.

He felt better when they were in the air. This wasn't anything—he was only working at his job. Now that he was up here, with the night closed in around the earth—up here looking for the wink of beacons, with the thunder of the engines in his ears, his sense of apprehension and vague insecurity left him altogether.

Rapidly, flying almost entirely by his instruments, he climbed and reached the ceiling at eight hundred feet. The clouds were ragged on the bottom. The navigation lights bloomed red and green, went blank a moment, and bloomed once more steadily as the clouds grew solid higher up.

He leveled off, easing down until he was once more beneath the ceiling. The air was violent. Bumps came in quick succession, throwing the ship, tossing everyone against his belt or hard against

his seat. But that was nothing; that was the way it had been the last hour before reaching Richmond. Rough air—there was nothing to worry about in that. The wings weren't coming off.

TEN minutes out—the ship, against this wind, seemed scarcely crawling—Bette Holloway came forward through the cockpit door, clutching for support. Deak Perry heard her straining voice behind him, and turned momentarily to see her face dimly sculptured in the reflection of the lights upon the board.

"Deak!" she shouted weakly. "These people can't stand it! Everyone is sick already. Can't you go high enough to find smooth air?"

Perry waved his gloved hand to Johnny Burrows to take over the controls. He turned to Bette. "I can," he yelled, "but I'd lose contact with the ground. I'd better stay down here, so I can see if the weather makes a sudden change."

For once, her cheerfulness was absent. Shadows of weariness showed beneath her eyes, and she was deathly pale. "Deak," she said with a note of desperation, "I'm sick, too! I shouldn't have eaten anything in Richmond. I'm so sick I'm afraid I'm going to faint, and this cabin is a frightful mess."

He nodded sympathetically. "Okay. Upstairs we go. You can leave this door open for more air."

The clouds swallowed them as he pulled the nose up. The temperature, as he continued the ascent, fell steadily. If it continued to fall, the plane would begin "icing" presently. But he would go as high as possible, searching for smooth air. Below, where a few scattered lights of a village had gleamed weakly through the rain, mist pressed up against the belly of the ship. The altimeter crawled around, from a thousand to two thousand. It was at twenty-seven hundred when the air smoothed out.

Immediately the temperature increased. And almost immediately, on the right side behind the co-pilot, an explosive metallic report cracked against their ears above the roar of the exhausts. The plane shivered. "Good God!" Johnny Burrows cried. "A prop let go!"

Face grave, Deak Perry only shook his head. "Ice melting off the prop," he said. "We did get some, after all." But he was disturbed. The farther north he went, the colder this sub-strata would become, and the more ice he would get in going back down through it. He'd have to go down quickly, when he started; and he'd have to go down while still well south of Washington, to avoid the risk of monuments and radio towers that thrust up almost a thousand feet into the sky. He thought: "I ought to go down now, but some passenger will report me for not staying in smooth air. I can't afford that—I've been reported too damn' many times already for 'inconsideration.' I can make it, here."

The Richmond radio beam went silent, and a voice tolled off the conditions up the line. Newark had moderate fog and zero ceiling. "Washington," said the operator; "Washington, ceiling five hundred feet, overcast, light rain; visibility three miles; wind northeast sixteen; temperature thirty-five dash one; barometer thirty zero two."

"I can make it," Perry repeated to himself, and checked the time. It was two-fifty-eight. The next broadcast would be Washington local weather at three-thirty. He was, he calculated, perhaps twenty miles from Richmond now, and would be in Washington in fifty minutes.

Johnny Burrows switched on the two-way transmitter and started calling Richmond, to report position. The rain static at this altitude was frequent, and extremely bad. He could not contact Richmond, and finally turned to Perry. "How about using the beam receiver for a while—we're in the center of the beam."

Perry nodded. He was on his course, and there was no apparent drift; he had no actual need for radio for a time. Johnny Burrows worked intermittently on two-way, trying to get acknowledgment of his position, but either "skip" was blotting out the signals, or the static always came at a time to interfere. At three-fifteen he changed Perry's receiver back to its beam frequency, to check the course as a precautionary measure.

"Richmond beam has faded out," Perry shouted. "Dial Washington for me." Johnny moved the knob, and Washington came in quite clearly. "Okay," Perry said, "you can try Baltimore on two-way, with my receiver, if you want to. But I'll kick back to the beam at twenty-five."

AT three-twenty-five, Perry tuned in the Washington beam again, preparatory to descent. Excitement had possession of him now, as he watched the swinging of his turn needle and the fluctuations of his rate of climb. Ice below, and a low ceiling under that! A lot of

things could happen, if he failed to dodge obstructions.

He noticed immediately a peculiarity of the whining signals of the beam, and he delayed a moment easing off his throttles. It got no louder as he flew toward the station. And he was drifting off his course—instead of getting a long, unbroken T, he was in the "twilight zone," hearing the T, but getting much more plainly a broad N.

His first thought was that he had drifted east, into the N zone. So he turned west ten degrees, expecting to get back on the T immediately. But he didn't. The T grew fainter, but the N, although becoming stronger in relation to the T, grew fainter too! Just then the beam broke, and the three-thirty broadcast came through clearly: "Washington—Washington, ceiling six hundred feet, overcast, light rain, light fog; visibility two miles, wind northeast seventeen, temperature thirty-four dash one, barometer thirty zero-zero."

Johnny Burrows, leaning across the cockpit, yelled: "Where the hell are we? The beam is fading out!"

"Passed the station," Perry snapped. "Must have gone over it while you were using my receiver. We're in a snorting southwest wind!"

He was worried, but not badly. It wasn't the first time he had gone past a station. But the other times had been when, almost upon the field, the beam had been turned off for a broadcast. This was nothing of that kind—this had come about because a violent wind was pushing him along up here. A tremendous wind that had increased his speed to almost twice its regular rate.

HE knew exactly where he was—he was in the N zone north of Washington instead of south of it, and he had only to go back. With a ceiling of six hundred feet, there was no reason for concern.

Yet it angered him to think that he had spent ten years in flying, and then should let a thing like this occur. It was dumb. It was idiotic. It wouldn't have happened in a mail ship, because he would have been listening constantly to the beam. Position report—another enforced order of the transport company—and it had got him ginned up on his beam. He had not conceived of such a wind.

Methodically he gunned his engines up another hundred revvs, turning southward. Gradually he got back on the north leg of the beam, and corrected his course to head directly toward the field. The beam was steady, without much night swing, so he knew he wasn't very far away. The static washed and crackled on his ears.

BUT instead of increasing gradually in volume as he approached the field, the beam held at a constant level. Ten minutes, and fifteen, and twenty—and finally twenty-five. The beam went off, and another broadcast came. Newark was buried in a dense fog; Camden had zero-zero; Baltimore had zero ceiling and a quarter of a mile of visibility. And Washington, this time, had dropped back a hundred feet, with misting rain and moderate fog—a visibility of one mile.

Deak Perry sat there, a frown of worry pulling bushy brows almost together. A thin, probing fear was searching through him now. But he didn't let young Johnny Burrows see it. In a tight place, in an emergency, he was a man of iron—hard-boiled, controlling his imagination. And he knew he faced an emergency right now—perhaps the most desperate emergency that he had ever known, or ever would know, if somehow he managed to wriggle out of this one.

For the wind, up here, was blowing against him equally as fast as he could fly. For twenty-five minutes he had sat here, apparently advancing back toward Washington none at all.

That wasn't all of it. The rest of it was that he couldn't descend, to get into the northeast wind. There was an icing temperature down there, becoming worse as night wore on. Washington had dropped a point, to thirty-four, and that would mean that he would pick up ice until he was almost to the ground. Five hundred feet—he couldn't go that low. There were obstructions all along the course that reached almost that high. Going down would subject him to a twofold risk. If he picked up a quantity of ice on the way down, and could not get low enough to melt it off, the weight might grow so heavy he could not climb back up to this warm layer in the clouds. In that case, gravity would suck him on into the ground, and there wouldn't be a chance. The other risk was that he was afraid of hitting something.

Johnny Burrows, watching the compass nervously, leaned over and asked bluntly: "What's happening? Are we flying back to Washington, or is that compass goofy?

What's the matter with the beam—we don't seem to be getting any closer!"

"We're not!" Deak Perry snapped. "The wind has messed us up, and I'll get ice if I go down."

"Washington is getting worse—fast!" Johnny yelled. "We'd better figure something out. We sit up here much longer and we'll end up in the trees!"

Perry nodded tensely. He had been thinking the same thing. Abruptly he eased the throttles back and started down, watching his thermometer. He would go down until ice was threatening to form, and maybe he could get low enough to be riding in the northeast wind that existed near the earth. It would be impossible to stay down there long, because he would pick up some ice immediately, but maybe he could go down, stay until his load of ice was getting heavy, then climb quickly once more into this warm air and let it melt, and then repeat the process. If he could do that, he could get back to Washington, although that would take some time. It might take too long, but it was the only hope he had.

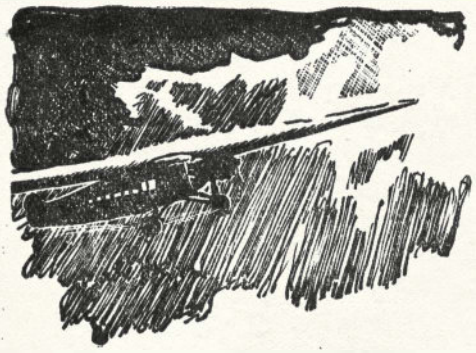
In spite of the iron control he had always had upon his nerves, he was stiff now with a kind of rigid tautness. He laughed mirthlessly at the irony of this situation. Hardboiled, was he? Yet he had pulled up against his wishes, against his better judgment, because he felt sorry for a girl! Watching the thermometer acutely—watching that, and seeing the turn needle and the rate of climb and all the other instruments in quick, momentary glances—he felt the ship drop suddenly into the colder air. In two hundred feet the plane slipped into violent air again; the thermometer went down suddenly from forty-one to thirty-one—colder, here, than it had been before, when climbing up through this same layer farther south.

Deak Perry yelled at Burrows: "Flashlight! Take her for a minute." He took the flashlight and threw the narrow beam out through the cockpit window, searching the leading edge of the thick wing. It was still raining, at this altitude—rain mixed with mist, through which the beam cut in a thin shaft. He couldn't be sure about the ice, for a few seconds. The temperature was right for it—he must be getting it; but on the shiny surface of the wing it did not show. Johnny Burrows had gunned the engines to half throttle, and the plane was still descending in a shallow power glide.

Johnny, tense with apprehension, snapped: "We're not stopping in Washington, kid—the first stop is just this side of hell!"

Perry turned back to take the wheel, intent on flying at this lower level until he felt the weight of ice increasing. He crammed the throttles open, and as he did, he noticed a peculiarity about the windshield. Rain was not hitting it and streaming off, apparently. But then he realized what this was—realized that there was a thick crust of glaze ice on the glass. He tried to slide the panel forward, but it was frozen shut. Through an opening of the side window he thrust his hand and forearm out into the freezing blast and felt along the windshield. Ice was crusted thick and solid there.

At that same moment Johnny Burrows yelled: "Horizon has gone out, and the



air speed—we're getting ice, Deak, sure as hell!"

Perry hauled back on his controls and started up, toward warmer air. He had been down here seven minutes, by his watch, and in that time this freezing rain had plastered every surface of the ship. Only when he tried to climb did he realize how much ice he had. The ship felt sluggish. Glaze ice—you couldn't see it easily upon a metal surface. In seven minutes down there, he must have picked up almost half a ton.

He was shivering now. Not from the cold, but from a fear which he could not overcome. Eight people in that cabin, and Johnny Burrows up here with him. He knew that Washington was closing, fogging in, and that he must get back there soon or it would be too late. Run with the wind? Where would he run? Newark and Camden were zero-zero. Run west? To what? Peaks stuck up on every side in that direction. Get down. That was the thing. His gas was getting lower every minute. Three hours more and the engines would be starved to silence, and he would get down, all right! There had been a lot of pilots who had gotten down *that* way!

JOHNNY BURROWS, making his half-hourly radio contact with a ground station, said in a harsh, strained voice: "Position somewhere north of Washington. We've been blown past the field, and are bucking a southwest wind so strong we can't get back to Washington. Can't go lower because of icing strata. Just tried it. . . . Stand by—" He leaned to Perry, shouting: "Shall I have 'em get special Boston weather for us? We could go up there in nothing flat!"

"Boston, Hartford, Albany and Bellefonte," Perry yelled. "We ought to be able to get in one of them."

Yet he knew they couldn't. This high was sweeping cold air across all the eastern states, and the farther north he went the greater danger there would be of ice. Just then that former metallic uproar was repeated on the fuselage behind him, first on his side and then on Johnny's. The ice was melting off the props again.

Bette Holloway came through the cockpit door. Another slug of ice was flung against the ship just then, and she jumped and touched Deak Perry on the shoulder, crying: "What was that?"

"Ice," he said grimly, resolved to say no more. There was no point in telling her the predicament he was in—that all of them were in. He liked her, but he could not stand the hysteria that he expected to result when she found out that they were caught. A girl had no business in the crew of an airplane, it had always seemed to him. A girl couldn't take it, when a crisis came.

She asked anxiously: "Where are we, Deak? The passengers are getting worried because we're not in Washington."

Johnny Burrows, getting weather, had not noticed her behind him. He leaned to Perry, shouting: "Boston has heavy sleet—Bellefonte freezing rain—Albany light sleet—Hartford thick freezing mist. We can't get in anywhere there. . . . Deak—I'm afraid we're really in a jam!"

But Perry gave no answer. He forgot the presence of the hostess there, for the beam broke, and a special weather broadcast droned into his ears. In a sudden daze of mental anguish, he realized that there was now not the slightest hope: "Washington—Washington, ceiling two hundred feet, overcast, moderate freezing rain, moderate fog, visibility one half mile, wind northeast ten, temperature thirty-two dash zero, barometer twenty-nine ninety-seven."

The beam leaped back into his ears, but after it was on, he could still seem to hear the words repeated. All of his self-confidence was gone, and he felt weak and numb all over. In ten long and hazardous years of flying, no situation had ever made him feel like this, before. But then, never before had he been caught like this, with seven helpless, trusting passengers behind him, wondering what was wrong that they were not already on the ground. He thought of Bette Holloway, standing there. She was worried, but she was confident of his knowledge and ability. And Johnny Burrows, who knew too well what that last broadcast meant.

A vast and violent change came over him, sitting tense and rigid in his seat, outwardly so calm. All the old hard-

boiled intolerance of regulations and restricting safety measures underwent a quick metabolic revolution. If he ever got both feet on the ground, intact, he would not question them again; he would preach them to all pilots.

But he was not down, and he really had no hope of getting down. Richmond—Richmond still was open, and it would probably remain open all night long. That uncanny sense of smell of his had told him that. But he could not reach Richmond in this wind, unless by some miraculous luck the wind changed at a higher altitude—which wasn't likely. Yet he started up, climbing at a thousand feet a minute, hoping to run out of this level of tornadic wind.

Johnny Burrows, face like marble in the dim glow of the lights, said hoarsely: "You heard that special, Deak? In the name of God, what can we do?"

Bette Holloway demanded in a thin voice of alarm: "What's the matter? How soon will we be in Washington?"

Johnny, irritated by her presence, tense with apprehension, snapped: "We're not stopping in Washington, kid. The first stop is just this side of hell!"

"But Deak—" She broke off, hand on her lips, eyes wide with consternation.

PERRY turned to look at her, sorry that Johnny had made that blunt and unembellished statement. He took her hand, and drew her down until he could talk against her ear. Speaking, he tried vainly to make his voice reassuring.

"Bette," he said, "go back and tell the passengers we're passing up Washington and are going through to Newark, on account of weather. Actually, we're not—actually we're in a bad jam." It was odd, he thought, how he hated to have to tell her that. But it wouldn't help any of them if the passengers knew that he was caught—Bette would have her hands full of insane people, if they knew the truth. "You take a back seat by the door. When we're out of gas, we may pile up. If we do, why—well, here's hoping you get out of it."

She said instantly, "But you won't pile up, Deak. You've got three hours yet, and I know you'll get us down. *I'm* not afraid." She squeezed his hand, and backed through the cockpit door and closed it tight.

Deak Perry sat there, filled with a peculiar calm. He'd thought that kid would throw a fit when she found out what might happen, thought she'd crack. But she hadn't even admitted she was frightened. Instead of that, she had shown that she believed in him. Maybe it was just a show, but somehow it relieved a little of his tension as he turned back to his instruments.

THE ship plunged up through solid mist to seven thousand feet, where Perry leveled off because of ice at higher altitudes. At this level they were making painful progress: the beam grew slowly louder.

But time was the essence of this thing. Fog and freezing rain were moving southward faster than they were. They had left Richmond at two-forty-five, passed Washington at three-twenty, and it was now five-three. They couldn't beat the wind. They'd be forced down, completely out of gas, by seven-thirty—and at this rate they'd never reach Richmond.

On the ground, the forces of every available agency were working desperately to give them information. Johnny Burrows, frenziedly keeping contact with Baltimore, was getting it as it was assembled—and none of it was hopeful. The whole east coast was closing in; sleet was falling at a dozen widely separated points. There was nowhere to go!

It ripped and frayed Deak's nerves to sit at the controls minute after minute—waiting, and knowing that each field along the line was shutting down as daylight came. A special broadcast droned up through the clouds and static—and Washington had dropped to a hundred feet, with moderate fog and moderate sleet.

The chance of finding the field down there without smacking into some obstruction was one in fifty—the beam did not line up with the runway. Even if he was lucky and happened to fly directly over it, he probably wouldn't see it soon enough to cut his engines and keep from overshooting—not with moderate fog, and a ceiling of a hundred feet. He'd crash if he overshot—there was a bluff bordering the field on one side, and the river on the other. High stuff. With the load of ice he'd have by that time he'd hit at almost ninety miles an hour.

But he had to do something, and he was getting close, now. The beam was louder. He was nearly there. A faint, thin reek of burning garbage reached his nostrils, here at seven thousand feet. The dump at the south end of the field, that burned continually. He'd smelled that smell a hundred times before.

One chance in fifty. One chance in a hundred, really, for he was afraid he wouldn't see the boundary of the field and cut the throttles soon enough to keep from crashing, even if he found it. . . . Yet that was a chance, and there was none at all, just sitting here. With the beam loud in his ears, he cut the engines back and started down. In that moment, as the exhausts fell to silence, he had a queer feeling of the proximity of death.

Johnny Burrows, voice sharp with alarm, yelled: "Richmond's closed! You're going to try it here?" His eyes were dilated, wide with fear.

Perry nodded grimly. He was thinking that he would have no second chance here. He would have to dive through the icing strata, leveling out on the beam over the Potomac the instant he glimpsed water, making a quick, sharp turn back across the river and then toward the airport. If he missed it the first time, even if he dodged obstructions, ice would drag him down and he would crash before he could come around again. But it was getting daylight now. He could see the outline of his wings through graying mist. If fog wasn't hanging thick across the water—and it couldn't be, with all this wind—he could see the river soon enough to keep from flying into it, he hoped.

As the descent continued, his nerves tightened almost to the breaking point. His perceptions sharpened and became excessive, until he could feel vibrations in the ship that he had never felt before, could hear the clicking of rocker-arms on the center engine, regardless of the whistle of the wind, could smell the thin reek of exhaust gases leaking from the collector-ring ahead of him. Oddly, he kept visualizing the straining faces of Bette Holloway and his passengers, and he was almost panicky with fear that he might misjudge his position on the beam in coming down, or might fail to cut his throttles soon enough after passing the boundary of the field.

THE beam station at Washington is located on an open flat on the south side of the river. The northeast leg of the beam, to Camden, crosses the river, passes Bolling Field and extends on across a residential section. For a distance of something less than two miles, between the station and the radio towers north of Bolling, there is nothing to hit when mushing down—that is, except the river and the ground.

Deak Perry, now well north of the station, riding in the center of the beam, checked his altimeters by the barometric setting, having previously noted, in Richmond, that there was no error in them. Then, blasting his throttles to keep the engines warm, he settled until the altimeters were reading twenty-five hundred feet. At this level the temperature dropped sharply, and the air became once more violent. Tensely, then, Perry snapped the throttles closed, and dived.

ICE formed immediately on the windshield—in pellets which he could see now. He opened his side of the glass and pushed his window back, motioning Burrows to do likewise. Freezing rain beat at his face, and the blast of air into the cockpit was a hollow roar. Ice built up steadily on the wings—upon every square inch of exposed metal—glaze ice, smooth and very heavy.

He could see the altimeter move—two thousand, eighteen hundred, fifteen hundred—down and down. It was amazing how the ice built up, for this was rain that he was flying through—rain, freezing as it fell. He glanced across, out Johnny Burrows' window, and saw Johnny's face, pale gray, tight-lipped, eyes wide and straining. This was either suicide or quick salvation, and they both knew it too well; it ate into their muscles, turned their mid-sections weak and filled with crawling, knotting pains; it brought moisture to their hands, yet left their fingers steady, somehow. It was terrible—but it couldn't go on long.

The airspeed needle jerked and went erratic—ice in the Pitot tube. A moment later the artificial horizon went out. But Deak Perry plunged on down, flying by his rate of climb and turn indicator, tuning the beam volume down as he approached the station, watching the altimeters with quick glances.

Five hundred feet. The fog was thick below but the color of it had changed a little, darkening. The earth was down there, hugged tight by clouds, swathed in a mantel of quickly forming ice. It crossed Deak Perry's mind that his calculations might be wrong, that he might be farther from the station than he thought—might be descending over high buildings that would suddenly loom up in front of him. But he had to take his chance. Holding his breath, he slowed the glide a little, but continued—down.

Three hundred feet—and there was still nothing below but fog, two hundred.

For a fleeting instant, straining his eyes downward, he caught the black gleam of water. Johnny Burrows, almost hanging his head outside the window, whirled with cat-like quickness, yelling: "Water under us! Close!"

The strain was awful, but it would be over in a moment now. They would either find a ceiling here, or go on in—Perry watched the rate of climb, and slowed the glide a little more. Ice was a glaze on every surface of the plane, and pellets of it cut back viciously into his eyes. But he eased on down. A hundred feet! The beam was singing in his ears; he was off of it a little, getting a broad A that was swelling swiftly in intensity.

He saw the water clearly for an instant, and then plunged on into a mat of thickly clinging fog. The A changed for a split second to an on-course signal, and then snapped over to an N—and he knew that he was past the station. . . . Now—to swing around and line up with the river and try to find the field. He gunned the engines, and they coughed, sputtered and then smoothed out with an even flow of power. The plane was sluggish with the weight of ice.

Banking, blind, he turned to the left—turned back over the river to avoid the hills and towers farther on. He got another glimpse of black—smooth black, with white ruffles here and there. He kept on turning, trying to gauge the time to straighten out. Seconds counted now, for it was by watching the moving second hand that he know how long to turn. The turn indicator needle was half way over on its dial. The rate of climb was reading zero. "Now!" he muttered, and rolled up from the bank and headed back.

Johnny Burrows, fighting his imagination, straining for control of fear that burned into him, shouted: "How will you know when to cut the guns?" and whirled back to try to pierce the fog and see the water. "Over land!" he cried. "We must be getting near!"

YES, they were near; but they could not use the beam now, for it did not line up with the field. The field lay in a crook of the river-bank, and they must slide over and run the risk of hitting things that lay between here and the field. They wouldn't see the boundary until they had passed over it, if they saw it then. And if they missed it, if they couldn't cut the throttles and slow up their speed in time to put the wheels upon the ground—

Deak Perry hung his head outside, but he couldn't see a thing. He kept sniffing at the air, between glances at the turn indicator and the clock. And suddenly a reek of burning cloth and rubber came up into the cockpit—just a faint and momentary smell. Deak Perry's nostrils picked it out, and he snapped the throttles shut and hauled the nose up steadily.

The ice upon the wings pushed them on down. They saw a hangar flash past in the morning gloom, and then an area of blank black earth. Then the wheels struck with a vicious force, and bounced, and settled down at last.

AT the loading ramp, with the motors still, Deak Perry sat limply in the cockpit, trembling. Johnny Burrows lit a cigarette with nervous hands, and laughed; but it sounded thin and overdone. Behind them they could hear Bette Holloway explaining to the passengers that they had come back to Washington—"because Newark's weather got a little bad, and the pilot thought it would be safer here, you know." They heard a man say, "I'm going to write the company a letter, and commend that pilot's judgment. I fly some, but I'm damned if I see how he found this field."

Deak Perry leaned back, worn out by nervous strain and sleeplessness. If he had had a mail ship up there, tonight, he would have bailed out and let it crash alone. He'd done that, once before. But somehow, this was better. There was a satisfaction in knowing that he had got this ship down safely. He couldn't quite define the feeling, sitting there. But it was all right; he was off the mail, and on passengers—and he didn't mind at all.

Johnny Burrows looked over at him wearily, grinning. The door opened, and Bette Holloway was standing there, with a perplexed and tired smile upon her face. Johnny said: "Deak, how the hell did you know when to cut the guns? I didn't see a thing."

"The smell of that dump back there across the road," said Perry. "Funny thing how high that smell of burning rubbish goes. I got a whiff of it at seven thousand feet, and figured maybe I could use it as a kind of boundary marker when I tried to get in here."

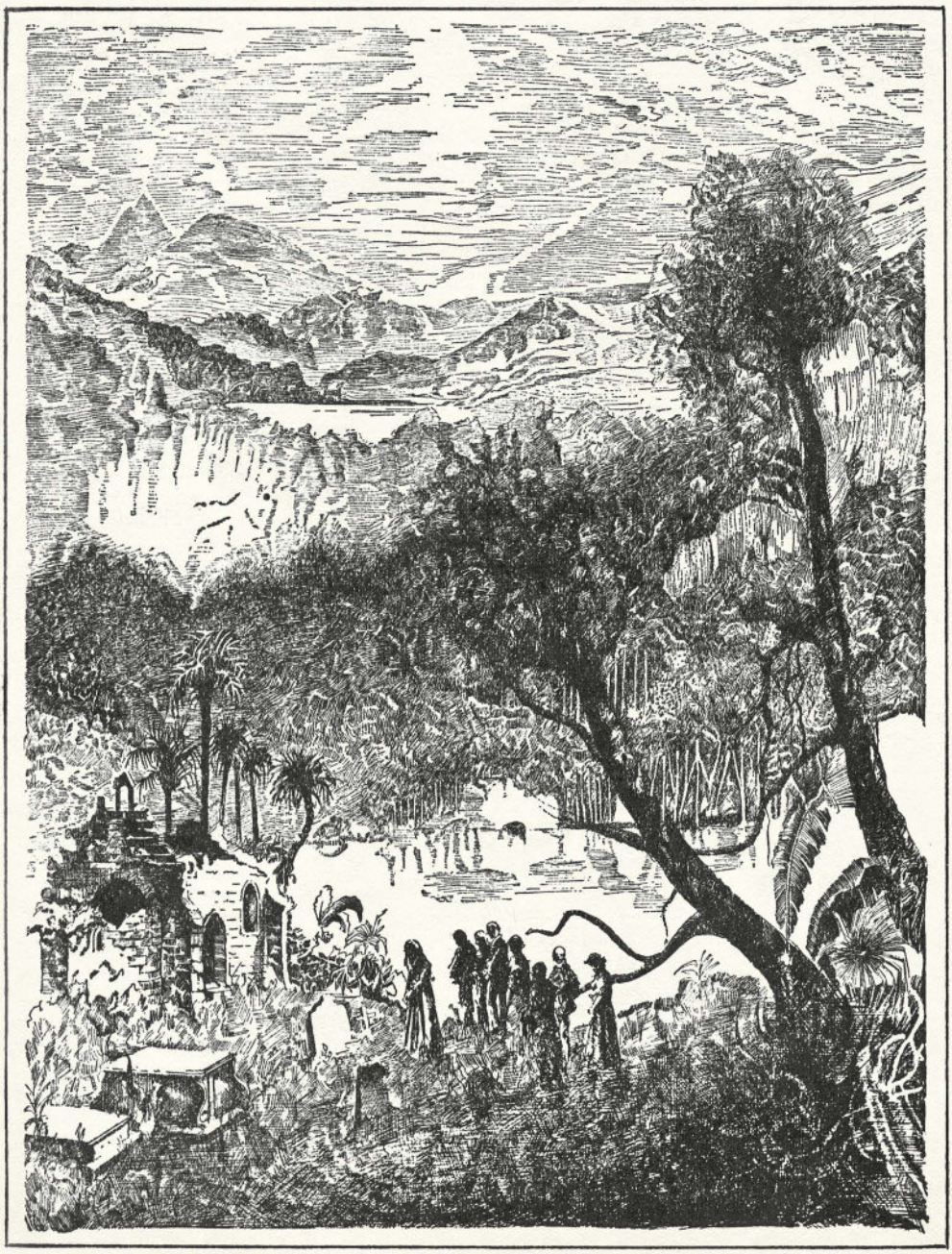
Bette Holloway said: "That nose of yours! Come on. Do you suppose it could guide us to some ham and eggs?"

"It might," Deak Perry grinned. "But I know one thing—it's grown too old to judge the weather.

King in, King out!

From the ends of the earth, in Papua, a distinguished writer sends you this story of New Barbary Gold—and another great treasure—staked on the turn of a card.

By BEATRICE GRIMSHAW



THEY were burying De Rinzey, in the little cemetery by the sea, where frangipannis, through the south-east season, scattered the graves with stars, and grass grew high, and over the marble crosses and the monuments, brought at great cost from Sydney, and forgotten very soon, the rose-red trailers of Cadena d'Amor threw, wildly and unchecked, their chains of shining hearts.

Anne de Rinzey, the young widow, in tropical mourning of black-ribboned white, had followed the coffin to the grave. She was conscious that every man in the party of attendant miners was looking at her; she could almost have told you what they thought; guessed what they said afterward, when the funeral feast was growing rather noisy, in the beach hotel; when she, withdrawing herself, had gone to the hangars to wait for the returning plane. Thank God, she thought, they would go back to the field without that black burden weighting the cargo-hold of the triplane, lying heavy, heavy as night, upon the hearts of everyone in the strange procession of the flying funeral.

Out of the furious sun, in the shade of the hangars, she sat, looking over her life. Other people, she knew, were doing that too. In the hotel, Wauchope with the snow-white beard and hair, young Romilly, young Synge, middle-aged Bill the Alligator and half a dozen more, were telling each other that she, Anne, would be bound to marry again soon. It wasn't as if—

And Leopardess Liz, that big, muscular woman with the tawny hair and the yellow eyes, Liz who was renowned for the wild attacks she made on enemies, male or female, when she had drunk a little too much—Liz was saying that that little widow of De Rinzey's, that pretty little widow (Liz didn't think her pretty, didn't like her, but Liz knew her job) would be looking for another man before you could say *knife;* and she wouldn't blame her either, because, of course, it wasn't as if—

Liz would finish the sentence. Dot the *i's* with large blots, and cross the *t's* with bludgeons. Leopardess Liz was almost too refined when sober; but when half a bottle of champagne had stripped her of adventitious aids, she could be as coarse as any Georgian best-seller.

And the proprietress of the hotel, even more refined than Liz; given to open lamentation over the drinking and love-making that were fast filling her pockets with Laurie River gold—the proprietress would say that it was a good thing Mrs. de Rinzey was a married woman, if she wanted to go back to the field, because the authorities of New Barbary didn't much care for girls all alone. Though, of course, you must remember that—

And everyone would say, popping the champagne-corks and picking the chicken-bones, that she was a good plucked one, a bonzer kid, to have come all that way to the wildest goldfield on earth, in order to keep her promise and marry a dying man.

Peter de Rinzey, whom she had once been in love with; married out of sheer pluck, with her teeth set, when he was a crippled wreck from a dynamiting accident; Peter, who had loved her perhaps better than any other man ever would again, was past. Done with. And the way was open for—well, for any one of twenty other men. She had only to choose. She was pretty; everyone told her she was just like the dainty little Duchess of York, a type by some mystery of adjustment, now becoming strangely common among attractive young women. She was well-bred—De Rinzey, with all his faults (one could forget them now) had been a gentleman; not likely to choose outside his own caste, when it came to marrying. Neither was his widow; for although she had told no one, hoped nobody knew, it was Harry Synge—the one man on the field about whose position there would be, in any company, no doubt—whom she looked at twice, three times, for once that she looked at anyone else.

The hot wind blew—it was southeast season, winter in New Barbary now, but on that burning coast you knew no coolness from January to January again. The long grass round the hangars, tiger-brown, rustled like blown paper. The hot sea hissed on the white-hot coral beach. There was no other sound.

ANNE sat with her head on her hand, and wondered. Soon the planes would taxi forth, the procession start back again, across the terrible, untrodden ranges, the drowning river gorges, the forests thick as fur upon a crouching beast, that barred the wondrous Laurie goldfield from the world. She would go into her empty house, the little slab-built cottage high among mountain mists, above the creek where de Rinzey's claim, that unsuccessful claim, lay shamed and naked among the rich possessions of

other men. She'd do washing, cooking, anything to keep herself. And if Harry Synge kept straight, maybe—

On the way back, Synge sat beside Anne, while the plane dipped and rolled above the misty gorges of the Laurie, climbing the ranges that were strewn with dead men's bones, up to the tiny airdrome snatched from the forest like a handful of hair from a New Barbary native's woolly head. She saw him, in the glass of the windows, watching her, fingering his upper lip. She was conscious, all of a sudden, of an immense pity for this young, careless yet careworn fellow with the gray-blue, big eyes in a keen narrow face; this kindly, merry, reckless Harry Synge who made money faster than almost anyone on the field, and flung it away faster still, this gambler, where almost all were gamblers, who hunted a new sensation as a dog might hunt a rat. It came to her, with a shudder not altogether due to the height and the cold air, that some day—some day not very far distant—there might be another flying funeral, with Harry Synge in the cargo-hold of the plane. He was the sort of man who might shoot himself if things went wrong. Others had done it. . . .

Romilly, sitting in front of her, twisted round and made some joke that she couldn't hear. She knew he was trying to cheer up the party, rattle a gay tune for them as military bands did, returning from a soldier's new-made grave. Romilly was a bit of a jester, but no fool. He was older than Synge, by years, yet still young; almost every man who had ever come to the Laurie was young—or dead. He was fattish in the face, and that alone distinguished him, among the thin, worn men of the field. Romilly had been the luckiest of all; Romilly did himself well, refused himself nothing, never went prospecting among the crocodiles and cannibals, but stored away his gold, and enjoyed life—as far as you could enjoy it, on the Laurie.

Romilly, Anne knew, would ask her to marry him as soon as he possibly could.

IT was an amazing sight to see Anne—that dainty little duchess type, who should by rights have worn only silks and chiffons, spent her days playing and her nights dancing—down in the red mud of the Laurie River, doing her best to superintend native laborers who still worked De Rinzey's futile claim. Anne, in the shorts and shirt worn by the few women on the field who didn't belong to the sisterhood of Leopard Liz; Anne, determined to get something, anything, out of the land for which Peter had given his life. She was like a kitten trying to scrub a scullery floor. She was like a paradise bird scratching for its living in a barnyard. She was like—

"Hell," said the miner who was watching her from the top of the sideling. Anne was not at all like hell, but the comparison seemed to soothe Jack Romilly, who had been hopelessly struggling with similes beyond his mental range. Romilly, despite his fat face, was active; you could not live and work on the Laurie field unless you were whipcord and wire. Ten leaps carried him down to where the widow of De Rinzey stood ankle-deep in sludge, hot, tired, and indignant, watching her native laborers waste their time and hers. Anne hadn't the knack of native-driving, and well these tough young savages knew it.

What was she to do? The men wouldn't give her washing and cooking; they laughed at the idea. "As long as a Laurie digger has a weight of gold left, Peter's widow won't want," they told her. The field was very loyal to its own. But none of them had reckoned with the pride of little Anne.

ROMILLY followed her to her hut, when the clangor of beaten kerosene tins announced the end of the day's labor. Anne, tired to the bone, motioned him into one of her two chairs. She was weary with waiting as well as work. Synge loved her, but he was making her wait too long. Romilly was different. Romilly had something to offer a woman, and he knew it. Looks, stability, the best claim on the Laurie; no debts, no gambling craziness—or at least, no more than was expected of any "sport" on the field. Tepidly, she liked Romilly. So did Leopardess Liz, and not at all tepidly—if report spoke true.

There she was now, following him up unashamedly, coming into the hut. Liz, smoking; Liz, quite sober; long and supple and handsome, and dressed with quiet taste. Never, on the Laurie, did you see Liz and her henna-haired sisterhood in slacks or shorts or bareback frocks; you never heard them raise their voices, unless in the midst of an uproarious party, when everyone was yelling together; you found them, nineteen twentieths of the time, quiet, sympathetic, almost too restrained. . . . If there was

Anne was weary with waiting; Synge loved her, but he was making her wait too long.

one thing surer than another about the light women of the Laurie, it was that they knew their job.

And of course, every woman on the field had to be civil to every other woman; that was the unwritten law. Anne couldn't refuse to welcome Leopardess Liz, who never before had entered her little hut. She gave Liz the bed to sit on, and silently wondered what was coming next.

Liz said, looking at Romilly under eyelashes thick as a cat's fur: "Come to ask her to the party?" There was almost a dare in her tone. But Romilly did not notice.

He said: "Yes. I thought Mrs. de Rinzey has been a bit too dull since poor Peter winked out, and after all it's a month or more, and we'd all like it if she'd just for once chip in."

Anne said: "What is it? You know I don't play bridge very well." A party, on the field, meant cards.

"It's not bridge," Liz told her. "It's something new. Ideer of your boy, Harry Synge." Anne understood that Liz meant to say: "Hands off. Romilly's mine."

Romilly said, with a shout of laughter: "It's King in, King out."

"What! But that's a native game; the boys play it, and get sent to jail for—"

"Yes. Some say the coons invented it themselves, but I rather think I've heard something like it before. Anyhow they might have invented it, it's that simple, and take my word, Mrs. de Rinzey, it's bonzer. Synge had his head screwed on right when he thought of it. Seems he heard a row among his boys the other night, and went to see what it was, and they were playing this game, so he had a look-in before they saw him; only by and by they got to fighting and slicing each other up with clearing-knives, and he had to stop them. But he says the idea came to him then, and I and he are running it, and you're all to roll up at the hotel tomorrow, bring whatever you can stake—goods pass as well as gold—and have a night of it."

"It sounds delightful," Anne said satirically. All the same, she meant to go.

"Bring whatever you can," Liz told her. "No chits allowed. I'll play these." She drew off her bracelets (they were not very valuable: Liz knew better than to dry up the springs of generosity by wearing good jewelry in public) and began tossing them about, throwing and catching with graceful skill. "Hup!" she cried, leaped to her feet on the bed, and began imitating the action of a rider on a circus horse.

It was amazingly accurate, and very funny. Anne found herself unwillingly

laughing. She thought that Liz must have been on the stage, probably a dancer. People drifted to the golden lure of the Laurie from every part of Australasia, and all strata of society.

LIZ dropped on the bed again. She was not at all out of breath. "Well," she said to Romilly, "we'd best be going." Anne noted the possessive tone. Romilly seemed to endure it rather than like it. "But if she wants him," thought Anne, "that won't matter."

Romilly waited a minute, hanging in the doorway, with the full sun of the afternoon shining upon his tall, powerful figure. "Do come along," he said hurriedly. "You—you don't know what I think of you. You—"

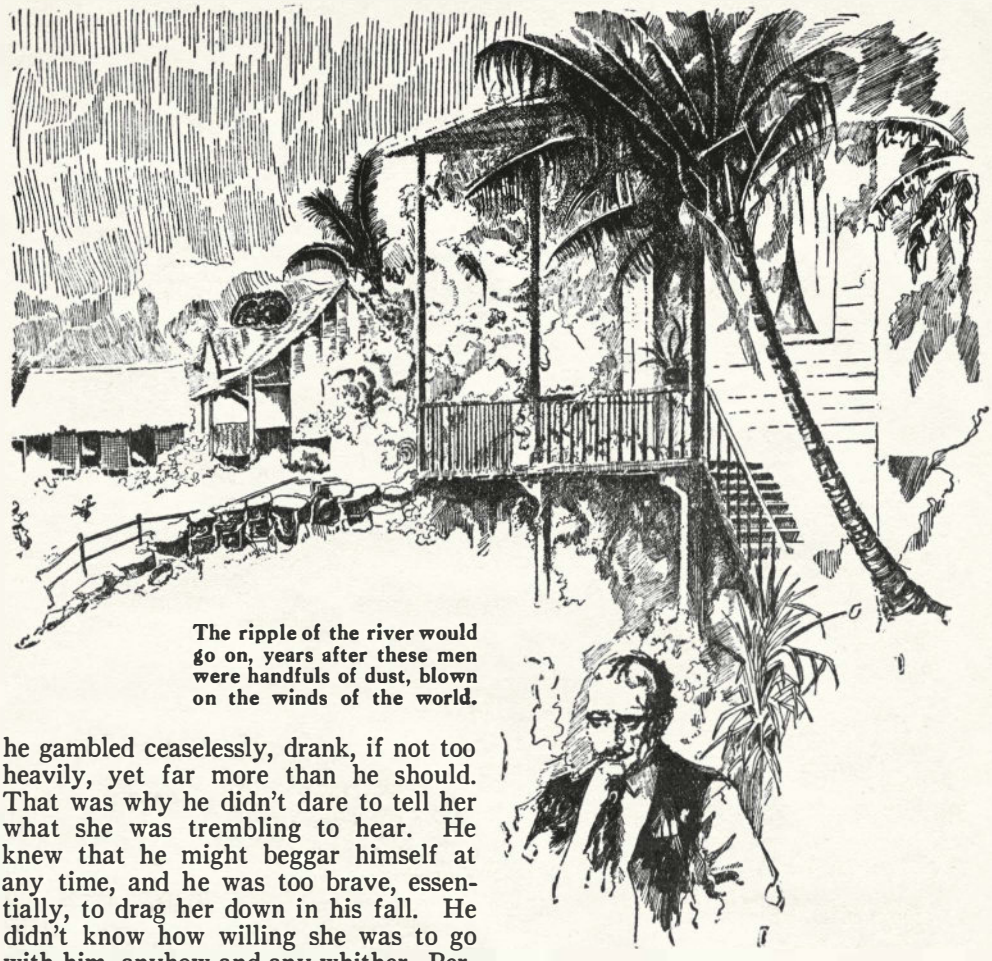
Liz was looking back. He caught Anne's hand, fiercely squeezed it, and hurried away.

"She was policing him," thought Anne, "and he let her, because he's afraid of turning her against me." They all knew that Leopardess Liz could be dangerous—even physically dangerous—when she was roused. And Anne knew that a good deal of Romilly's gold had gone down the bottomless gulf of the Leopardess' greed. Liz, no doubt, wanted to be sure of her profits. It wasn't pretty, this sort of rivalry. It wasn't as romantic as one had expected life on the goldfields to be. "Still, if I really wanted him," she thought, "I would have him, in spite of her claws. . . . But no. Not while there's a Harry Synge in the world."

She couldn't stay in the house. She went out, down the long bush track that led toward the settlement. It was quiet now; work on the claims had ceased for the day; men had gone home. There was no sound but the eternal ripple of the Laurie River, mother of death and gold, and the sinister grumble of the every-evening thunderstorm, coming down from Koroni peaks, above. Suddenly, she was aware of herself, a mote in the enormous solitudes of the New Barbary bush; a little thing, rashly confronting those awful powers that, like the dragons of legend, everywhere guard earth's cherished stores of gold. The Klondike—the deserts—the waterless lands of Australia, the horrible wastes of Siberia—and now these new discoveries, in the heart of wicked, unknown New Barbary. Every one of them dragon-guarded. Every one of them devouring flesh of men. What was she doing in the midst of it all, led by that foolish love of hers that had

been cut off by death, before she had had time to realize it was all a mistake? Why didn't she go while she could, save herself? The answer to that question was in her sight, coming down the track. She knew Synge from far off. She would have known his face, a mere speck in a crowd of a million, heard his step stand out from all the others in a marching regiment, if she had known the days, seen the troops go by to death. Old people talked of the war; she had been a baby, then. But she thought she knew how a woman must have felt when she saw her man go forth to almost certain disaster. Because, watching Harry Synge, she knew that he was headed for nothing else.

The danger, the excitement, the work, the fevers, of the Laurie field had—almost—broken his nerve. That was why



The ripple of the river would go on, years after these men were handfuls of dust, blown on the winds of the world.

he gambled ceaselessly, drank, if not too heavily, yet far more than he should. That was why he didn't dare to tell her what she was trembling to hear. He knew that he might beggar himself at any time, and he was too brave, essentially, to drag her down in his fall. He didn't know how willing she was to go with him, anyhow and any whither. Perhaps he never would know. There was steel in Synge; there was courage; he could hurt himself, and even, if necessary, another. Men were men; a woman could not do that.

"I've heard about the party," she said, as soon as he came within hearing. "I think I'll go to it."

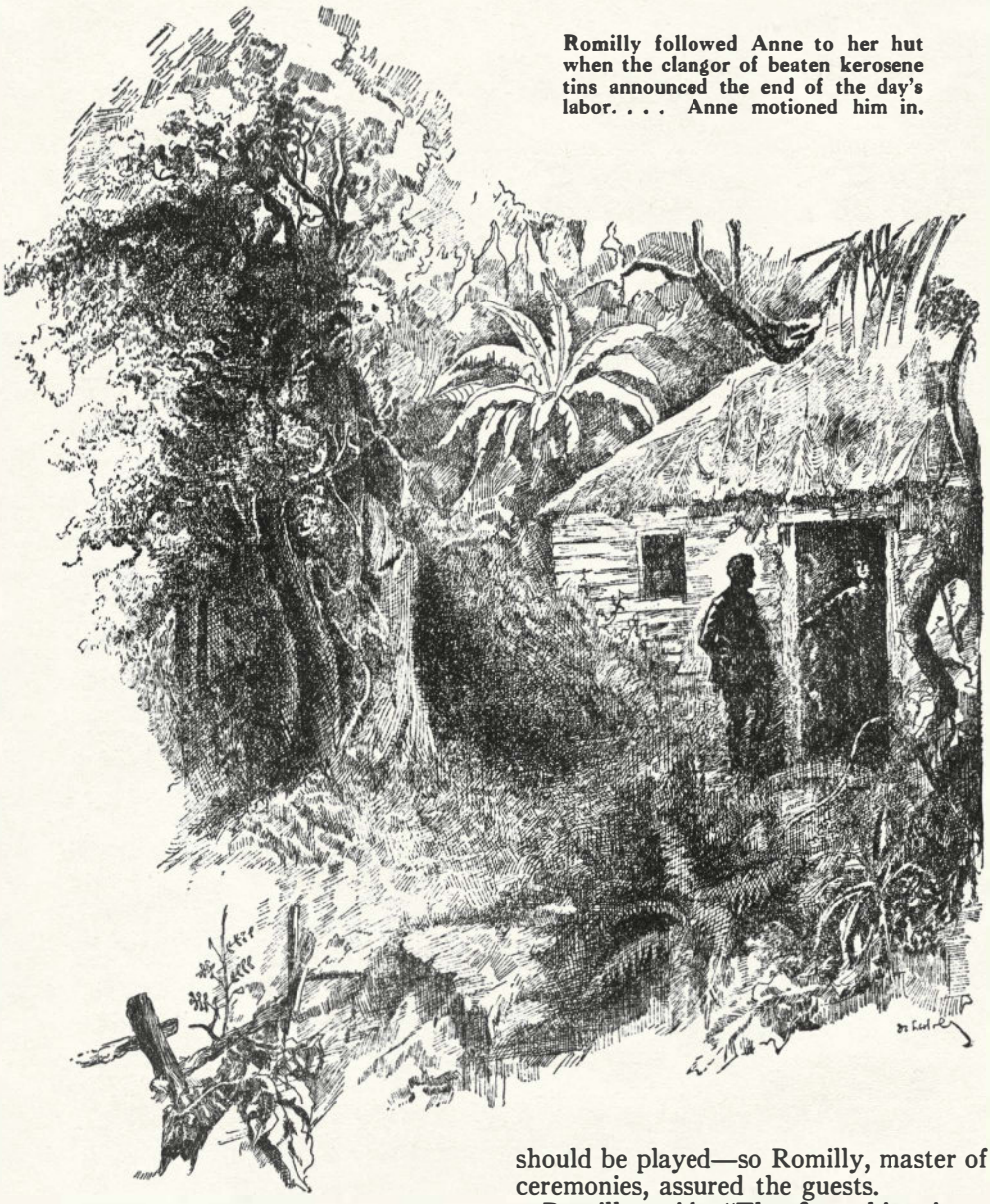
He seemed to be looking at her so hard that he did not hear what she said, but presently he answered: "I didn't think you liked that sort of thing."

"I like," she burst out suddenly, "little villas in Sydney, somewhere Bellevue or Bondi way, with those horseshoe-shaped arches at the door, and a sun porch, and tapestry suites, and wardrobes with mirrors, and a gas stove in the kitchen, and aluminum—aluminum—" She wanted to say "aluminum saucepans," but broke down upon the word. It meant so much, that no man would ever understand. It meant all home and safety, all that she had missed, was likely to go on missing. Romance? Adventure? The "bright face of danger?" Anyone who wished could have her share of that! She wanted to cook omelets within sound of the roaring tramcars; to sit at breakfast under the horseshoe sun-porch of a Bondi bungalow—not alone. . . .

She saw Synge's arm begin to seek hers; she saw a light in his eyes, like the light on the blue peaks of Koroni, when the sun was rising on another day. Then, suddenly, the light died; the long bare arm in its single sleeve fell back. She could see how thin it was, and her heart shook at the sight.

"We'll send you home," he said, in a dull voice.

"Oh!" she said. "Thanks," she said, and choked on the word, and hurried back to her hut. Synge did not follow. "Romilly would," she thought, despairingly. Always, what you did not want, you had. How did the Spanish proverb run? "Heaven sends walnuts to those who have no teeth." Romilly, and the wild, romantic goldfield life, were her walnuts. What Synge was, she did not dare to think.



Romilly followed Anne to her hut when the clangor of beaten kerosene tins announced the end of the day's labor. . . . Anne motioned him in.

The Laurie 'drome, the heart and the key of the field, lay like an emerald ear-drop on a table of moss-agate, lost among the eternal forest of the Koroni Range. And at the fine end of the emerald, you found Tim Murphy's hotel, that marvel of Twentieth Century achievement, carried bit by bit from the burning coasts of New Barbary, in the bellies of the planes.

It was cool, of nights, at this elevation of five thousand feet; the party was being held, not on the open veranda, but in the great dining-room, cleared for the occasion. You needed space, to play the game of King in, King out, as it should be played—so Romilly, master of ceremonies, assured the guests.

Romilly said: "The first thing is to draw a chalk line right across the room."

"Going to play football?" Alligator Bill scornfully asked. Romilly did not heed him. "Of course you've brought your stakes," he said. "Gold or goods. Put them down where you can see them."

They had all heard about this. The space round the walls was piled, by and by, with little bags of gold-dust, with ornamented saddles, with fine Panama hats, phonographs, traveling-rugs, leather suitcases, portable wireless-sets, rings and studs and gold and silver cigarette-cases. Most of the men had gold to put down, but some had been unlucky, and it was in order to keep these unfortunates

in countenance, that the others had brought property as well as gold. Besides, it was better fun. Up on the field, with civilization half a world away, goods were much more than goods; if you won solid proper you could cash in at once on your winnings, instead of waiting for months.

"Rules, rules!" shouted Harry Synge, sitting cross-legged on the floor like the rest. Half of them were now on one side of the white line, and half on the other.

There were several women in the crowd; Ruby the barmaid and Leopardess Liz, and Anne de Rinzey, sitting not very far from Romilly; he had somehow managed that, though she had come determined to find a place near Synge. There was no knowing what he might do, once he got going at a new form of gambling.

ANNE, who used little make-up as a rule, was painted as prettily as a Fragonard tonight; she had put on her one nice frock, the low-backed pink crêpe that she was saving—she knew for what. If she didn't wear it tonight, she might never have any other use for it. Tonight was the night. Tonight she had to do battle. She knew that, though just what the battle was to be about, she could hardly—yet—have told.

Ruby, as usual, was the last word in gentility, little finger daintily crooked when she lifted her glass of lemonade, frock so high back and front that you might have thought she suffered from rheumatism—if you didn't catch the by-no-means aged glint in her eye. Liz, in amber velvet, her long legs stretched out on the floor, was more than ever like a leopardess; and Anne could tell by the restless movement of her head, by the occasional, husky laugh from her scarlet painted lips, that she had had her full share from the open champagne-bottle standing between her and Romilly.

"Rules!" shouted Synge again. He had not been drinking, but the sight of cards, the very thought of a gambling-game, seemed to intoxicate him.

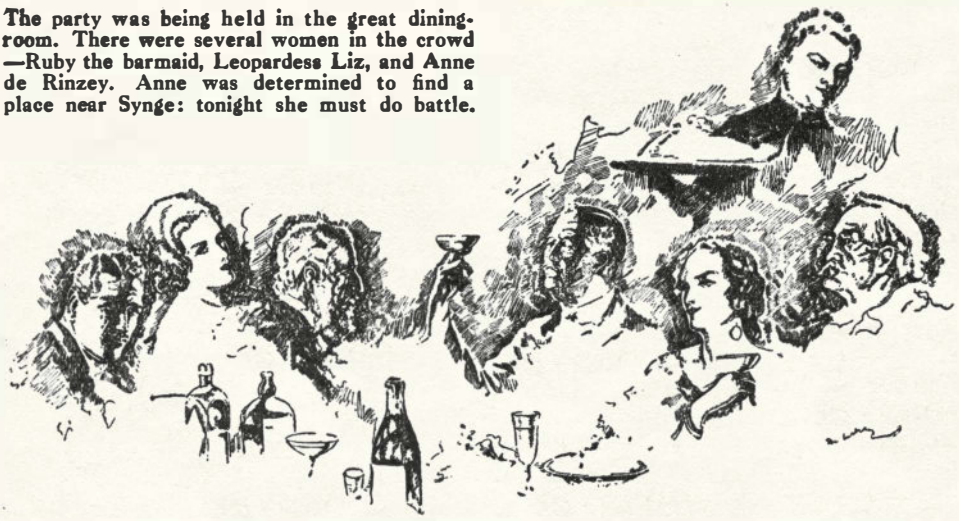
Romilly called for silence, and the sound of popping corks, of shuffling feet and bodies, and the loud-voiced chatter, ceased. For a moment, as the players waited, you could hear the talking of the Laurie River, far away below; that sound that never ceased, day or night, that had echoed down the gorges of the Koroni centuries before the white men came flying to the field; that would go on and on, years after the gold was won and the forests left once more to snakes and crocodiles, and the men themselves were handfuls of bitter dust, blown on the winds of the world. . . .

"These are the rules," said Romilly: "The dealer holds a pack of cards—and every player chooses a card to represent himself, and names his stake. Any number of players can play. This side of the line is in, this side is out. Half the players are in, half out. Dealer takes the cards, and throws a card alternately on each side. Picks it up, and shows it. Fellow who owns the card wins or loses his stake, according as it is in or out. You ready? Alligator Bill can deal first time."

They chose their cards. Liz had the queen of hearts, Anne had the queen of diamonds, Synge chose the king of diamonds in, and Romilly took the same card, out. Other players chose at random from the pack. Tim Murphy, hovering in the background with bottles and glasses, shook his head when asked to play. It wasn't thus that you made money on the Laurie field.

Alligator Bill flung down the first card, out; the second in, the third out. No one spoke. The fourth card was the knave of hearts, belonging to old Wauchope, the only aged man on the field. It was in. Wauchope raised a shout. "I've won Jack Sims' phonograph," he cried, and placed it among his goods. In ten throws more, Ruby had won an ounce of gold. Anne found herself the proprietress of a miner's Panama hat, and Synge had got for himself a silver cigarette-case, which as he always smoked cigars, did not seem likely to be much use.

GOLD and goods changed hands with bewildering swiftness, as cards fell "out" and "in." There was no finesse about this game, no waiting, save when cards unowned by anyone turned up in succession. Wauchope of the white beard and cottony hair was luckiest of all: bracelets, bags of gold-dust, a suitcase, a rug, joined his pile of goods within half an hour; he was exultant, he jeered at the younger men. "I'm lucky," he shouted, slapping down his last winning, which was Anne's wedding-present fountain pen. The young men chuckled, nudged one another, and said things under their breath about other kinds of luck, proverbially incompatible with fortune at cards. The room was growing very hot; it reeked with beer and whisky and smoke;



The party was being held in the great dining-room. There were several women in the crowd —Ruby the barmaid, Leopardess Liz, and Anne de Rinzey. Anne was determined to find a place near Synge: tonight she must do battle.

Tim Murphy and his helpers ran ceaselessly from bar to dining-room and back again. The players yelled in their excitement; the cries of "Out" and "In" could have been heard in the bed of the Laurie River.

Anne, on the "in" side, looked across the chalked line at Synge. He was as pale as linen; his blue eyes seemed to burn in his face. He caught her eye now and then, and laughed, but she did not like that laughter. "Oh, my God," she thought, "I wish I had him thousands of miles away. If I were brave enough, I could think of something. If I were brave—"

THE game was reaching its final stage. It had lasted for hours. Anne had a tearing headache; the spots of rouge in her white cheeks stood out like paint on the face of the dead; Liz was wild and tousled, playing with fierce concentration, refusing champagne when Romilly offered it; some of the players had been lucky, some, having lost everything they staked, got up with a laugh, and made way for others. One man had roused excitement and applause by bringing his horse in, staking him, and winning him back. Men, hearing the racket, had come in from outside; it seemed as if "King in, King out"—the shouts and the slapping down of stakes, and the tense silence when the card was being lifted, and the cheers when it showed its face—were going on all night. Anne would not leave; she had lost all the little trinkets she brought with her, and was only a looker-on, but while Synge sat there, tossing down bag after bag of gold-dust, his ring, his gold pencil, his watch, finally, with a shout of laughter, the coat he had stripped off when he began to play, she would not leave.

Romilly had been winning. At the twentieth or thirtieth deal of cards—nobody knew, or cared, how long the game had been going on,—he took the gold that he had won, every bag of it, and set it down before the chalk-line, adding a bag of his own that brought the total up to something like a thousand pounds' worth.

Jack Romilly loved a bold gesture, an effect; and he did not fail now in getting it. For a moment dead silence fell upon the room; then a wild cheer rose from "out" side and "in" side alike. Synge, whiter than ever, with hands not trembling, as they had done at the beginning of the game, but quite steady, searched in his pockets for a counter-stake. Nothing. . . .

"Excuse me," he said, and rose and disappeared from the room. Anne heard his footsteps passing toward the office, toward the place where Tom Murphy had his fireproof safe, and where, amid bags, tins and billycans of gold-dust, certain valuable papers were stored. The noise and shouting began again. There was an interval; Murphy's figure passed the door at the back of the room, with a bunch of keys in his hand.

Synge came back; he brushed against the seated figure of Anne as he passed her, and she felt the light touch as if it had been a shock from an electric battery. He had meant to touch her, she knew. But there was no good in that, if he went on as he was doing now.

Again he took his seat, and with a defiant sweep of his arm, threw down on

the chalk-line something that more than matched the gold of Romilly; something that she had guessed at from the moment when he left the room. It was the registration papers of his claim.

Again there was silence. The men at the back stood up. The girls craned forward, eyes staring and mouths open. Old Wauchope took the deal; it was his turn now—almost everyone else had dealt already. He slapped down the cards with style—in, out, in, out. The pack seemed endless; cards belonging to every man in the room came up, cards that belonged to nobody, and still, the king of diamonds hid his face. In, out, In, out. . . . *The king! And out.*

And Romilly, who was king of diamonds in, had won.

SYNGE, with a smile, tossed the registration papers over. "We'll see the Warden in the morning," he said. Anne stared at big Romilly, with his fat face as expressionless as a side of bacon; surely he couldn't, he didn't mean to—

But he did. On the Laurie, play was play. He nodded, put the papers beside him, and drew back again his bags of gold. He was, by far, the biggest winner of the night—Romilly, who needed nothing.

"Walnuts," said Anne to herself. She bit her lip to keep herself from laughing hysterically; the taste of the lipstick on her tongue merged with the salt tang of blood. Romilly was looking at her now, and laughing. He knew quite well what this meant to Synge—to her. He was a good man to wait, was Romilly, a clean fighter, and a long one.

Liz hadn't noticed, and Anne was glad of that; you could never count on what the Leopardess might or might not do. She was hanging over the dealer, watching for her card; it came almost last, came "in," and she had won a big nugget from Wauchope. "My deal now," she said, grinning, and took the cards.

Synge was rising to his feet. "Not going, are you?" asked Romilly. "I'm going," Synge replied. "Nothing left." He seemed quite cool about it; only his color, that had gone from white to gray, showed that he realized he was ruined. All of his capital, Anne knew, had been sunk in the claim that was gone—and on the Laurie, you had to have money before you could make it. . . .

For one moment, she was conscious of nothing but a feeling of sickness, almost as physical as that which had attacked her the first time she went up in a plane. She wondered if she were really going to be sick—there before fifty people. Then she knew that she was not. The air cleared; her nerves grew taut. She got up on her feet.

"Going—too?" asked Romilly, with a slight significant emphasis. There was not much that he missed.

Anne said: "No. I'm going on playing."

"Oh?" And she could almost hear him, silently, ask: "With what?"

Telepathically, the other players had become aware that something strange was afoot. They stopped shouting and shuffling. A ring of staring eyes focused themselves on Anne.

She was quite cool now. "I'll play you for those registration papers," she said, keeping her stand at the "out" side of the chalk-line. "I'll play for Synge."

Synge, at the sound of his name, paused on the outer veranda. "You can't," he said, "I'm cleaned, broke to the world, and so are you."

Anne did not heed him. "Bill played his horse," she said. "Synge will play his girl."

"By God," began Synge furiously, but he was overborne by a delighted, shouting crowd. "Don't you butt in!" they cried. "Leave her go. Let her choose." They pulled him back, and the last Anne saw, as she took her stand beside the line, was Synge's white desperate face. He had given up struggling; he stood hemmed in by numbers, and he looked like death.

"Fair dinkum!" Romilly said, using the Australian equivalent for "Honest Injun," and looking at her under his heavy eyebrows. Liz, with the cards in her hands, broke out into a wild laugh. "The things they'll do," she mocked. "The things these lady-girls don't mind!"

"Roll up your sleeves," some one told her. She rolled them, and sat ready to deal; no chance of cheating, with fifty pairs of eyes watching her. . . .

"Fair dinkum!" "Anne answered Romilly. And Liz tossed the first card.

"King in," said Anne mechanically.

"King out," Romilly declared. The cards slapped down. One or two men won, and one or two lost; nobody was heeding. They all wanted to see the king of diamonds come up; they waited for that only. Liz, bare-armed, watched by lookers-on as keen as any watcher at the famous Dublin Sweep, coolly slapped the cards in and out. . . . Romilly was not quite so cool; one could see his breath coming and going quickly, as he glanced, now at the cards and now at the girl. For never in her life had Anne looked half as well as she looked now; she was not merely a pretty girl, she was for that moment, beautiful.

The card came up, and a frantic yell rose. *King of diamonds—in!*

Romilly had shown himself a good winner; he was now to show that he could lose. With courtesy almost exaggerated, he picked up the bundle of registration papers that represented Synge's mining-claim, and handed it to Anne, bowing as he did so. He had to bend down, for Anne's knees had given way beneath her, and once more, she was sitting on the floor.

But not for long. Synge, let loose, had his arms about her, and had pulled her on to her feet, before Liz, who had tossed away the cards and ceased dealing, could interfere. "Let her go," she cried, then. "You'd ought to have put her head on her knees—don't you see she's near fainting?"

Synge did not seem to hear; he had half led, half carried Anne out to the veranda, and dropped her into a chair. "If you ever—if you ever—do such a thing—again—" he was gasping. Anne, still not very far from collapse, found breath to say, scornfully: "What do you think I'd ever want to for?"

Synge said: "So help me God, if I touch a card again—"

"You needn't talk about God," Anne answered him. "I'll attend to it myself—if you do."

HER lips were still stinging with his kisses, five minutes later, when he left her in the chair, and went into the dining-room. Most of the men had gone; from the bar, where Murphy and his helpers were hard at work, came the sound of some twenty or thirty miners singing, in different keys—"Genevieve," "Annie Laurie," and "Happy Days Are Here Again."

Happy days, she thought. Happy days—with a Bondi bungalow shining through them like a star, and aluminum saucepans beckoning, glowing, like pearls upon a string. . . . And—Harry!

Harry Synge had gone into the dining-room to retrieve the king of diamonds. He intended, he told himself, to have that card framed in gold, and set up on the—on the what-is-it—no, whatnot, if there still were such things—in any house they might have. Or hung on the wall.

Leopardess Liz had not yet gone to join the men in the bar. She was sitting on the floor of the dining-room; she made an odd shuffling movement, as Synge came in. With one hand under her amber velvet skirts, she asked him curtly: "Well, what's eating you?"

Synge was not troubling about Liz. "Give me the king of diamonds," he said unobservantly. She gave it, with a grin.

IT was not until Synge had gone away again, that Wauchope, of the snowy beard and hair, crept into the room with a grin that matched Liz's own. "He don't know," Wauchope whispered.

Ten claws, crisped like the talons of a wild beast, confronted Wauchope suddenly. "Hold on, Liz," he cried. "Hold off, I mean. I never—I never meant to tell—"

Liz, with her claws still ready for action, said threateningly: "Tell what? You don't know anything to tell. You never saw me doing bareback juggling on a horse in no circus. Circuses are dead, and you never saw one, anyhow."

"Never," Wauchope agreed, still watching the claws. He seemed relieved when Liz let her hands fall to her sides; when, produced from the air, or nowhere, a card appeared. "Take it to the kitchen stove," she said. "See it burn yourself."

The placid features of the duplicate king of diamonds, in Murphy's kitchen stove, flared up, went out, and died, while Liz, padding along the veranda, called to her man: "Romilly—Jack!" she said. "I want you."

"Liz," thought Wauchope, stirring the ashes, "generally gets what she wants, and keeps what she gets." Looking at her, looking at the veranda outside, where Anne and Synge were sitting in one chair, he suddenly realized that he was very old.

Another glamorous story of that far Papuan land she calls New Barbary will be contributed by Beatrice Grimshaw—in the next, the January, issue.

You too will agree that the depression is over when you read this astonishing story.

By EDGAR FRANKLIN

Illustrated by Henry Thiede

The Hole In Airplane's Ear

IN Harbor Hospital Mr. Jennison Phinney's nurse reported that, although he mumbled incessant curses on some one named Airplane McCue, he was still only partly conscious. Mr. Phinney's son Wilson and Mr. Mark Talbot, in the adjoining room, remained in a semi-hysterical condition and were unable to give a coherent story; in each of these cases, however, there was much whimpered pleading to know if Airplane McCue had yet been apprehended and electrocuted. Miss Grace Lantry had been rushed aboard the *Rex* at the last minute, to avoid publicity. Therefore the police and the fire marshal went to work in a big way on Mr. James (Airplane) McCue. [His dictated statement follows:]

Listen! You guys can lay offen me before you start, because I will talk; account the way things worked out I will be with you for quite some time. If this is a pinch, I hereby plead guilty to whatever it is and if some smart number tries to spring me on bail, I will stand on my rights as an American citizen and refuse to be sprung.

Well, I guess you will remember it was pretty chilly this morning. I am standing beside Mr. Phinney's six-car garage on his handsomely mortgaged Long Island estate, watching Mr. Wilson Phinney trying to get even a cough out of his imported car, which it is a wonder it can still stand on four wheels—being ready for a complete overhaul job around January 1930, and it would now fall down in a pile of junk if a person sneezed on it. I am also thinking very gloomy about how lousy it is that I now have to drive private for Mr. Phinney at fifty fish the month, when before them crooks slipped over Repeal on us some months ago I was pulling down my good three yards a week with Sniffer Kugel's mob.

Well, Mr. Wilson then slams down the hood and says:

"Poor thing, she was at least two years overdue at the last round-up, Airplane, and— Say, why do they call you Airplane?" he says.

"Well, will you kindly looka," I says, "them ears?"

"True," Mr. Wilson Phinney agrees, "they do stick out from your head like you were about to take off for a nonstop flight. Since we are on the subject, why did you have that hole punched through the flap of the right one?"

"You could not rightly say it was punched, Mr. Wilson," I says, turning sick and faint as always when I think of this matter. "That comes from a certain rat telling Sniffer Kugel I had squealed, which was a lie; but only that Sniffer was so nervous that day and not able to shoot straight, the slug would have gone two inches more to one side and I would now be just something under a headstone. . . . Why don't you try priming her with ether?" I says.

Mr. Wilson then laughed quite loud and harsh.

"I suppose, because we have not got the price of the ether," he says. "Oh, do not grin," he says, "if it were not for my mother's fifteen thousand a year which has somehow hid out on the economic readjustment, you would have the same chance of collecting your wages that the Statue of Liberty has of turning handsprings. What can you use besides ether?"

"Well, Mr. Wilson," I says, after thinking for a moment, "I got something upstairs which I been saving for my old age and as a memento of the good old days, but maybe it would work."

I then went to my room over the garage and brought down a one-gallon jug and I says to Mr. Wilson: "Spill not more than one teaspoonful of this in your carburetor and turn her over." I cannot tell you if Mr. Wilson was more surprised than I was, but when he had done this the old can let off a hell of a bang, and I am a such-and-such if the engine did not start to turn over like it had just left the factory.

"For the love of Mike," Mr. Wilson says, when he had stood some time with his mouth open, "what is it? Dynamite?"

"No, it is just something made up by a friend of mine when we was still in the business," I says. "He called it TNT Plus."

"Ah, and it smells distinctly potable, too!" Mr. Wilson says, getting a silver cup out of the car.

"Oh, Mr. Wilson! Mr. Wilson!" I says. "Do not try drinking that, for it is supposed to be cut with nine times as much water, and even then I have seen our customers laid out in a row, as stiff as boards, after taking two drinks."

"Airplane," Mr. Wilson says, "what makes the lower orders the lower orders is that, now or then, they never did know how to hold their liquor."

WITH that he drinks what is in the cup; I cannot describe it except to say that Mr. Wilson then gave a shake like he was standing on top of an earthquake. His eyes stuck out till I thought they would fall on his cheeks and as his breath came at last, it sounded like a steam-pipe had bursted.

"It is no wonder the engine started!" he says when he can speak. "Airplane, this shows us that the greatest mistake our country has so far made was in getting rid of Prohibition, for beside this nectar the legal stuff is less than ditch-water. Where can we get a lot more of it?"

"Mr. Wilson," I says, "fire me if you like, but you will never know from me where that came from. Once," I says, "it was thought I had talked about our business—and I got this hole in my ear to show for it."

MR. WILSON is just trying to explain to me that our business is now as dead and gone as prosperity, when out from the house comes this Miss Grace Lantry, who lives next door and is an old friend of the family, but is also engaged to some rich guy named Mr. Howell Payne. I cannot describe Miss Lantry, except to say she has blonde hair and elegant clothes, but is very snooty and the way she looks at me you would think I am the dirt under her feet. However, she is so beautiful that a person goes goofy when he sees her.

"What ho," she says, "and so General Washington's staff-car motes again! How-come life got back in the old dog?"

"One shot of this!" Mr. Wilson says, quite solemn, and hands her the jug.

"A little watery, but still not bad," Miss Lantry says when she had sniffed it. She then happened to spill a few drops of TNT on the hood of the Rolls and, believe it or not, in running down it removed the paint like it had been scraped away with a chisel.

"Oh, lady, be careful," I says, "you might get some of that on your pretty hand and take off a finger!"

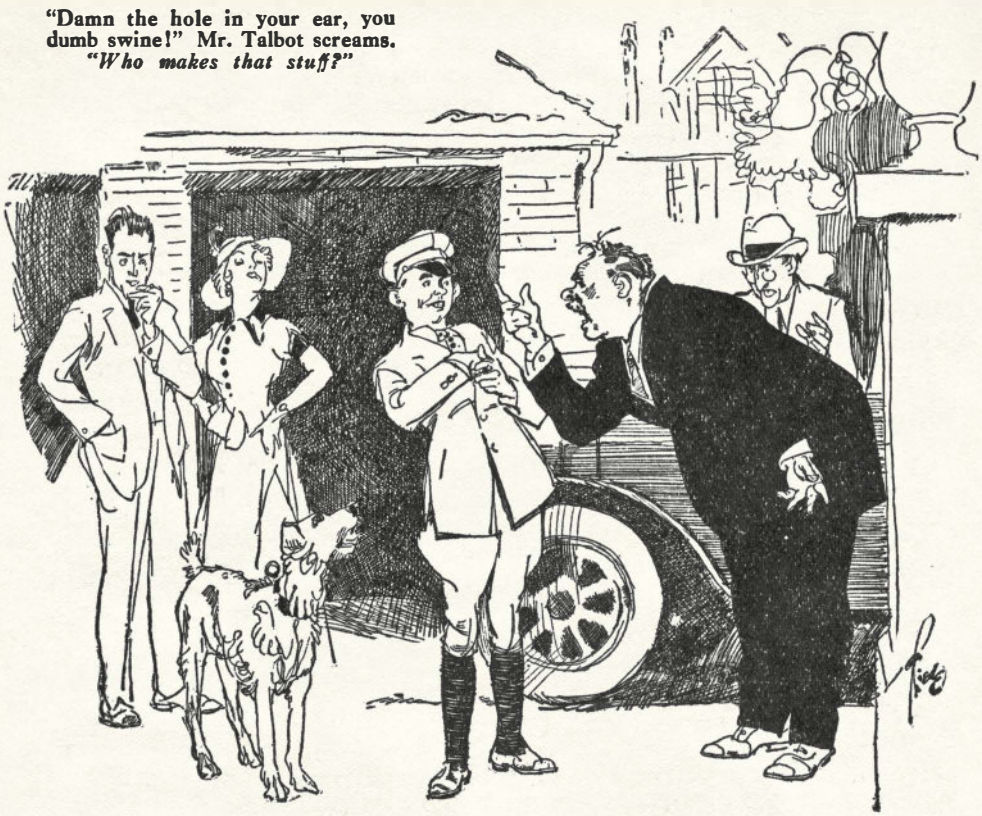
Miss Lantry is just glancing at me with her nose in the air when out from the house also comes Mr. Jennison Phinney, my boss, and Mr. Mark Talbot, the brother of Mrs. Phinney and still President of that padlocked Intercommercial Trust Company till they try him on the two indictments. Both these gents look like a couple of undertakers, as always lately, and Mr. Talbot, who is a large heavy-built man, says:

"Did you have sound-effects put in, Wilson, or is that engine really running?"

Mr. Wilson then explains. When he is finished Mr. Talbot reaches for the jug and says:

"The cup, too, Wilson, please, for this —who knows?—may be the way out."

I cannot describe about Mr. Talbot when he has taken a long drink of TNT, except to say it was like he had been hit



"Damn the hole in your ear, you dumb swine!" Mr. Talbot screams. *"Who makes that stuff?"*

with a brick. He gave a loud snort and grabbed his throat, dropping the cup; he then staggered back against the car, clamping his hands on the both sides of his head; but presently he starts to blink like he is seeing things, and he cries:

"By Jove, Jennison, it is not merely propaganda! *The depression is over!*"

Mr. Phinney, who is a small, sharp old man with gimlet eyes and gray hair, stares quite curious at him.

"Pour me at least three fingers, Wilson," he says.

Well, I thought from Mr. Phinney's face when he had drunk it that he would drop dead, but he did not. Mr. Wilson and Mr. Talbot caught him under the arms and held him upright until the first shock had passed. He then looked at Mr. Talbot for some time, like an owl looks at you in the daytime.

"Mark," he says, "*was* there a depression?"

"Well, this proves that there is hope, even on the deadest day," Miss Lantry says, with her snooty smile. "So now that everybody is tight except me, let us make big whoopee and all take a ride in the 1818 model and kill hundreds of dogs and chickens and unemployed."

"I was about to suggest just that," Mr. Wilson says, "for I have a great idea. If she works so swell in the front end, we ought to be able to take off within a hundred yards if we put some in the hind end." And with that he walks to the rear of the car and starts pouring my TNT into the gas-tank. He would have had it all in, only Mr. Talbot jumps at him and curses him and gets the jug; so then we all get in the car, Mr. Wilson driving and me beside him and the other three in back, and we are about to start when this Mr. Howell Payne, which is the finance of Miss Lantry, drives up in his heavy roadster. He is a large young man with great fists, and he scowls ugly when he sees Miss Lantry amid these shouting and strangely laughing gents.

"What the heck," he says, "is going on here?"

"Oh, little Wing-ear there," Miss Lantry says, pointing to me, "has pushed science ahead about three centuries and we are making a trial flight. If it will amuse you, try and catch us. —Let's go, Wilson," she says, "and it better be good, for I have been bored stiff all week."

Well, I will state that it was good. I will not describe the ride we took in this

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car which a few minutes before was practically out on its feet, except to say it was like something that might happen in hell. I cannot explain what the TNT did when it got into the gas to make the old crate burn up the road like a bat out of the place I just mentioned, and I will not even state that on the straight stretches we did one hundred and five miles an hour. No, I will just refer you to the police of Roslyn, Westbury, Northport, Wading River, Montauk Point, Patchogue and Wantagh, all of which tried to flag us and hand us a ticket and got blown flat by our wind.

While we are taking this ride I am always watching Miss Grace Lantry in the mirror and also listening to the red-hot line Mr. Talbot and Mr. Phinney are throwing at each other, especially Mr. Talbot. At first he speaks about millions and then about hundreds of millions, but after the sixth drink he can only talk about billions; all this time Mr. Phinney is rubbing his hands together and nodding till you would think his dome would fall off, and saying things like: "Not a doubt of it! If it'll send this old ruin along at this speed—"

Well, a few minutes after we start, the way it seems, we are back again, having toured Long Island and put two dozen cars in the ditch and taken down many of the fences between Mr. Phinney's estate and Block Island Sound, and I am expecting any minute to see a regiment of motorcycle bulls roll into the yard, which for some reason, however, they do not. Mr. Phinney's coat is split and there is a bruise on his forehead; Mr. Talbot's hat is smashed flat and there is skin off his nose and Miss Lantry looks like she had been tossed in a blanket for several hours. Mr. Talbot then hops out and chucks the TNT jug in the air, for it is now empty, and it hits a rock and smashes.

"To business, Airplane," Mr. Phinney says. "Tell us at once what this stuff is and where it came from?"

"Mr. Phinney," I says, "it is a very secret preparation with the guy that invented it, costing thirty cents the gallon to make and bringing in seventeen-fifty when cut with nine times as much water. If you are asking from where I got it, Mr. Phinney," I says, "you can go sell your papers, for I do not tell."

"Why not?" says he.

"Because one hole in a man's ear is enough," says I.

"I will talk to him," Mr. Talbot says, and lays a hand on my shoulder. "Airplane," he says, "this is the drink of the gods, but it is also the internal-combustion fuel of all the ages. Come clean!"

"I am not as dumb as I look," I then smiled. "I still think one hole in a man's ear is enough."

"Bologny, Airplane, you are neurotic and full of groundless fears," Mr. Talbot then says. "You are living in the past," he says, "for Prohibition is only a memory and this Sniffer Kugel you fear so is now doubtless in some honorable employment and has even forgotten you are alive."

"Says you," I says, "and that is all you know about Sniffer Kugel."

"Oh, to hell with Sniffer Kugel!" Mr. Talbot then says, growing impatient. "Look! We have something here which will revolutionize the whole power scheme of the world. Once I have hired a couple of twenty-thousand-dollar engineers for twenty dollars a week and turned them loose on this, it will scrap every engine in existence. We shall have Standard Oil crawling to us on their knees and begging for mercy. Why, there's billions in it!" he yells. "And of course we'll see that you get a nice slice of the profits, Airplane," he says. "So! Where's it made?"

"Mr. Talbot," I then smiled, "aside from one hole in a man's ear being enough—"

"Damn the hole in your ear!" Mr. Talbot screams, him not being one who cares what he says even if ladies are present. *"Who makes that stuff?"*

"Mr. Talbot," I says, "I am trying to tell you that—"

"One minute, Airplane," Mr. Phinney busts in. "Here is an angle that will appeal to your finer side. Mr. Talbot and I will be able to make many millions out of the stock of the company we shall incorporate. Well, then, Mr. Talbot's bank has been in some trouble lately and we shall use these millions to open it again, and in that way thousands of widows and orphans will get back their money. It will be nice to think that *you* did that, eh?"

"Yeah, I heard about how Mr. Talbot took the orphans for a ride and how the D. A. puts the finger on him and he will probably do a long stretch," I says, "but if you will let me explain, you will see that in spite of that and everything else I cannot—"

Here Mr. Talbot gives a great cry and leaps at me and picks me up and shakes me like a cat shakes a mouse.

"You dumb, impudent little swine!" he hollers.

"Mr. Talbot," I says, very quiet, when he puts me down, for I am quite sore, and I also put my hand inside my coat like I am reaching for a rod, "did you kiss your family good-by before you started calling me a dumb swine?"

"Well, well, perhaps I spoke hastily," Mr. Talbot says, ducking behind Mr. Phinney and trying to smile sweet. "Be reasonable, old chap!" he says. "Who does make this wonderful stuff?"

"I would be too dumb a swine to know, Mr. Talbot," I says.

Well, Mr. Talbot gives me one terrible look and puts his hands behind his back and walks back and forth for some time, eating his lips. He then suddenly pushes Mr. Wilson Phinney out of the car and gets in.

"Hold everything!" he says, and with that he is gone.

WELL, it has been in the papers how Mr. Talbot probably now has much of what the widows and orphans used to have, and how it is probably stuck around in a number of safe-deposit boxes on Long Island, and I will say this is the right dope, for he is gone less than half an hour. Meanwhile, Mr. Wilson lies down in the station wagon and cries in his sleep and Miss Lantry smokes cigarettes and throws sticks for the Airedale to chase and something happens to Mr. Phinney's knees, so that as he leans his back against the garage he slides down slowly until he is sitting on the ground, and there he stays with a smile on his face such as you see on a wax figure.

Then Mr. Talbot comes roaring back with the radiator boiling and they return to life, but Mr. Talbot comes straight to me.

"Airplane," he says, "it is necessary that we deal with principals only, so you will have to take us to the man who makes this TNT. And this will square it," he says, poking five bills at me, each with a *M* on it.

Well, I put these five G's in my pocket and look at Mr. Talbot and think how he calls me a dumb swine, and I also think what will happen if I take him where this TNT is made and Sniffer Kugel hears about it.

"No, Mr. Talbot," I says, "I am too dumb a swine."

MR. TALBOT gives another terrible scream and grinds his teeth together so you can hear them, but shortly he is calmer again.

"This is not the first expensive remark I have made in my time," he says. "There, damn you! Take it all, second crack out of the box!" He then pokes ten more bills at me and says: "*Now!* Take us there!"

Well, I put this ten G's with the five G's and think further.

"No, Mr. Talbot," I says, "I am still too dumb a swine."

"Say, how much do you think you're going to get out of this?" Mr. Talbot then shrieks at me. "What do you suppose I gave you fifteen thousand dollars for?"

"The only guess I make, it is because you are a sucker, Mr. Talbot," I laugh heartily and put my hand inside my coat again like I am reaching for a rod. "And if you want it back, try and get it."

Well, now comes the very peculiar part, which I do not yet understand myself. What I mean, it seems no matter what else is going on, I cannot take my eyes off this beautiful Miss Lantry. It seems every time I look at her I am drinking genuine champagne and getting perfume poured on me; and maybe Mr. Phinney notices this, for he keeps squinting very funny at me.

"Mark," he says, sudden, "I wish to confer with you—and with Grace; and you better come along too, Wilson," he says, and with that he leads them off maybe a hundred feet and they go in a huddle like they are working out a new

Mr. Talbot lets off a howl like a wolf which is hungry. It seemed he wished to kill me. Mr. Phinney and his son tried to hold him, but I grew quite nervous.

play—which they are, only I am too goofy at the time to know it. I mean, it is exactly as if I am full of hop, and while I catch snatches of their conversation it does not click with me so as to mean anything.

I see Mr. Phinney talking very earnest and I see Miss Lantry shake her head and once she says quite loud: "No, stick me full of pins or burn me at the stake, but do not ask me—" Then Mr. Talbot says something to her about: "—Probably keep me out of jail and save the bank. Listen, Grace," he says. "In 1907 I saved your father and his railroad from ruin. It took every dime I had, but if I had turned him down he would have shot himself and you would have grown up in a small Brooklyn flat and probably now be working in the hosiery department or married to a plumber's helper; so I am justified in asking—" After that I couldn't catch no more, but presently Miss Lantry quit shaking her head and turned around and gave me a long look.

Well, then everything gets still more peculiar, because suddenly she shrugs her beautiful shoulders and walks toward me, and she is now smiling like an angel in Heaven and I feel crazy happy and like I am on a pink cloud.

"Airplane," she says, "they make me sick, talking the way they do about you and I cannot stand it any longer. Maybe I too have treated you rotten," she says, "and if so, old kid, I am sorry."

"Well, what was the matter of you, Miss Lantry?" I says. "Was you scared of me or something?"

"Oh, call me Grace," she says, and gives me one look with her wonderful eyes and, believe it or not, suddenly I could see that she loved me and I was that wild with joy I could have shrieked. "No, Airplane," she says, "I was not scared of you. I was scared of—myself," she whispers and drops her eyes and slides her arm through mine.

"For the love of tripe," I says, "why was you scared of either of us?" I says, not knowing what I says. "For cannot I take care of the both of us?" I says.

"I bet you can, you big, strong, handsome brute," she says, very soft, and with that we walk away from the others and I start wondering what'll happen if I grab her and kiss her. "No, Airplane, I guess a girl just gets that way when—when—"

"You mean, when she is in love with a guy?" I says.

"Would it be for me to speak about that until asked?" she says, shooting her eyes at me again.

"Gracie," I says, when able to talk, "I am the happiest punk this side of China and anything fifteen grand will buy is yours for the naming—or would you like somebody rubbed out?" I says, wishing to give her the best I had.

"No," she says, "I do not want anybody rubbed out; but I wish you would stop their silly beefing by taking them where that funny stuff comes from."

"In that case, Gracie, somebody would certainly be rubbed out and the somebody would be me," I says. "Because it so happens that while Sniffer Kugel is doing quite nice with the snatch racket he is now in, he still has twenty thousand gallons of Scotch to get rid of before he can retire permanent from our old business—and he would be very peeved if the place where this is was known."

"Oh, well, if you would not run a little risk like that for *me*," she says, sticking out her lips like a child when you take away its candy. "I had all my money in Mr. Talbot's bank and am without a penny of my own till it opens again. But why should you care about that?"

"Listen, Gracie," I says. "If it is really that way, show me with one kiss and I will not only take you where TNT is made, but I will also spit in Sniffer Kugel's eye." I then held out my arm and said: "Into the clinch, sugar!"

Well, Miss Lantry squares her shoulders and grows quite stiff, like she is bracing herself to take one on the button.

"O. K., Airplane," she says. "Greater love than this hath no man, I guess."

Well, when she admits it like that I think my heart will bust with joy, and from this point on you can say I am more bughouse than anything they have in a padded cell. What I mean, I put my arms around this swell doll and kiss her till she is practically unconscious with happiness herself and I then take her hand and lead her back where the other three are standing.

"Gents," I says, "something wonderful has happened which changes everything, so I will now take you where TNT is made and if anything unpleasant breaks along the line I am trusting you that I get a nice funeral. We will now shove off," I says.

Well, Mr. Talbot then starts jumping and yelling like a nut and Mr. Phinney cackles and rubs his hands together and we all get in the car, me driving this time with Miss Lantry beside me, but just then I get an elegant idea.

"Gracie," I says, "one more kiss."

"Oh, Airplane," she says, "with everybody looking?"

"Leave us give them an eyeful, baby," I says gayly, "and with this kiss you can also spare a hug for little Airplane, and until you come through with the both of them we do not start," I says.

Well, Miss Lantry then makes a noise like a moan which at the time I take for happiness and puts her arms around my neck and gives me this kiss, such as it was—and no more than she does so I hear a loud yell and turn quick, and there is Mr. Howell Payne, all purple, in his heavy roadster beside us. His eyes look like there is a fire inside his head and he is reaching toward me and also trying to get out of his car, but he is so excited his legs keep getting tangled with the gear-shift lever and so he falls several times.

"Hey, I have chased all over Long Island for you and been arrested four times and— Why, you dirty little rat, I'll kill you!" he screams at me; and no matter if this palooka is rich and has a college education and all, I am telling you he means this and probably still does.

Well, it seems it is now time we are getting away from there so I let in the clutch and for a little while I can see Mr. Howell Payne behind us, always driving with his left hand and shaking his right fist and yelling; but he has no TNT in his gas, so presently we lose him and I can slow down.

WELL, I start thinking how these guys in back are smarter than me, because they got rich. And here I am going to hand them something they can make millions out of, for a punk fifteen grand—which is not so good because shortly now I will be marrying Miss Grace Lantry, and fifteen grand will probably buy her stockings and lipstick for about six months. So I continue to think and in this way we get to New York City without no trouble except I am somewhat cold inside, because we are now very near where Sniffer Kugel keeps his stock and I am certainly hoping that at present Sniffer Kugel is off snatching some wealthy person in Kansas City or Miami.

I do not have to tell you about Sniffer

Kugel's place, for you now know it was in the very large and secret sub-cellar under the nine-hundred-thousand-dollar apartment-house in Park Avenue which he owns. I will say that Sniffer was always very proud about this, because we had a long tunnel running through to Lexington and coming out under a barber shop, and no bull of any sort was ever wise to this, and in that way Sniffer saved quite a piece of change.

Well, we now stop near the back of this apartment-house and I have finished thinking, so I says:

"Mr. Talbot, we are almost there, but before going farther let us see how much I cut in on what you make. There is two of you and one of me, although soon to be two of me also," I says, smiling fondly at Miss Lantry, "so leave us cut it three ways, me to take one. Write that on a paper and sign it, Mr. Talbot," I says, "because otherwise the sight-seeing tour is over and we are returning home."

Well, Mr. Talbot then curses something frightful, but as I let in the clutch once more they have another huddle and presently he writes on a page from his notebook and Mr. Phinney and Mr. Wilson Phinney put down their names as witnesses, and I put this paper in my pocket along with the fifteen G's.

"I will now take you where the TNT is," I says. "You stay here, Gracie, and as soon as my job is done we will beat it downtown and get ourselves married."

"Oh, I am coming too," she says.

"No, no, Gracie, stay here," I says—so she come along with us.

Well, to get to this sub-cellar you take a gate which looks like it leads into the house next door and then go down a flight of steps to an iron door. I go first and give a certain rap on this door—and here is a great break, because not Sniffer, nor anybody, is hanging around the old place today; so then I open the door with a key I still have. Miss Grace Lantry stays near the stairs, but them other gents come in with me and are greatly surprised at all they see roundabout; at the same time I will not take too many chances and want to get this over with quick, so I says:

"Stay here in the big cellar while I go see."

Well, I notice Mr. Phinney and his son are now quite pale and trembling slightly, but Mr. Talbot is a very bright green color and so nervous he is dancing on pins and needles, which happens when the TNT is working off a person.

"Get us—couple gallons!" he says, in funny jerks. "And get us—man who makes it. Is he here?"

"If he aint, he *was*." I smile mysterious and walk away, for presently I am going to hand them a fine big laugh.

I THEN go through another certain door to where we keep the TNT and other articles, and am somewhat astonished to find there is only one jug of TNT left on the shelf. I return and hand this to Mr. Talbot, who is now so shaky he can hardly hold it. He squawks:

"The man! The man who makes it! Where's the man?"

"Mr. Talbot," I says, "have a fine big laugh on yourself, for that is what this dumb swine was always trying to tell you and you always kept interrupting. It just so happens," I says, "that the man who made it was a Finn we called Ooftie. Many months ago it was thought he had squealed about certain matters, and so that is why he was found in a burlap bag up near City Island."

Mr. Talbot then turns blue instead of green and gasps: "You mean the inventor of this is—dead?"

"Unless he has greatly changed since I last seen him," I smiled.

"D-d-dead!" Mr. Talbot whispers, and with that the jug slides out of his hands and busts in one thousand pieces, and there is TNT all over the floor and the fumes coming up are enough to strangle you. Mr. Phinney and Mr. Wilson start coughing, but Mr. Talbot is too excited to cough.

"Who else knows about making it?" he croaks at me.

"Nobody in the world," I says, "because it is something Ooftie made up himself in the old country, and I once seen him turn down twenty grand that Sniffer Kugel offered him to write out the directions. Sniffer was very angry at the gorilla who cooled Ooftie last summer without no orders," I says, "and only for this Repeal thing coming along the way it did, he would probably also have been found in a burlap bag up near City Island."

Well, Mr. Talbot is about to say something tough when Mr. Phinney puts in: "Calm yourself, Mark; the town is full of chemists and we can find out all about it in a week. Rustle us another two or three gallons, Airplane," he says, "and let us get out of here."

"Well, there, Mr. Phinney," I says, "is where the laugh turns sour, because

so far as I know there is not another drop on earth beside what is inside you gents and on the floor there."

Well, Mr. Talbot lets off a loud and very peculiar howl, like a wolf which is hungry, and I cannot repeat the words he says to me, for I do not use such language. It seemed for some reason he wished to kill me. Mr. Phinney and his son tried to hold him, but the party was getting rough and I grew quite nervous, Mr. Talbot being so large and powerful and me really not having no rod. In fact, I am getting so nervous I pull out a cigarette and light it and start backing to the stairs.

Well, if necessary for you to hold me, I will now say that I done this on purpose; but the truth is I supposed the match was out before I threw it on the floor, which it seemed it was not. Consequently there was a very loud explosion and the cellar looked like it was full of fire, and my hat blew off and also this part of my coat.

I could see Mr. Wilson and his papa rolling on the floor with their arms around each other and yelling loudly, which they did until they struck the south wall with a *kerplunk*, and then they did not yell no more. I could see Mr. Talbot sitting on the floor and sliding backward like he was pulled with a wire, until he also hit the south wall; he then looked like somebody had tapped his coco with a bung-starter and he laid down on his side like he was asleep.

Well, it seemed I could do nothing more there and Miss Lantry was waiting for me to marry her, so I went up the stairs and I found Miss Lantry sitting on the sidewalk, where I suppose she had been blown. I then picked her up and stood her on her feet and I says:

"The show is over, Gracie, and we will now go get married. We will have to do the best we can on fifteen grand for a start."

I will state that this Miss Lantry is a very bright girl and can think like a flash of lightning. What I mean, she looks at me for a second and then says with a smile that would stop your pulse:

"Have you it still? Give it to me, for it will be safer."

"You have a conk on them pretty shoulders, my little woman," I says. "Here it is,"—and with that I slipped her the fifteen grand.

Miss Lantry then stuffs it inside her dress, and you can knock me down with the skin of an onion, for she is suddenly looking at me like she hated me and also screaming:

"Get away from me, you filthy little monster! Oh, I hope they hang you!" And with that she starts downstairs hollering: "Wilson! Mr. Talbot! Oh, Mr. Phinney!" and such things.

Well, presently I am able to see I am just another tire with the air let out by a faithless woman, and I start looking around. I can see bushels of glass everywhere from the busted windows upstairs and hear people screaming many stories above and also other people running everywhere. I hear fire engines coming and also you guys' emergency truck whistling, so I think it is better I head east and be elsewhere immediately.

But as I head east I suddenly turn and head west, because here is Sniffer Kugel, who is by no means in Kansas City, and no more he sees me than he has his rod in his hand. Well, I am thinking how lucky I am now if I get no more than a hole in my other ear, so I go into high and continue to head west, hoping to reach Mr. Wilson's car. However, I do not head west for more than ten feet, because just across the street Mr. Howell Payne is climbing out of his heavy roadster; and if the devil has a face on him like Mr. Howell Payne when he sees me —which had got kissed by his finance—I will hereafter lead a better life.

Well, it seems if I continue west I will be rubbed out and if I turn back east I will also be rubbed out; so now, I says to myself, I will go downstairs again and burn to death with the others, because that will be less painful and also give me a fine big laugh on them two guys up here. But as I am about to go down the stairs you bulls come around the corner in your truck and start piling out, and while I have never before wished to kiss a copper I will state that I could have kissed that harness bull that grabbed me, and liked it.

THIS is my full statement, and if you will look out the window the way I did fifteen minutes ago, you will see Mr. Howell Payne and Sniffer Kugel sitting together over there in Mr. Payne's heavy roadster and watching the door here. So if I have confessed enough that you can put me in the cooler I will now go lay down a while and rest; and if not will you kindly state what I have to confess to, to get a two-to-four stretch? You only got to say what you want confessed to, and I will confess to it.

Fight Fire

A New Deal diplomat and an American newspaper man draw cards in a deadly game of international intrigue.

MORGAN had lost his job. No longer was he London correspondent for the Amalgamated Press. And even for crack foreign correspondents, an American in London without a job was in hard luck. Especially if he needed money! And Morgan was broke.

Consequently, when he returned to his lodgings that afternoon and found a job awaiting him, he did not go into mourning. Quiet, level-eyed, seldom losing his head, knowing most of Europe like the palm of his hand, Morgan had a reputation for getting results where others failed.

The card held a line of writing: *"See me at the American Embassy at eight tonight if you can tackle a man's job."* On the card was engraved, in florid type:

HOMER BARLOCK

Barlock Auto Gun. Barlock Sprayer.
Barlock Oil Gauge. Barlock Filter.
Try the Barlock Line, My Brother,
We Guarantee You'll Try No Other.

Morgan laughed, then frowned.

"Barlock—of course! that's the man. Sent over here on some special diplomatic errand at the Arms Conference, and made the laughingstock of Europe. Same chap—business man from the Middle West. That's the one, all right. Utterly ignorant of diplomacy, and trimmed right and left by these sleek Continental diplomats. I heard he'd resigned. What kind of a job has he got for me, I wonder? Selling the Barlock Line in Europe? Well, we should worry. We need the shekels. Too bad the chap doesn't own a few newspapers; then I might land a real job!"

At eight o'clock that evening Morgan sent in his name and was shown to a room where Homer Barlock awaited him. His first impression was disappointing.

Homer Barlock was a dry, leathery man with an expansive grin that was turned on and off as by a faucet. His eyes were brilliant, sunken, piercing. His features were ungainly; and one side of his mouth was occupied by an unlit cigar. He took out the cigar, shook hands, hitched his tie around to loosen it, and dropped into a chair.

"Glad to meet you, Morgan. Heard of you," he said jerkily. "Want a job?"

"Maybe," said Morgan warily. "What sort of a job?"

"Good pay; I'm paying you. If you slip up, you lose. No publicity. Devilish hard work, sharpest outfit in Europe to go up against. Know anything about the Barlock Line?"

"Only what I read on your card," said Morgan, amused. Homer Barlock drew another card from his pocket and surveyed it proudly.

"That's genius," he solemnly averred. "Runs like poetry, don't it? Listen, now: 'Barlock Oil Gauge—Barlock Filter—Barlock Auto Gun—Barlock Sprayer—Try the Barlock Line, my brother—we guarantee you'll try no other.' You'd be surprised, Morgan, to know how that there thing has spread business. Yeah. I got sent over here to go up against some of these diplomatic sharks, and I'm in a hole. It's a new deal all around, at home and abroad; and by goshfry, I'm dishing it out. But I need a feller like you. These Europeans have played me for a sucker, but I've been learning my job, see?"

"I heard they sort of hornswoggled you at that Basle Conference," said Morgan bluntly.

with Fire

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

Illustrated by Austin Briggs

"Yeah." Barlock chewed at his cigar. "Your business is to know the inside of things. Do you know it?"

"Some of it," admitted Morgan. "Europe is back in pre-war days, for one thing. Intrigue, suspicion, spies. All afraid of France, with the big army and big gold reserve. Nobody dares start anything openly. Under the surface a secret, merciless war. Right?"

"Yeah," said Barlock. Suddenly his leathery features wrinkled up, and a smile lit up his dark eyes; in this instant the whole man changed. He leaned forward and clapped Morgan on the knee. "You've hit it. Feller, will you take the job to act for me?"

"In what capacity?"

"Secret agent. Fight fire with fire. Strictly on the *q.t.;* no earthly connection with the State Department or with the Government. With me only. You can do a lot of dirty work I can't swing. By goshfry, I want to apply business methods to this cutthroat game—and the best business method I know is to give 'em what they aint looking for."

He leaned forward earnestly. "Morgan, I'm no high-hat diplomat, see? I'm sort of crude, and I aint on to all these high-society didoes. I had to work so durned hard making a living that I didn't have any time to learn fancy frills. Well, I'm out for business, and I've learned my lesson. I'm going after diplomacy in my own way.

"Mind you, feller," he went on, "I aint representing Uncle Sam; and if I get nicked, I can't holler to Washington for help. You neither. But I got some notions; I got some good inside dope; and I've got nerve. How about you?"

Morgan met the flashing thrust of those brilliant eyes, and threw caution overboard.

"A new deal in diplomacy, eh? Done. I'm your man."

"Shake," said Barlock solemnly; they shook. "We'll talk wages later. Right now, we got to act and act fast. Know anything about the Principality of Arnheim?"

"Arnheim? Why, sure! That's the little buffer state—used to be part of Austria, is now semi-independent. Isn't it run by a princess? The last prince died a short while back, if I remember correctly. They say there's all kinds of hell brewing in Arnheim right now."

BARLOCK slapped him on the knee again, then leaned back.

"Correct, feller! And I've got a hurry-up call to help out the Princess. Her dad was an American. I used to know him back in Ohio; in fact, he backed a couple of my first inventions. Then she and her ma come over to Europe and she married this no-account prince, and now she's in a hole. What's more, if I don't help her out, there'll be a bonfire started that will play hell with Uncle Sam. Bond issues, get me? Bond issues that set Arnheim on its feet. We don't want to see 'em forfeited."

"Hold on!" exclaimed Morgan. "Who are you working for? Bankers?"

"Not me!" And Homer Barlock grinned. "Word of honor."

"All right." Morgan relaxed. "I don't mind being patriotic, but I hate to waste all that energy just to save the bonds of some banking group. Well, what's the trouble with this Princess? Just what can we do to help her out? Better let her resign and skip the job."

"That is it; she can't," said Barlock. "I won't know the rights of it till we see her. I got a long-distance message from her today but she wouldn't go into details. Can you catch the afternoon plane tomorrow, for Arnheim?"

"Sure. Mean to say you're going too?"

"Naturally." Homer Barlock cocked his cigar at an aggressive angle. "And don't do any talking, feller. Here's a check for expenses. Now, about salary—"

Fifteen minutes later Morgan was headed homeward, his brain in somewhat of a whirl.

His first conjecture, that Homer Barlock had gone crazy, was now completely rebutted. He perceived, to his astonishment, that this shrewd, uncultured but wealthy man from the Middle West had thought of something new in the way of investments. Homer Barlock, frustrated and made a laughingstock by the sleek diplomatic circles, was now buying chips in the game on his own account, with a deadly earnestness that was impressive.

"And he might pull off something, too," thought Morgan. "He's not working for any government; he can throw all the rules overboard. Glory be, what a chance it is! If he holds up, that is. If he meets some of these murdering rats in the European game. and still holds up, all right!"

MORGAN well knew the perils of such an affair, where death lay in wait everywhere, and prison walls would close on the slow-witted. It was the very fact that Homer Barlock was himself, that appealed to him. Working with such a man, one might pull off *coups* readily enough, before the secret-service crowd knew what was going on. Secret diplomacy was a dirty game at best, a game of lies and theft and assassination.

Hard words, but true. Morgan was a hard man at times. Bronzed, lean, bony features, cold gray eyes that held no illusions but could warm into eager laughter, and a knack of getting things done quietly. He had been knocking about Europe long enough to gain a healthy contempt for brass hats and titles, a healthy respect for the poor devils underneath who bore the load. It was the peasants who were worth while, he was wont to say. It was emigrating peasants who had made New York and Nebraska what they are today. Sound stuff, brains, courage in these lower classes. Not that Morgan despised society as such. He was no Red. But he had no love for the conventional diplomat and the professional politician.

"So we're going to Arnheim, eh?" he thought that night, as he turned in. "One place I've never seen. Going to rescue a princess, eh? Sounds like a fairy story. I'll bet a dollar the princess turns out to have boils and a pug nose and a gin complex. All right, Homer Barlock! Maybe you'll get a black eye out of this, but we're going to give diplomatic circles one hell of a jolt."

And, with a delighted chuckle, Mr. Morgan went off to sleep.

NOT twenty miles from Arnheim, its last stop this side of Vienna, the great Lufthansa air liner crashed.

Morgan's brain recoiled in frantic horror from the recollection.

Eleven passengers, one of them a woman! The two rearmost seats were occupied by Homer Barlock and Morgan. Barlock must have been the first to detect anything amiss. He caught at Morgan's arm, across the aisle. His leathery features were suddenly white as death; in his deep eyes blazed an unuttered message. At this instant, one of the pilots appeared from the cockpit.

The pilot leaned on a lever that flung open the rear door. Panic was in his face, a mad shout on his lips. But few understood his words, spoken in German.

"Parachutes! One by one—*jump!* Quick, you fools, *quick!*"

Then Morgan saw it: a tongue of flame shooting from the right wing, a burst of black oil-smoke rushing past the right windows.

The pilot flung himself at the paralyzed passengers. He seized the shrieking woman and literally hurled her through the open doorway, pulling the cord of her parachute as he did so; she lacked the sense to do it herself. Then the plane suddenly swirled over in the air, end over end. Morgan was flung upside down. His head smashed into one of the bronze lighting-fixtures in the ceiling.

How the rest of it happened, he never knew; his own actions must have been automatic, involuntary. Probably he was still near the open door when the crash came, and was flung through it by the impact. Seldom does the human mind recall how these things happen; they have a speed too great to register. The frightful rapidity of death laughs at the cells of the human brain.

The woman who had been flung out could tell nothing afterward: her parachute did not work. . . .

It was close to dusk when the crash occurred. Whether others had followed the unfortunate woman, was impossible to say. When hastily gathering peasants reached the spot where flames were spouting up from the hop-fields, they found no living thing except Morgan, who was painfully dragging himself away from the intense heat.

He collapsed as they reached him. Nothing was left of the huge air liner except a monstrous torch of twisted metal in which everything living and dead had been consumed.

Not until the following morning did Morgan waken to consciousness. By one of those seeming freaks which often occur in terrific accidents, he was absolutely uninjured except for a slightly cut scalp and a few minor bruises. The shock, however, had been frightful. When memory came back to him, he lay with closed eyes, shivering.

The nurse spoke to him softly, gently. Presently he opened his eyes again.

He lay in a white hospital room. He had been brought into Arnheim, the nurse said; so far as was known, no one else had survived the crash.

A picture on the wall caught his eye, an enlarged photograph in a heavy frame. Just the head and shoulders of a woman. Even in this frightful moment, the expression of the face caught Morgan's eye. So lovely was the face, so strong, so fine, that he wondered. The nurse smiled.

"That is Princess Marie, my friend."

Morgan looked again at the picture, smiled faintly, then drifted into slumber.

The nurse left him and went to a large screen across one corner of the room. She moved a panel aside and then curtsied. A veiled woman sat there behind the screen.

"He is asleep again, Highness," said the nurse respectfully. "It is the hypodermic. He will waken later on, in the afternoon, with a clear mind."

The woman who had been flung out could tell nothing afterward: her parachute did not work.

The veiled woman nodded and rising, left the room.

When Morgan wakened again, it was to find a doctor examining him—a bearded doctor, an old man, with a majestic leonine head. He was helped to sit up, given some broth. The old doctor regarded him with a benignant expression.

"You should give thanks to God, my friend. You are perfectly well; you alone escaped. But to make certain, I shall

keep you here until morning. Have you friends in Arnheim?"

Morgan shook his head. "No one else escaped? My friend Barlock—"

"No one else that we know of. The bodies in the plane were one charred lump, and were buried in a lump. *Ach*, it is horrible! Newspaper men want to see you. I have forbidden them."

"Thanks," murmured Morgan. So Homer Barlock was dead, then—dead, with all his plans wiped out before they even began to work.

"Your clothes are here, with everything in them," said the old doctor, and lowered his voice. "The clothes are in the closet yonder, but I took everything out of them. Your money, everything; it was too much to leave around. I put all in the hospital safe."

Morgan merely nodded, with a bitter smile. What did money or other things matter?

Left alone again, he lay back on the pillows and tried to get things straight. Barlock had told him nothing of their errand here in Arnheim except that it was to help the Princess. Against whom? Morgan had no idea. He looked up at the picture on the wall. Lovely woman, yes. Probably all tied up in red tape and politics; a widow. Probably some crowd of nobles, out at elbows and strictly selfish, were trying to put something over on her. That was the best thing they did in Europe. Bosh! She had married for a title, so let her take the consequences.

Doctor Franz had left a newspaper behind for him. Morgan read German and French as well as he did English. He read the account of the disaster. His own name was there. What of the others? The painted countess, the diamond merchant, the two rascals who sported titles and looked like underworld rats—dead, all of them. And Homer Barlock, formerly a diplomatic envoy from Washington, now engaged in private affairs. Dead—snuffed out in an instant! Morgan laid the paper aside wearily.

THE door of his room opened and closed again. He glanced up. A woman had entered, a veiled woman in black, who approached the bed swiftly.

"Wrong room, madam," said Morgan.

"You mistake." She threw back her veil and leaned forward, clasping his hand in both of hers. Morgan could only stare at her in utter stupefaction. The original of that picture on the wall, the Princess herself!

She smiled at his expression, and his heart leaped.

"You!" murmured Morgan. "Good Lord!"

For an instant, the anxious worry fled from her eyes, as she met his startled gaze.

"You seem to know me, Mr. Morgan—oh, that picture there, eh? My friend, we must talk rapidly; I have little time. I am supposed to be resting. There is a ball tonight, and you must be there, at the palace. Doctor Franz says you are all right."

"Me? At a ball?" Morgan laughed harshly, wondering if he had heard aright. She pressed his hand. Her words were crisp, vigorous, energetic.

"The details are arranged. In an hour you must see the reporters. Tell them you are compelled to remain a few days in Arnheim; you were going to Vienna on business, but the shock has unnerved you. Do you comprehend? Don't mention Homer Barlock to a soul, to a soul!"

SOME electric quality in her thrilled through him, pulling him together, snapping his brain awake. He was himself again.

"Maybe you know what it's all about," he said coolly. "I don't."

She uttered a silvery little laugh.

"I hope I do, Mr. Morgan. I'm up against it, that's all, and every hour counts. You and Homer Barlock must work fast—"

Morgan flinched. "But he's dead."

"Nonsense." Her eyes widened, blazed at him with violet fires. Excitement, and an eager vitality, filled her face. "He is not dead at all."

"Good God!" Morgan sat bolt upright. "Are you serious? Do you know what you're saying?"

"Listen: nobody knows, nobody must know," she said earnestly. "Perhaps it is suspected that you were connected with him. Therefore, be careful, trust no one except Doctor Franz. No one! That is imperative."

"All right, all right," Morgan broke in. "But what about Barlock? How—"

"I know only that he is alive. He telephoned me at noon today. I know his voice. He spoke very briefly."

"Great Scott! If it's true—"

"It is," she hurried on. "You will see the reporters. Say you'll remain here in the hospital to recuperate; you do not know Homer Barlock; get rid of them all. Tonight, Doctor Franz will come

One swift step and his arm flashed out. His grip closed on the pistol-wrist, and he jerked the old officer to his feet.

and will bring you to the palace. He knows the secret way to my apartment. You can trust him. When you reach my rooms, I shall have a few minutes with you, no more. I shall tell you what to do; that is all. Explanations must wait. Tonight everything is happening. Are you equal to it?"

"Sure, I'm equal to everything!"—and Morgan chuckled. "What's up, anyhow?"

"I don't know yet, myself. But it is danger. You must trust me, trust Barlock, blindly. Now I must go." She pressed his hand again. "Do just as Franz tells you, remember."

"Right. Only, I'm sorry you're not a nurse."

She gave him a puzzled look. "But I have studied nursing. Why?"

"Don't nurses often kiss their patients for luck?"

Her fingers jerked free. Color rose in her cheeks.

"What? You forget that I am—"

"All right, all right," said Morgan. "You're a princess, sure. But to a newspaper man you're only another dame—prettier than any of 'em, though. And born in America. Ohio!"

Her color deepened, then she broke into a laugh, leaned forward quickly, kissed him.

"Right! So good-by, until tonight."

"And tell somebody to send me a thick steak, will you? Thanks, Princess."

Her laughing assent was cut short by the closing door.

Morgan lay wondering if she were real. His pulses leaped at the thought of her, at the memory of her words, her voice, her eyes. And—Homer Barlock alive!

WITH the thought, Morgan dropped from the heights, lost his enthusiasm, and regarded the matter with his usual critical, hard-boiled eye. Was all this merely some ruse to make use of him? His emotions rebelled at the suggestion, but his cold, suspicious reason considered it very carefully. Had she lied about Barlock being alive?

"Hold everything, now," he cautioned himself. "You're in a game where the most beautiful critters imaginable are dealing the cards. Why did she give you that kiss, except to befuddle your brain? Maybe she liked you, sure. Maybe not. So go slow—"

Suddenly he realized that his door had opened and closed again, so silently he barely heard it. A man was approaching his bed. A youngish man of perhaps thirty, exquisitely dressed, with a huge black mustache and a peculiarly cold and steely eye. His walk was, like his gaze, peculiar; a rippling grace of motion, a light, lithe stride that told of perfect muscles and great agility.

"Pardon the intrusion, Mr. Morgan," he said in English. "I was sent to get your clothes that they might be pressed."

"You were?" Morgan, still in surly and suspicious mood, was not conquered by the charming smile that accompanied these words. "There must be some mistake. An orderly got them a few moments ago."

"Oh!" The steely eyes flashed, then the other bowed. "A thousand apologies—"

"Come on, come on," growled Morgan. "You're no orderly. What are you after here?"

"A journalist," and the other laughed suddenly. "From the *Staats-Zeitung*. Will you do me the honor of giving me a statement?"

Morgan leaned back with a faint grin. "You're not so bad. What do you want to know?"

"Your impressions of the disaster."

"Haven't any. Hit my head, and that's all I remember."

"Your friend Mr. Homer Barlock was with you?"

"Never heard of him. Who is he?"

"My dear sir!" said the other in protest. "You were both bound for Arnheim; you booked passage together—"

"Bosh! I wasn't bound for Arnheim at all, but for Vienna," broke in Morgan. "Don't know a soul here, never heard of the place, and I did have important business in Vienna. Now I must stay here for a week to get over the shock and my bruises. Now clear out. I'm tired."

As he spoke, he reached to the bell beside him, and pressed it. Looking slightly startled, the other bowed again, then departed swiftly and silently. Morgan whistled to himself.

"Wanted my clothes, eh? Why? To see what was in the pockets? I've played that trick too often myself. Good thing the clothes are still in the closet—if they are!"

They were, as the nurse who appeared a moment later verified for him. Morgan said nothing of his visitor.

The latter did not appear among the group of polite, bowing reporters who interviewed him, after he had enjoyed a satisfying meal. Morgan played the part of a weak and sorely shocked man, and presently was rid of the guests.

As a matter of fact, he felt quite well, entirely himself. That information about Homer Barlock, true or false, had made a new man of him. Or was it the kiss he had received? He fell asleep again, with a smile at the photograph on the wall.

IT was close to eleven that night when old Doctor Franz strode into the hospital room, wakened him, and opened a grip. He had brought Morgan's personal effects.

"You are shaved—good!" he exclaimed phlegmatically "Ten minutes to dress, my friend."

From the grip, he tossed garments on the bed. Morgan wasted no time in idle questions, but got into the clothes, which

fitted him fairly well. Then, astonished, he looked in the mirror. He was in the smart midnight blue of the French aviation corps; in fact, he had become a captain, with several glittering decorations on his breast. On the cross of the Legion was a smear. Morgan rubbed at it, then looked at his finger. Blood. Scarcely dry. He turned, but Doctor Franz, who had not observed his action, was laying out a large vizard mask and the black cloak of a domino.

"Fancy dress?" Morgan asked. The other assented.

"Yes, up to a point. Leave the domino slightly open to show the uniform. You are now Captain Latour of the French aviation, attached to the embassy at Vienna. You speak French?"

Morgan assented, dazedly. Doctor Franz looked at his watch.

"Come. We must be to the minute. She will tell you what to do; this is as far as my knowledge goes. God save us all—what a mess it is, this life! Come on."

MORGAN followed him out of the room and along the corridors, thinking somebody might have done a little explaining in the course of the evening. He was in a decidedly bad humor when, upon gaining the street, he found an automobile waiting and was handed in by the old doctor, whose chauffeur apparently knew their destination without being told.

Dark streets, narrow, twisting hillside streets. A high wall, interminable, with the lights of the palace glittering above its wide gardens; a huge pile of masonry that quite dominated the entire city. Suddenly the car stopped, the wall still on its right. With a low word, Doctor Franz got out, and Morgan followed. The car rolled on and away.

Franz strode along beneath the wall, and halted at a tiny but massive door set behind a heavy grill of iron. With keys, he unlocked this grill and the door. Morgan passed in; he was standing in the palace grounds. Thirty feet away loomed a dark, unlighted mass.

"The old stables," muttered Doctor Franz. "More than one Prince of Arnheim has passed this way—in or out."

Now a door in the wall of the stables. It was unlocked and opened. Morgan stepped into a dark corridor. Franz produced a flashlight. Following down steps and along the sharply angled corridor, Morgan thought grimly that he would have done a better job were he building a get-away! This affair was clumsy.

Still another door, this time closing the corridor. Franz opened it, then handed the bunch of keys to Morgan.

"Give these to her. I must return. You'll find the next door unlocked; open it carefully. If the room is empty, then go in and wait for her. And remember, you are Captain Latour."

"Right. What's this?"

Morgan found an automatic laid in his hand.

"You may need it."

"Nonsense, Doctor. In all this masked mummery—"

"Fool!" Doctor Franz gripped his shoulder, stared into his face with blazing eyes. "Tonight I killed the real Latour. I, the master surgeon, became a murderer. Why? For her sake—so you might take his place! Now go, and talk no more of mummery."

Morgan obeyed, with a swift chill in his heart. He remembered the blood on the decoration he wore. No trickery in this sturdy old man; for her sake! That desperate, fierce earnestness was impressive beyond words.

Ahead lay a crooked flight of stone steps, then the corridor ended at a door. This he tried, and drew open in silence. Before him hung a thick blue velvet curtain. He listened and heard nothing; carefully drawing the curtain, he looked.

Here was a large room, a woman's boudoir, lighted by a huge central chandelier of crystal. Opposite him, Morgan beheld an enormous bed hung with silken curtains that were looped down from a shield and a coat of arms. Dressing-table, knicknacks, jewel cases. This was her bedroom, then.

He stepped into the room. To his right was a half-open door, from which came a sound of distant music, a burst of voices. Glancing around, Morgan frowned. Blue velvet curtains closed the walls from sight. He was not even certain just where he had entered.

THEN a swish of silk; the Princess came in at the half-open door, and swung it shut behind her. Morgan stood transfixed. She was like a vision, all in sheerest white save for the jeweled decoration over her heart. Diamonds coruscated in her hair.

"Oh! What is the matter?" she exclaimed. "Is anything wrong?"

"No, just you," and Morgan laughed. "A fairy come to life. I've never—"

A figure was moving silently, its lithe stride not unlike the swoop of a bat.

"No time for compliments," she broke in rapidly. "Put on your mask. Follow me, but not too closely. Mingle with the crowd. When a man attired as a bat accosts you, tell him in French: *'The price is agreed.'* It is the answer to the password."

"And what is the password? What will he say to me?"

A look of distress came into her face.

"I do not know; we could not learn. You will have to risk it. At your reply, he will give you a paper. Bring it straight here. We must have that paper at all costs. Do you understand me?"

Morgan bowed, a little coldly. "Perfectly."

"One thing; I must warn you." Her hand fell on his arm; her eyes looked into his, frankly and honestly. "We know very little; use your wits. If they learn that the real Latour is dead, then look out! Why are your eyes so icy?"

"Because," Morgan answered coolly, "I am disappointed. I thought this was something better than the old lodge stuff—intrigues, papers, passwords!"

Anger leaped in her face. "When we have time to talk, you shall learn better, indeed. Do you think Homer Barlock would waste time on what you call the old lodge stuff?"

"True," and Morgan nodded, brightening a little. "Is he here?"

"He promised to be here, yes. I have not seen him yet." She extended her hand, and Morgan clasped it firmly. She drew back. "What? You haven't learned to kiss a lady's hand?"

"No," said Morgan. "To me, a kiss is a sacred thing."

One swift, smiling glance rewarded the words, then she was gone. Morgan followed to the door, saw her crossing a huge, empty anteroom, and adjusted his mask.

"The devil!" he thought. "Do they know what Latour looks like? Never mind. I must go at it blind, and trust to luck."

He strode after her. Once across the anteroom, a door opened upon a long hall of majestic proportions. She was already upon the first steps of a wide marble staircase, descending to the glittering scene below. People were in the hall, on the stairs, everywhere, in gaudy and fantastic uniforms of every description. She alone, it seemed, was not masked.

UNIFORMS were here, of half the armies in Europe. Pierrots, monks, dominos, fantastic animal figures, glorious gowns, shimmering jewels, gold lace. As he moved down the staircase Morgan glimpsed immense rooms pulsating with dancing couples, athrob with music, thronged by people strolling or talking. Gayety was everywhere. Servants and guards alone wore no masks.

Downstairs, Morgan moved about at will, though aimlessly. He helped himself to a champagne cup from a servant's tray and kept on the outskirts of the crowd. He was looking everywhere for a bat figure—flittermouse, the creature was called here—and to his dismay saw not one but half a dozen. The costume was striking and distinctive; if only one man had worn it, he would have been a marked person.

"Evidently," thought Morgan, "our opponent is not lacking in brains."

PRESENTLY one of these bats approached, coming toward him with a peculiar sweeping motion, a lithe, silent stride that heightened the effect of the costume. Morgan turned away, but the other drew near and tapped him on the shoulder.

"Your pardon, monsieur—" came the words in French. Morgan started slightly at the voice; somewhere, he had heard this voice before. "Am I mistaken in taking you for Captain Latour?"

"I have not yet heard the signal for unmasking," retorted Morgan coolly. The other smiled. The eyes behind the bat-mask were very bright.

"But monsieur, may I not glance at your decorations? Even in these dark days, the rewards of bravery cannot be purchased."

This, then, must be the password.

"That depends," Morgan returned, "as to whether the price is agreed."

"Good. Here you are." The other handed him a folded envelope. "Five in the morning, monsieur, is the time. Better get some sleep first."

The bat glided away. Morgan suddenly recognized the walk, the voice. This was the fake journalist who had come to his hospital room.

Startled, he turned to the great staircase. As he set foot upon it, another masquer approached him; it was the figure of a grotesque circus clown, whom he had recently noticed talking with the Princess. The clown came up to Morgan, caught at his sleeve.

"Well, did you get it?"

"I fail to recognize you, monsieur," said Morgan, and turned. Hard fingers suddenly clamped on his arm. He heard a chuckle that petrified him. Barlock!

"Good work, feller!" came a familiar voice. "By goshfry, you sure act the part!"

"You! It's you!" exclaimed Morgan.

"Of course it's me. Well, come across. Did you get it?"

"Yes."

"Then get upstairs with it. I'll be along pretty quick. And keep your eye peeled."

The urgent voice impelled Morgan. He turned and swiftly ascended the marble

stairs, weaving his way through the people thronged there.

Barlock—no lie, after all, then! Here was the promoter of the Barlock Line in the flesh, and apparently unhurt. Somewhat dazed by the meeting, Morgan found himself in the huge upper hall, and then came to a puzzled halt.

ALL along the hall were doors, some open, others closed. He had glimpses of stately chambers, but nowhere one that he recognized. People moved about, masquers laughed gayly. But—which door was the one he sought?

Morgan tried in vain to recall its position. Heavy velvet drapes helped make everything look alike. Moving back along the hall, where there were fewer people, Morgan tried one closed door at the end, and found it locked. Then another. This one opened to his thrust, swung open on a lighted room.

At a table, holding up a telephone, sat an elderly, bullet-headed man in gorgeous uniform. Upon his face was an expression of such dismay, such ghastly alarm, that Morgan was startled. And, swinging around to face the intruder, was a man in the costume of a bat. Masked. Was it the same, or another?

Before Morgan could withdraw, the bat darted forward, caught his arm, urged him into the room.

"Here is Latour now!" he cried out, and tore open the cloak to show Morgan's uniform. No, not the same bat; the voice was different.

The officer at the desk laid down the telephone and with a leap that upset his chair, flung himself at the door. He slammed it shut, stood with his back against it, staring at Morgan. All this had passed in the fraction of a second.

So rapid was it, that still the American stood bewildered, trying to collect his wits. Then a thin, sharp voice crackled on the silence of the room. It came from the telephone on the table.

"I tell you, Latour is here, dead! We have just found his body. Warn the count at once—hello, hello! Where the devil are you, Denheim? Answer me!"

The bat gripped Morgan by the arm.

"So you are not Latour, eh?" he cried out. "But you wear his uniform! And you told the count a few moments ago that you were Latour. Denheim, we have an impostor here, a spy!"

Morgan moved quickly, unexpectedly; the bat, gripping him, was flung staggering. But as Morgan turned, he found a pistol in the hand of the elderly officer at the door. This man, beads of sweat breaking out on his grim features, stood covering Morgan, and death lay stern in his desperate eyes.

"Gentlemen, your comedy has gone far enough," said Morgan quietly, calmly. "I am not Latour, whoever he may be. I have not claimed to be Latour. Undoubtedly, you have made some error. You can see for yourself—" And as he spoke, with the greatest deliberation, he removed his mask.

His quiet assurance, his perfect *sang-froid,* pricked their excitement as a pin pricks a balloon. At sight of his perfectly strange features, they were both held for an instant in hesitation, in uncertainty. It was this instant of indecision on which Morgan had counted. He gave no warning. His smile, his calm demeanor, had flung them off guard.

One swift step, and his arm flashed out. His grip closed on the pistol-wrist, and he jerked the old officer toward him. Morgan's fingers were like iron. The weapon fell to the floor. From the officer broke a startled gasp as he lost balance. All this, too, passed in the flash of a second.

The bat was darting forward, a glinting sliver of light in his hand. The old officer clutched desperately at Morgan, caught the domino and gripped it savagely, just as the American was breaking clear. Overbalanced in his turn, Morgan caromed into the swooping bat. All three men struck against the overturned chair, and went staggering.

JUST what happened, was impossible to tell. The knife in the bat's hand flashed, flashed again. Morgan's fist took the bat under the chin and lifted him, sent him reeling back across the room. The old officer gasped out something and stood clutching at his throat with both hands.

Morgan, freed, paid no attention. He darted to the door, flung it open, and slammed it again behind him as he came out into the great hall. He glanced around desperately. Ten feet away, he caught sight of Princess Marie. She was just opening one of the doors—no doubt the very one he had sought in vain. Her glittering white figure was alone. Next instant, she had disappeared.

Morgan plunged after her. The door opened to his hand. Yes, it was the big open anteroom; she was halfway across it. As the door closed, she glanced back,

then halted. Her lovely face lit up with recognition.

"Oh! I thought you had come up before me. But where is your mask?"

"Lost it," panted Morgan. "Are we alone here? No servants around?"

"None. I have dismissed my maid; I am free, now, for the rest of the night."

"Then you'd better lock this door. I got lost trying to find the place." As he spoke, Morgan rearranged his torn costume. He saw her face change, her eyes dilate; a flash of alarm rang out in her voice.

"What has happened? What is that —look!"

MORGAN glanced down, and whistled softly. Across the back of his left hand was a bright crimson smear of fresh blood. He knew instantly what must have happened, and why that old officer had stood gasping.

"Oh, that?" he said. "Blood, I expect."

"You are hurt? Who did it?"

"No, no; I'm all right. I got into the wrong room, looking for this one. Yes, this blood must belong to an elderly gentleman in a gorgeous uniform. Name of Denheim."

"General Denheim!" she exclaimed. "What do you mean? What has happened?"

Morgan shrugged. "He and one of those bats were in that room. They were just getting a telephone message that the real Latour is dead. They tried to grab me, but the bat's knife caught Denheim in the mix-up. Poor old chap! That's why he was clutching at his throat—"

"Come," she said, turning abruptly, and her face was very white. "I think—I think Homer Barlock is waiting for us."

Barlock was indeed waiting, his clown's costume removed. And at sight of that leathery countenance, chewing now on an unlit cigar, Morgan knew instantly that something was wrong. Barlock looked as though only an iron will were holding him to his job.

"Hurt?" demanded Morgan, and the other nodded. "The crash?"

"Nope—the parachute," said Barlock. He touched his side and winced. "I got out of the plane right after that woman. The landing shook me up like the devil—broke a rib or two. Doctor Franz bandaged me up, but I'm still in bad shape. Haven't had any sleep, either. Princess, get those doors locked up, will you? And make sure the boy's safe. By goshfry, Morgan, I'm sure glad you're on deck! Get a move on, Princess, get a move on! Look after the doors, then the boy. I'm all right."

The Princess disappeared.

Morgan eyed Barlock.

"Barlock, what's it all about?"

"Time enough, feller. No hurry about it now. We'll have a bite to eat, too. I'm about starved—"

"Supper be damned! Am I crazy, or is this whole place a madhouse? I haven't a ghost of a notion why we're here or what we're doing."

"Dry up," spat out Barlock. "I've been busy. Had no sleep, confounded little to eat, and I've gone to pieces. If I don't get some sleep, I'm done for. Everything has gone wrong, except your filling Latour's shoes."

"Sorry," said Morgan. "Are you really so badly off?"

"Worse. This aint any piker's game, feller. The four biggest European powers have their agents in Arnheim. The biggest scoundrel of all is playing the game on his own hook, with the deck stacked. And I'm about out of it for a while. You know that the Princess runs the whole joint, eh? She has a son, Rupert, six years old."

"She doesn't look it," observed Morgan, lighting a cigarette.

"THESE people don't want a woman to rule 'em," Barlock went on. "The Prince died a year ago, and plots have been going on ever since. Two bombings, for instance. The present plot is simple. She and the boy are to be rubbed out, and another feller takes over the works."

"What?" Morgan looked at him incredulously. "Murder? You can't be serious. Nobody could get away with such a crime; the whole civilized world—"

"And him a newspaper man!" exclaimed Barlock scathingly, taking his cigar from his mouth and regarding it sadly. "Listen to him—thinks the world is civilized! He never heard about the king and queen o' Serbia being murdered in their beds. Nope. He don't know that anybody can get away with anything, in Europe."

"All right, you win," said Morgan. "What power is backing the Princess?"

"None. She's too independent to suit." Barlock replaced his cigar. "And up in the hills back of town, they've found oil. See what that means? Loot! All these

diplomats would like to see her out, and out for keeps. I'd like to see her in, for the same reason."

"Hello! Mean to say you're not an altruist in this job?"

Barlock winked sagely. "Feller, I've formed an oil company, fair, square and aboveboard, with her, the boy and old Prince Luitpold in on the deal. Business is business, and don't you forget it. Now, the Princess aint sure who's in this plot. She's helpless, and has her son to worry about—"

"Well, let's have the inside. Who's back of the move against her?"

"Count Ernst, the bat who gave you that message tonight; he's a sharp one, too, and has got together some of the worst rascals in Europe. Latour was one of 'em. It was from him that we learned what we know, before he died."

"He died today?"

Barlock nodded jerkily. "Yeah, this evening. He was slow about it. Doc Franz is a good surgeon, feller. . . . I told you I'd been busy as hell."

Morgan got the implication, and found drops of perspiration on his brow. The incredible and merciless savagery of this business was borne home to him. Suddenly Barlock took the cigar from his lips and tossed it away. He leaned back; his leathery features were deeply lined, looked shrunken and old.

"I'm done up, Morgan," he said quietly. "To be honest about it, I got badly banged up with that durned parachute. I'm turning this job over to you. Never mind explanations. I'll tell you what must be done, so listen."

HE closed his eyes and spoke wearily, curtly; the man's energy was at low ebb. Morgan listened in silence.

"I see," he said when Barlock finished. "But I'll have to learn a lot of things."

"Learn 'em, feller. I'm done, worn out. . . . Hello! Here she is now."

The Princess appeared, bringing into the room a breath of eagerness, of keen vitality. Going to one of the velvet hangings near the huge bed, she drew it aside to disclose an alcove in which was a table, set for supper, with a couch and a telephone-stand beside a window.

"Everything's all right," she said brightly. "Rupert's asleep. Give me a hand with this table, Mr. Morgan, and we'll lift it over—"

Morgan lifted the table to the chair Homer Barlock occupied, drew up other chairs, and the Princess seated herself.

"For heaven's sake, sit down and don't stand on ceremony!" she commanded. "Did you get that message from the bat?"

"Yes." Morgan laid the envelope on the table. "Do you know what it is?"

"The orders from Count Ernst, for Captain Latour. It should tell us what we most need to know. The time they have set for action."

"I can tell you that now," Morgan said. "Five in the morning."

THERE was a silence. Barlock sipped his wine, reached for a sandwich, bit into it. The woman's face whitened.

"So soon!" she murmured. "We have only a few hours. What are we to do?"

Barlock grunted. "Morgan's running the show, Marie. I'm going to get some sleep—"

"Sleep? At such a time?" she exclaimed sharply—then became contrite. "But I forgot; pardon me. You're hurt, ill. Yes, you must sleep. There is a couch in the alcove, by the telephone. You can take that, and I'll draw the curtain. But eat something first."

Barlock was already eating, ravenously. The Princess turned to Morgan, her gaze searching him, probing him.

"Have you any plan? Do you know what to do?"

Morgan nodded. "More or less. But I need information. And don't expect any diplomacy from me!

"First,"—and Morgan grinned at Barlock,—"what about soldiers, friends, police? Why not grab this Count Ernst, whoever he is, here and now, and lock him up?"

She shook her head. "I can count on no one. He is popular; he has got his friends into power everywhere. How far the plot extends, I don't know, and one word amiss would ruin us. I thought General Denheim was faithful, but—"

She shrugged. Morgan glanced at the back of his hand, where a trace of the blood-smear still lingered, and nodded.

"The servants, the guards," she went on bitterly, "the officers—some of them can be trusted, of course; but which ones?"

"What makes you think this Count Ernst means murder?"

"He has formed a party like the Nazis, the Fascists. He means to kill me and Rupert, and everyone else who might oppose him. I've been warned of this."

"Hm! Haven't you any relatives?"

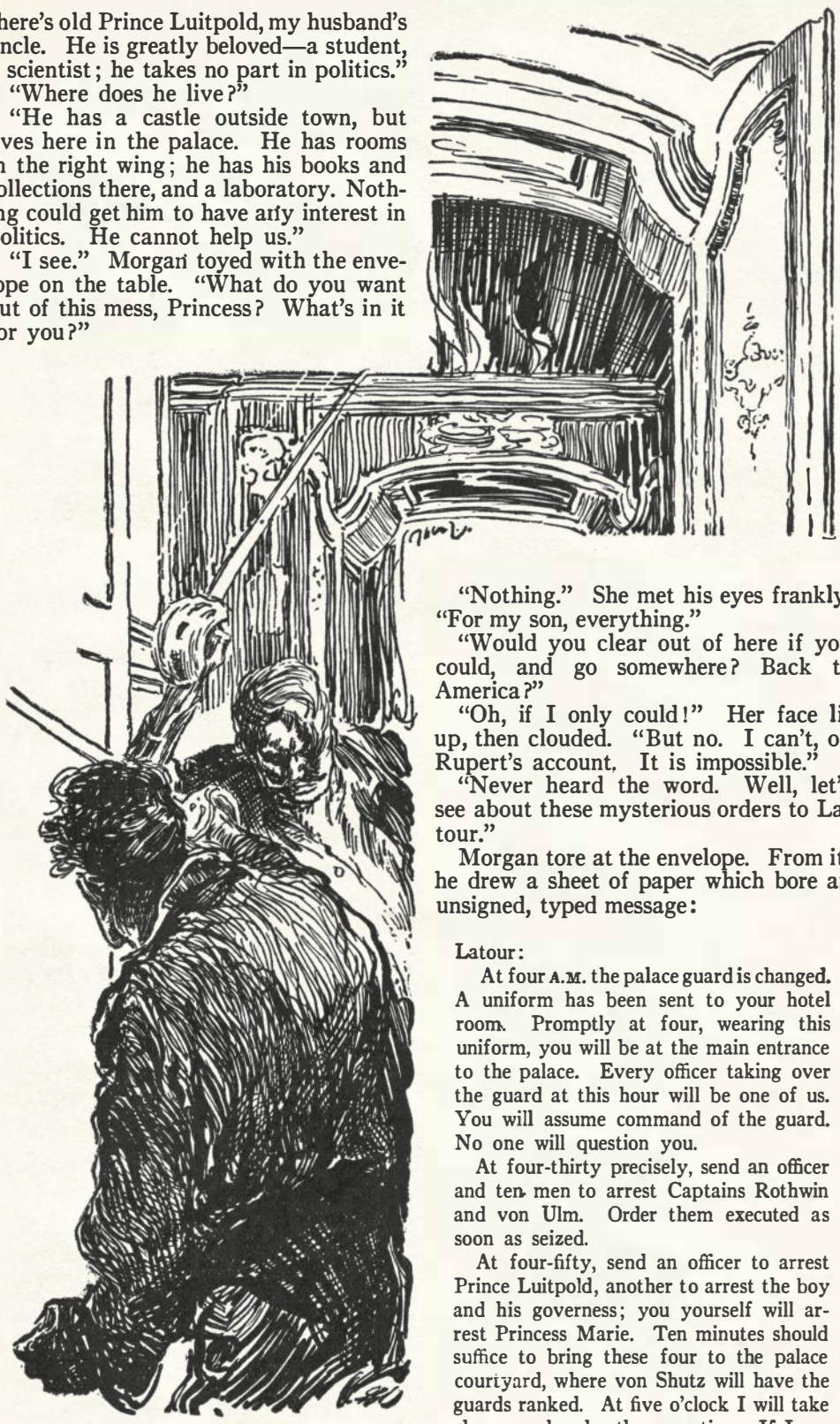
"Count Ernst is a relative. Then

there's old Prince Luitpold, my husband's uncle. He is greatly beloved—a student, a scientist; he takes no part in politics."

"Where does he live?"

"He has a castle outside town, but lives here in the palace. He has rooms in the right wing; he has his books and collections there, and a laboratory. Nothing could get him to have any interest in politics. He cannot help us."

"I see." Morgan toyed with the envelope on the table. "What do you want out of this mess, Princess? What's in it for you?"



The blades curved, slashed, parried, clashed. The men seemed a part of their weapons.

"Nothing." She met his eyes frankly. "For my son, everything."

"Would you clear out of here if you could, and go somewhere? Back to America?"

"Oh, if I only could!" Her face lit up, then clouded. "But no. I can't, on Rupert's account. It is impossible."

"Never heard the word. Well, let's see about these mysterious orders to Latour."

Morgan tore at the envelope. From it, he drew a sheet of paper which bore an unsigned, typed message:

Latour:

At four A.M. the palace guard is changed. A uniform has been sent to your hotel room. Promptly at four, wearing this uniform, you will be at the main entrance to the palace. Every officer taking over the guard at this hour will be one of us. You will assume command of the guard. No one will question you.

At four-thirty precisely, send an officer and ten men to arrest Captains Rothwin and von Ulm. Order them executed as soon as seized.

At four-fifty, send an officer to arrest Prince Luitpold, another to arrest the boy and his governess; you yourself will arrest Princess Marie. Ten minutes should suffice to bring these four to the palace courtyard, where von Shutz will have the guards ranked. At five o'clock I will take charge and order the execution. If I am delayed, you will give the order.

Five o'clock is the zero hour.

Morgan laid down the paper, which he had read aloud.

"Our friend Ernst is the right man in the right place," he observed. "No wasted sentiment; he wants results. Well, this shows us that two of the guard officers can be trusted. Could you get hold of them right away?"

"Of course." The Princess came to her feet; she was white-lipped, desperate. "Oh, we expected it, we feared it; but here, this writing in cold blood—I am going to get Rupert and bring him here! I must have him in this room, in my bed yonder, with me."

"Hold on." Morgan checked her. "Does Count Ernst live here in the palace?"

"No; he has a house of his own in the Regnerstrasse."

"Hey!" Homer Barlock spoke suddenly. "Watch your step, feller. They know Latour's dead and somebody else got his orders!"

"Right." Morgan frowned. "They may advance the hour to four, when the guard is changed. Princess, can you get Prince Luitpold here right away? Is he at the ball?"

"Heavens, no! He never goes to balls. He's in bed, at this hour, or working."

"I have it. Can you reach either of those two officers by telephone?"

"Yes. Both are on guard duty now."

"Fine! When does the dance end?"

"Not before three."

"All right. Get Rothwin and von Ulm here at once. Have 'em fetch Prince Luitpold with them—in his nighty, if they must. Where's Doctor Franz?"

"At his home, I presume."

"Very well," said Morgan cheerfully. "I think we have the situation in hand—"

"But don't you see?" she burst out in frantic protest. "Anything may happen now! I must get Rupert here with me, at once! They may change their plans, and—"

"Sure; keep your head. First, telephone! The main thing is to get those two officers here with the Prince. Then go get your boy, or do what you want."

She turned to the alcove hastily. Homer Barlock rose.

"All right, feller," he observed. "I'm going to hit the hay. Wake me when you need me."

HE, too, passed into the alcove, went to the couch by the window, and stretched out on it. The Princess, at the telephone-stand, was using the instrument. Presently she rose and came out of the alcove, and drew the blue velvet curtain across it.

"I got Rothwin; he's in charge of the guard," she said, coming to Morgan. "He and von Ulm will bring Prince Luitpold here. And now—"

"You want your boy, eh? Can I help you get him?"

"No. The governess is faithful, and steady. Steadier than I am."

"Nonsense." Morgan smiled into her glowing, excited eyes. "There's no other in the world like you, Princess! Are we safe here? Can they get at us by that secret passage?"

"No; the secret of it is not known except to Doctor Franz and Luitpold."

She went to the curtained wall, drew aside a hanging, and passed out through a door. The boy's room evidently communicated with this bedroom of hers.

MORGAN lifted the table out into the anteroom, and pulled up two big chairs. This large room was safer than the bedroom; he distrusted that secret passage. He examined the windows, saw that the entrance door was locked.

Homer Barlock must have had an iron nerve, to go as long as he had gone; now, however, he was out of it. Count Ernst and his friends must be taking counsel, trying to atone for their blunder in giving that envelope to the wrong man. This scheme of giving typed orders at a certain time, was a good one; but all Ernst's program had been punctured.

"Barlock blew it up by grabbing Latour," thought Morgan. "His idea of diplomacy—well, he certainly sticks at nothing! Right now, Count Ernst will be trying desperately to find the fake Latour. He's evidently the slow, plotting kind who wants to be sure of every detail before he acts. No immediate danger, I fancy. Hm! I wonder if I can pull off this thing as Barlock planned it? Here's luck!"

And he lifted his glass toward the other room where Homer Barlock lay.

Presently came a bustle of sound and low voices from the boudoir; then the Princess came into the larger chamber.

"All right; they're in my bed now," she said. "At least, I know he's safe."

"Then you'd better get into some working-clothes," said Morgan. "And if you have any cash and jewels on hand, pack 'em up."

"Just what do you mean to do?" she demanded, with a touch of asperity.

Morgan perceived that she was roused, was ready to fight.

"Princess, there are a lot of things that can knock us into a cocked hat," he said. "I know nothing about your town, your customs, your people; therefore, I can go ahead. I don't know what to be afraid of, you see. And I've no ax to grind, remember. If I were to tell you the simple truth—"

As she met his eyes and their admiration, a faint color rose in her cheeks.

"The simple truth," she said gently, "may often be unwise, my friend."

Morgan smiled; they understood one another. He pointed to the table.

"Prince Luitpold is the dark horse," he said. "Can you change your clothes and get back here to meet him? And telephone Doctor Franz. Tell him to have a car waiting at precisely three-thirty, at the door in the wall where his car dropped us *en route* here."

With a nod, she was gone into the boudoir. No hysterics, no wild talk: a sensible, well-poised and lovely woman. Morgan blew an unseen kiss after her.

He examined the pistol Doctor Franz had given him: an automatic, fully loaded. He removed his domino, took off the dark blue uniform coat, and from it stripped the decorations and insignia. He had barely donned the coat again, when a sharp rap sounded at the door.

LUITPOLD or Count Ernst? Pistol in hand, Morgan strode to the door, flung it open. Outside stood two officers in glittering uniform. With them was an elderly man. Deep-eyed, with massive white beard.

"Enter, gentlemen. Princess Marie will join us in a moment. My name is Morgan. Prince Luitpold, pray be seated before I give you the shock in store for you."

He locked the door again. Staring, bewildered, startled, the three advanced to the table. Prince Luitpold sank into a chair; before him, Morgan laid the Latour orders.

"Here is the warrant for your arrest and execution," he said bluntly. "Look this over, all three of you. It'll save a lot of talk."

Luitpold took the paper, the officers glancing at it over his shoulder. Rothwin was hard of eye, iron-jawed, an uncompromising and rather grim man. Von Ulm was younger and quite a dandy.

"*Ach, Gott!* But this—this is incredible!" broke out the old man, as he read the message. Then he looked up and rose. The officers stiffened. Princess Marie was coming toward them, now garbed in riding-costume which she was hurriedly fastening at the throat.

"No ceremony, gentlemen. Ah, Uncle Luitpold, thanks for coming! This is Mr. Morgan, my friend and helper. So you have read Count Ernst's instructions, have you?"

"Yes. I always said Ernst was a devil!" exclaimed the old man harshly.

"Correct," put in Morgan. "My friends, all of you marked for execution are gathered here. There is no time for discussion or talk. Her Highness has been good enough to let me propose a course of action, but it brooks no delay. If any of you want to be alive in the morning, we must work fast tonight."

THE three men, bewildered and yet alive to his argument, eyed him narrowly.

"The boy Rupert is in the next room," went on Morgan. "It is of him we must think. By the way, Princess, will you be good enough to get a pen and paper?"

The Princess nodded and moved to a writing-desk at one side of the room.

"Get General Denheim here!" exclaimed the old Prince suddenly.

Morgan smiled.

"He's dead. He was in the plot, also. Who is this von Shutz mentioned in the orders?"

"Colonel of the guards," replied Rothwin. At this, Morgan whistled, and turned to the old man in the chair. The Princess was bringing pen, paper and ink.

"Prince Luitpold, this situation demands desperate remedies," said Morgan. "With the help of these two officers, I'll try to bag Count Ernst; but that's only a half remedy. I have advised Her Highness to abdicate. She refuses, unless the safety of her son is assured."

The lovely eyes of the woman leaped to Morgan in startled astonishment. The three men stirred uneasily, frowning. Morgan proceeded swiftly:

"If she abdicates in favor of her son, I can save her life, get her out of Arnheim. But who can assure the boy's safety, who can act as regent? We can trust no one; the adherents of Count Ernst are everywhere. Prince Luitpold, give us your advice. You know best what is to be done. Remember, this means life or death for all here."

The Princess turned to the old man, her face alight, her lips parted in suspense. Upon the room settled silence.

Old Luitpold stared at the paper in his hand, his shaggy brows downdrawn. A slow, rosy flush crept up beneath the snowy beard. His eyes gradually kindled, lost their abstraction. After years of scholarship, of erudition, of unworldly effort, the Arnheim blood wakened. Suddenly his shoulders squared, and his head came up. The dreamy confusion, the gentleness, had vanished from those high-carven features; they were stern, alight with decision.

"And you, Marie?" he exclaimed. "Would you name me as regent?"

"If you only would let me!" she broke out. "The people love you. Once you establish your authority, Rupert could be in no better hands. Yes, yes!"

"Then it is settled." He rose, a pulse throbbing at his temple, his voice deep and hard. "I will take the boy. He'll go to England to school. You'll have every right to see him, be with him, watch over him. Nominally, I shall be his guardian. Is it agreed?"

She clasped his hand joyously, but he bent over her fingers and kissed them with a fine stately courtesy. Then she came to the table, leaned over, and wrote swiftly.

"There." She straightened up. "Will that do?"

PRINCE LUITPOLD glanced at the writing, nodded, gestured to the others. "Gentlemen, kindly witness this."

The white-bearded features had become fiercely eager, hawk-like, dominant.

"But how can you secure the boy's safety, and your own?" Morgan asked.

"That, sir, depends on you," said Luitpold. "I shall get my two faithful servants from my own apartment; we will take the boy and slip out into the town. Marie, you have the keys to that secret passage? Good. By morning, I shall have enough faithful men around me to make all safe—if you, sir, do as you promised."

"Bag Count Ernst, eh?" said Morgan. "All right. If these officers lend a hand, we'll do it. Princess, will you take the chance on everything? It demands trust and courage."

"Yes," she responded calmly.

"Then get the boy wakened and dressed," said Prince Luitpold. "I'll be back with my two servants. Gentlemen, farewell for the present!"

The old man strode to the door, the two officers saluting stiffly. Morgan unlocked the door, let him out into the great hall, caught a burst of music from below, and locked the door again.

"You'll want to see him off with the boy?" Morgan said, returning to the Princess.

"Through the passage, at least," she replied.

"Very well. These two officers are going on an errand with me. Let's see; it's getting on to two o'clock. What about Doctor Franz and the car?"

"He will drive it himself. At three-thirty he'll be waiting by the gate in the wall."

"Fine. I'll meet you there, then, at three-thirty. You can bring Homer Barlock with you."

"Of course." She turned to the two officers. "Gentlemen, I can depend on you, and on you alone. Will you be good enough to accept the orders of Mr. Morgan as though they were my own?"

The two bowed in silent assent. She gave them her hands, smiling; they kissed her fingers, then stood at attention. She laughed a little.

"You forget; I am no longer the Princess, my friends. Good-by."

She departed into her boudoir. When the door closed, Morgan motioned the two officers to the table.

"Come, gentlemen. Let's have a bite to eat, and finish this admirable wine."

Uncertainly, the two seated themselves. If they were tempted to think Morgan mad, his easy assurance, his alert gaze, gave such a premise the lie.

"This paper," and he tapped the Latour orders that lay on the table, "holds your death-warrants. There is only one way to get around it; kill the other man first. Shall we talk over the matter?"

At this, their demeanor changed. Rothwin smiled grimly and reached for a sandwich. Von Ulm thumbed his mustache, broke into a laugh, and seized the wine-bottle. Morgan, pressing out his cigarette, followed their example.

He was sure of his men now.

OLD Prince Luitpold, followed by two very anxious servants, knocked and was passed on to the boudoir; the door closed again. Morgan rejoined the two officers.

"I see that you carry pistols. Are they loaded?"

Rothwin nodded. "Let me ask one thing. Since we cannot be sure of the

men under our command, is it not risky for us to try and arrest Count Ernst?"

"I said nothing about arresting him," Morgan replied amiably. "His death, and that alone, will secure the safety of the boy Rupert. The three of us will leave in a few minutes and go directly to his house. You know where it is."

Von Ulm frowned. "Sir! Do you mean to walk into his house and shoot him down?"

"It would be a pleasure, but that's not my idea. How the devil do you think Her Highness can get out of the city, unless he's along to give orders? Undoubtedly his men will be guarding the gates. No. I mean to take him prisoner and carry him along with us."

Rothwin laughed harshly.

"First you propose an impossibility. Next you suggest an insane plan—"

"That will do," said Morgan quietly. "We'll not discuss the matter. You will simply do as I ask, for the sake of the lady in yonder, and hope for the best. Can we leave the palace without using the great staircase and crossing the dance-floor?"

"Of course. There are many entrances, numerous staircases."

"Good. I believe Count Ernst is still somewhere here, for he and his aides must confer over a change of plans. He would perhaps leave when the ball breaks up, about three. Such is my idea, though it may be wrong. I figure, then, that we should reach his house before him, and welcome him when he enters."

The others nodded together, more hopefully now.

AS they talked, Morgan learned odds and ends of details: The Princess had dismissed her personal attendants for the night. There was disaffection in the guard regiment. The governing council of Arnheim was said to have dissension in its ranks. Trouble everywhere, gloomy forecasts on all sides, Arnheim on the down grade and headed for ruin.

"Herman," said Rothwin to the younger officer, "go and get two cloaks, to cover our uniforms. Meet us at the side entrance in five minutes."

"Right." Von Ulm drained his glass and rose. With a laughing nod to Morgan, he strode away. Rothwin came to his feet.

"Ready? Do you want a hat?"

Morgan shook his head.

A moment later they stood out in the great hall. Morgan glanced toward that other door which he had opened by mistake, and wondered if the dead general lay in that room now.

Then they were gone; on into a lesser hall, an interminable corridor piercing into this vast pile of masonry. The music, the hum of voices, had all died out behind them. Twice they met palace servants in livery, who stood aside respectfully at sight of Rothwin's uniform.

Staircases, more corridors, stately passages adorned with old tapestries and old armor, guards who saluted crisply.

MORGAN scarcely paid heed to their route. He was a bit afraid now, wondering how long his luck would hold good. At the same time, he found a grim amusement in the speed with which this whole affair had worked out. True, the crisis was a desperate one; yet at a moment's notice he had rushed all these people into action despite themselves.

How to carry through his present errand, Morgan had not the least idea. He could only depend on circumstances, and on these two officers.

He was not blind to the chance that he had guessed wrong, that Count Ernst might do a dozen things he had not figured out. This he must risk. The one imperative demand was to get hold of the Count and so remove the guiding spirit of the whole plot; but not to kill him until he had served his purpose. Without Count Ernst, that automobile would not get out of Arnheim. The plotters were not such fools as to leave the gates wide to flight.

Now the two men came to a carriage entrance, an enormous pillared portico ablaze with light, but with no one visible. Rothwin led the way to one side, into the dark shade of the pillars. They must wait here for von Ulm to appear.

Suddenly Morgan felt the officer's hand on his arm, felt a quick, hard grip. A figure had appeared there beneath the portico, coming from inside the palace; not that of von Ulm, but the grotesque costume of a bat. The masquer came toward them. As they stood there in the shadow, he passed within six feet of them, unwitting. It was not the lithe, floating stride of Count Ernst, but another of the bats.

Like a flash, across Morgan's mind darted the value of that costume to them now; and with it, the chance to get rid of one of the plot's chief men. He shook off the hand of Rothwin and turned. The bat had passed them, heading for

some point across the gardens. Morgan darted after him, without concealment. He was close when the bat heard his step, glanced around, and halted.

"You!" came the word, sharp with recognition. Then Morgan struck. This bat, he now realized, must be the same who had been in that room with General Denheim. His fist slapped home. The bat staggered, his hand slipped under his cloak, but Morgan was upon him.

Not striking; but, thumbs protruding, making cruel jabs for the kidneys. No time to stand on punctilio. The bat got his knife out; Morgan was too close, had gripped him too tightly, to give the weapon play. A terrible groan came from the man, a gasping cry. Then he succumbed to those deadly thrusts, and relaxed. He lay quivering on the gravel, as Rothwin dashed up.

"Get him back in the shadow," exclaimed Morgan.

They dragged the cloaked figure, knife still in hand, out of the light. There Morgan worked at the costume, and with rapid fingers got it clear. Presently he had stripped it from the senseless man, and now, throwing aside his own domino, he began to get into it. Rothwin stooped and removed the bat's mask, only to straighten with a low cry.

"Look! It is Colonel von Shutz, commander of the guard—"

"And that knife in his hand," added Morgan, "killed Denheim in striking at me."

He stepped back into the light of the portico and arranged the black cloak, the headdress, the mask, the winged sleeves, of his costume. After a moment Rothwin joined him, breathing hard. Morgan turned to him.

"Did you tie him up?"

"No need," said Rothwin in a gloomy voice. "No need. He was a traitor."

"Eh? What do you mean?"

"Let it go. There's von Ulm now. Let it go, I say!"

The angry, agitated voice startled Morgan. He recalled the knife. He knew suddenly what this man had done.

WITH an effort, he kept silence. Von Ulm joined them, spoke with Rothwin in a low voice; then all three headed down the drive, the two officers wrapped in uniform cloaks.

The main gates stood open, lighted, guards grouped about the entrance. Rothwin slipped away to exit at another gate, lest these men take some warning, for at the moment Rothwin was in command of the guards. Von Ulm linked his arm in that of Morgan and spoke softly.

"Ask if Count Ernst has left yet. None can enter or leave without showing their faces. I'll vouch for you, however."

"No need," said Morgan. He remembered perfectly the voice of the man who had just died there by the portico—the rasping, guttural tones.

THE guards before them stood at attention. Morgan spoke, imitating those tones; no doubt Colonel von Shutz had entered in this same costume, earlier in the evening.

"Has Count Ernst departed yet?" he rasped. The officer in charge saluted.

"Not yet, Herr Colonel."

"Tell him I have gone ahead. Come, von Ulm."

They strode out. Von Ulm was laughing; and once out of earshot, he clapped Morgan on the shoulder.

"Capital! Admirable! I could have sworn it was the Colonel himself! Here, cross the street; Rothwin will join us at the next corner. It's only a short walk to our goal."

"Has Ernst a family?"

"No; his wife is dead. It is a small, ancient house, not pretentious. He will have servants, even at this hour, on hand."

Von Ulm described the interior of the house, which he knew slightly. Presently Rothwin appeared and the three went on in company. Morgan inquired the time. Five after two, with a high, wan moon glimmering through fleeting clouds, a dark sky, rain in the air.

The streets were narrow, twisting, deserted. They met an occasional watchman, who saluted when the officers showed their uniforms. They passed opposite Count Ernst's house, a small stone structure set back from the street, with a high wall before it. Above the gate in the wall burned a lantern.

"Now, wait opposite the place," said Morgan, as they turned at the next corner. "I'll try the gate; if I get in, then come along."

In his grotesque costume, he swung back to the gate. An old-fashioned bell-pull was at one side, and he rang. In the gate was set a tiny panel; this swung open, the face of a man peered out. Then he said hastily:

"Your pardon, Highness! We did not expect you yet."

Bars rasped back, the gate opened. Beyond it showed a graveled path. The house door stood open, above a short rise of stone steps, ten feet away. The servant was alone there, and bowed respectfully. As he straightened up, Morgan's fist swung perfectly to the angle of the jaw. The hapless servant collapsed in his tracks.

Morgan ripped at his bat's gown, and with strips of it bound and gagged the man. As he finished, the two officers appeared, closing the gate behind them.

"Ernst isn't here yet," said Morgan. "Captain Rothwin, will you remain here, while we explore the house?"

Von Ulm swung up the steps with him. Beyond the entrance they passed through a second open doorway, and so came into a long hall. The building was very old, and of incredibly massive construction, the windows being deeply set in thick walls. Another servant in livery appeared, and like the first, took Morgan to be his master.

"Pardon, Highness!" he exclaimed. "I have just lit the lights in the armory."

Bowing, he flung open a door. A large room was revealed, with high little windows and massive beams. The floor was of stone. A few chairs stood about the walls, which were hung with all manner of ancient weapons. In one corner was a gun rack.

Von Ulm threw back his cloak and his pistol covered the servant.

"You are under arrest," he snapped. "How many of you are around now?"

"Barlock—the American!" exclaimed Ernst. "I thought you were dead!" "A mistake, Count," said Barlock cheerfully. "I'm a long way from dead—and I have a message to give you."

Morgan removed his mask. The man gasped.

"Two of us, no more—"

"Turn around and put out your hands before— Wait! Sit down in that chair behind the door.

Utterly dismayed, gaping at the uniform of von Ulm, the man showed no resistance. He seated himself in the chair, was tied to it, and his mouth stoppered.

"No one else around, eh?" Morgan glanced about the glittering walls. "Weapons to burn, evidently. Well, suppose we get back outside and catch him at the gate."

"Perhaps you do not know him?" suggested von Ulm. "He is no child."

"And no fool." Morgan produced his own pistol. "Come along."

He had now rid himself of the clumsy bat costume, which he flung in a corner. They went back to the entrance, and as they emerged from the house, saw Rothwin at the little wicket in the gate. He turned, spoke softly.

"Listen! You hear?"

FROM the street sounded the rapid clicking of heels. Two men, laughing and talking, were drawing near. Suddenly a growl broke from von Ulm, who had approached the gate.

"Rothwin! That is Major Ulman; you recognize his laugh? The other is that Hungarian noble who has been visiting Count Ernst. Is it possible that both of them—"

"Right." Rothwin peered through the wicket, closed it, cursed softly. "Bat costumes, both of them. Sir!" And he swung around on Morgan, eagerly. "Let us handle them, I beg of you! In our own manner!"

"As you like," Morgan said, with a shrug. He was interested only in Count Ernst. It was obvious that the bats were assembling here at this house for action.

A low murmur passed between von Ulm and Rothwin. The steps clicked and paused outside the wall, a bell-peal resounded from inside the house. Rothwin swung open the massive gate and stepped back.

Two bat-figures strode in; but the men wore no masks. Rothwin closed the gate. Von Ulm threw up his automatic pistol. The two arrivals halted in staring dismay.

"Well, gentlemen, honest gentlemen!" said Rothwin, in a terrible voice. "I see that you recognize us. So you did not know that the bats are being cleaned out of Arnheim tonight? Come, inside with you! We shall talk with you in the house. Lead the way, von Ulm. I'll shoot them in the back if they try any tricks. March, both of you!"

Morgan stood back, his weapon ready; but the two bats, utterly aghast, spoke not a word. They obeyed Rothwin like automatons. The four men tramped up the steps and disappeared inside the house.

Going to the wicket in the gate, Morgan opened it and looked out into the street. He wanted Count Ernst alive. Once the gates were passed, Rothwin could kill the man if he so desired, but not until then. Every city gate, Morgan could guess, was well guarded that night by Ernst's adherents.

And after perhaps five minutes of waiting, Morgan had his reward: No clicking heels this time. A tall figure moving silently along, flitting with that lithe swinging stride not unlike the swoop of a bat. Morgan, pistol in hand, stood ready.

Count Ernst halted, jerked at the bell. Morgan swung open the door; and as Ernst strode in, backed a pace.

"Arms up," he snapped. *"Up!"*

In the light of the entrance, Ernst saw his face, saw his pistol, and obeyed. Then, swiftly, Morgan reached forward and tore away the mask and headdress.

"Now turn around. Turn your back to me. Quick about it!"

For one instant the steely eyes glittered at him, the hard, reckless features worked with fury; then Count Ernst turned. And Morgan, as he did so, struck him with the edge of the palm, across the nape of the neck—and struck again. Deadly, paralyzing blows, product of the *ju-jitsu* art that knows no mercy. No time to think, to talk, to act: just the one blow, and the second.

Count Ernst dropped his arms, rocked for an instant, then crumpled.

MORGAN flung himself on the twitching, helpless figure. He tore off the rest of the bat costume to reveal a glittering uniform. With strips of the cloak he bound Count Ernst hand and foot, firmly. Then he straightened up. It was done! And time to spare.

Only now did he realize that no sound had come from inside the house.

He frowned, hesitated, then barred the gate in the wall and turned back into the house entrance. No sign of life anywhere. Morgan strode down the hall

and came to a stop at the door of the armory, which was now closed. He jerked impatiently at it. As the door swung open, he heard a sudden click and clangor of steel, the voice of a man groaning, the ringing stamp of feet on the stones. He walked into the room and stopped short.

He might have expected anything of that man Rothwin—except this.

IN the center of the floor, Rothwin and the Hungarian stood saber in hand, parrying and slashing rapidly. Von Ulm lay at one side, dead; evidently the Hungarian had done for him. And then Rothwin, having killed the guards major, who lay in a huddled sprawl, had taken on the Hungarian.

The latter was groaning, whistling at every breath. He had been slashed across the chest; desperate, white as death, he fought on. Rothwin faced him like a thing of steel, grim features set in an impassive mask. The blades curved and slashed, parried, clashed again. Morgan realized that he was watching a duel between experts. The two men seemed a part of their weapons —the sabers seemed but an extension of their bodies. Those bodies moved, resilient beyond belief, agile, now quick with violent effort, now slow, deadly with the menace of gathering forces. Morgan, watching, was utterly fascinated.

Then a stroke of light, so swift as to be almost unseen. Rothwin lowered his point and leaned on his weapon, panting; a faint, terrible smile touched his lips. The Hungarian took a backward step, and another. The saber fell from his hand with a clang. Only then did blood begin to gush from his throat. He collapsed, his head nearly severed from his body.

Morgan checked himself. What was the use of anger, of reproach? These men had their own code, their own traditions, their own ways of thought and life.

"Count Ernst is waiting," broke in Morgan's voice upon the silence. "If you have quite finished, Captain Rothwin, I shall be glad of your guidance to a certain place."

Rothwin divined the sardonic note in Morgan's voice, but merely shrugged, and threw his saber into a corner.

"I have finished. Eh? You say Ernst is waiting?"

"To go with us." And Morgan turned to the door.

In the street a powerful car stood waiting, by the door in the high wall of the palace grounds. It was close to three-thirty. The moon was gone behind the clouds and a faint drizzle of rain had begun to fall.

Footsteps approached: two men, supporting between them a third, who moved with slow dragging feet as though not in full command of his faculties. Old Doctor Franz descended from the car and faced the three.

"So it is you, Herr Morgan."

"Right. Good for you, Doctor. No sign of anyone from inside?"

"None." Franz hesitated. "That is, so far as *she* is concerned. A man left this door just as I drove up. Whether he had come out by the passage, or had merely been standing under the arch for shelter from the rain, I do not know."

Morgan started slightly. What the devil did this mean? Perhaps Count Ernst had put some one to watch the passage exit; he might know of it.

"Did you see what the man was like?"

"I saw only his figure," said Franz nervously. "At first I thought it was Herr Barlock, but when I addressed him, he only moved away and was gone, without response."

Barlock, and alone? Nonsense. With a shrug, Morgan turned.

"Well, you might get off home, Doctor. I'll do the driving now."

"I shall wait, thank you. I must make certain if she departs."

"As you like, of course. All right, Rothwin; put him in front. The three of us can sit there; put him between us. Leave his hands bound. Your one and only job is to watch him, and to kill him unless he does exactly as he's told. Understand that, Ernst? Don't talk. Rothwin, your orders are definite. Kill him if he tries to talk, or if he does not say exactly what I tell him when we reach the gate."

"With pleasure," said Rothwin; his iron voice made the words a menace.

THE three settled in place, Franz climbing into the rear. A street lamp lit the car faintly and showed the face of Count Ernst. It was an unpleasant sight; the man had bitten through his lower lip and blood dribbled on his chin, and his eyes rolled from side to side. He was in perfect command of his senses, though not of his muscles, but he was now recovering fast. Morgan turned to the old Doctor in the rear.

"Franz, I think we've smashed Ernst's plot. His chief aides are dead. The Princess has abdicated, naming Luitpold regent. Luitpold has taken the boy away; with morning, you'll see him in charge of the city. Arnheim is getting a new deal all around."

"God be thanked!" said Franz. "And this reptile Ernst?"

"Oh, he's going to pass us through the gates," Morgan said cheerfully. "Rothwin, you'll have to guide me through town to the right gate. We want the main road to the frontier."

HE broke off abruptly and slid out from beneath the wheel. The door in the wall had opened and a dark figure emerged. Morgan approached, and recognized the Princess.

"Everything all right? Here, give me your load. Where's Barlock?"

"I don't know," she rejoined, handing over her two suitcases. "He was gone, without a word to me. When I came back from seeing Rupert and Luitpold off, you had departed. I only looked for Mr. Barlock a few moments ago; but he was not in the alcove, not there anywhere. Shall we wait for him?"

Morgan escorted her to the car, saw her inside, and put in her bags.

"Wait? Not much," he said. "He knew the time, the appointment—after all, he's in no particular danger. You come first. Ready, Doctor? We must be off."

Doctor Franz paid his respects and the car door slammed. Morgan started the engine. Was it Homer Barlock, after all, who had left this door in the wall?

The car leaped away, Rothwin giving low-voiced directions. His arms were folded, his pistol was pressed against the ribs of Count Ernst. The latter's eyes flashed as they passed the street lamps, showing their whites, like the eyes of a maddened horse. The palace with its glittering lights all fell behind. The car dropped through the sleeping city, crossed the great central marketplace, and headed for the gates.

Morgan had taken for granted that Count Ernst, who seemed to overlook no detail, would have his own men at the gates. In fact, Homer Barlock had suggested this, had laid emphasis upon it in their short talk. As to what happened later to Count Ernst—well, Morgan did not care in the least.

The gates loomed before them, cutting short all these reflections.

Merely huge iron grilles closed for the night, with guard-quarters in the old tower at the left. A sentry was halting the car. Overhead, an electric light flashed on. From the tower strode a sergeant with a request for their papers. Two or three men came into sight.

Morgan stared in astonishment. Only a handful of men, no formalities, except a brisk salute at sight of the uniforms. Was it possible that Count Ernst had overlooked this detail after all? Why, Homer Barlock had laid more emphasis on this than on anything else, in his rapid instructions!

The gates swung open. No need of a word; the uniforms had done the trick. Morgan, as he started the car, did not observe that the eyes of Count Ernst were no longer rolling, but now showed an eager, expectant flash. Morgan watched only the road. In the headlights, the wide highway stretched out for a hundred yards, flanked by villas, then swept away in a curve to the right.

As the car shot forward, Morgan laughed with the breaking of his tension.

"All right, Count Ernst, you may speak if you desire. You were quite a convincing newspaper man, back there at the hospital! Didn't expect me to take Latour's place, did you? All right, Rothwin, let him talk."

COUNT ERNST said nothing. His gaze was on the road ahead. As the car swept around the curve, trees closed in on either side. The misty rain had ceased now. Suddenly a sharp word broke from Rothwin; Morgan was already jamming on the brakes.

Across the road was a barricade flanked by two red lanterns, another in the center.

"What the devil is this?" exclaimed Morgan, as he brought the car to a stop.

"I rather think you've found my men at last," said Count Ernst mockingly. "There should be a machine-gun at each end of the barricade. It really is better to cover each exit outside the gates than at the gates themselves—"

"All right! Order that barricade removed. Rothwin, watch him!"

Men were moving in the darkness to right and left. An officer stepped out alone into the road. He swung a flashlight on the car, saw the face of Count Ernst, and snapped to the salute.

"I have them, Highness, as you ordered," he exclaimed. "They are here, both of them."

"Speak up, Ernst!" commanded Morgan sharply. "Clear the road, at once."

"I think you do not understand," and Ernst's voice was silky, deadly suave. "It is I who am giving orders and not you. Officer, flash that light on them!"

THE officer turned. The beam of his flashlight fell upon a group standing to the right of the barricade. Over Morgan swept a wave of incredulous dismay. A cry burst from the woman in the rear of the car.

Each held by two men, the beam revealed the shape of a boy, blinking at them, and the tall, majestic figure of Prince Luitpold.

"Rupert! Rupert! Oh, it is my boy!"

And the Princess flung open the car door. Then came Ernst's voice again:

"If I am harmed, Officer, shoot them both."

"Stop! You must let him go, you must!" The Princess, who had jumped out, whirled and faced Count Ernst. "You can have anything you want, but you must let him go. Take me, kill me if you like, but let him go unhurt—"

"Marie, remember yourself!" came the deep, stern voice of Prince Luitpold. "Make no appeal to these swine; let them kill us, but do not stoop to parley with them!"

"Nonsense! I am his mother!" she cried out. "Name your terms, Ernst, your terms!"

Count Ernst laughed softly, and the sound of his laugh pulled her together. She drew herself up, yet her face was desperate with fear.

"Rothwin, release my hands," said the count. "My good American, you have lost."

It was true. Morgan knew himself futile, helpless. Then the voice of Prince Luitpold drove at them.

"Rothwin, kill that reptile! His men will not dare harm us. Kill him, I tell you!"

There was some truth in this, but now the Princess flung herself at the side of the car where Rothwin sat, and caught at his arm frantically.

"No, no!" In her voice was such ringing entreaty that it overbore all else. "No, I forbid it! Spare his life, Ernst!"

"Very well, very well." Count Ernst moved, came to his feet. "Come, Rothwin, free my arms at once."

Upon the instant, he dominated the situation. His vigorous personality made itself felt, as the staring officer kept the flashlight directed on the car. Rothwin worked at the bonds, then Count Ernst stretched his fingers, and looked down at the imploring face of the Princess.

"Very well," he said, his steely eyes flashing. "Get the boy, if you like, and put him in the car. You men, let the boy go free."

The childish figure ran forward from the obscurity, to be clasped in his mother's arms. Count Ernst turned, an infernal mockery in his reckless features.

"Your pistol, Mr. Morgan! Yours, Captain Rothwin—you also have my own, I think. What, gentlemen, you hesitate? Surely you would not want to see this barricade the scene of an execution—this charming domestic reunion spoiled by bloodshed?"

In his voice was a sardonic note that made Morgan shiver. Silently he handed over his weapon. Rothwin, suppressing a vitriolic oath, followed suit. They were helpless now; it was failure, utter failure. Morgan, acknowledging defeat, cut off the engine.

Then Count Ernst did an astonishing thing.

"Free Prince Luitpold, you men!" he called into the darkness. "My worthy uncle, I see no point in detaining you or your friends. If you wish to depart, then you shall depart with them. My dear Marie, will you get into the car with your son? Let me assist you."

He flung the weapons out into the darkness, and with one agile leap was over the edge of the car, and then pulled open the rear door. He bowed to the Princess; the tall figure of Prince Luitpold strode forward, followed by that of the boy's governess.

"Ernst," said the old man sternly, "I distrust your generosity."

Count Ernst bowed to him mockingly.

"That is my misfortune, Your Highness. In one moment the barricade will be removed; then you may depart, all of you, together."

SOMETHING in the man's voice, in his air, stirred an indefinable horror in Morgan's brain. He tried to speak, to call out, to protest; he could not. Then Count Ernst strode over to the officer, took his arm, spoke rapidly to him for a moment. The officer started back.

"But—Highness!" he exclaimed in a choked voice.

"Obey!" snapped Count Ernst, and took the flashlight from him. The officer drew himself up and saluted. The

light struck across his face for one instant, and Morgan glimpsed it; the look in that man's face heightened his instinctive horror, he knew not why. Then the officer turned and strode off into the darkness.

The Princess and the boy were getting into the car. Prince Luitpold assisted them in. Count Ernst, moving over to the barricade, stood there waiting in the glare of the headlights, and kept his electric torch playing on the car. He stood slim and erect, a devil's light in his hard; handsome features. Then, as the car door slammed, he broke into a laugh.

"*Adieu*, my dear friends!" he called. "You shall have a quick and easy journey, all of you together. Are the machine-guns ready, there?"

"Ready, Highness," came the response from the darkness.

There was one frightful, interminable instant of silence—heart-frozen silence. Morgan understood now, each of them understood. No mercy in that man who stood there; he had trapped them. Machine-guns would blast the life out of everyone in that car!

"Very well," said Count Ernst coolly. "Ready! Aim—"

FROM the encircling darkness spoke out a voice in English:

"Just a minute, Count Ernst! I have an important message for you."

"What the devil!" ejaculated Ernst, and swung the flashlight around. It fell upon the figure of Homer Barlock, who was advancing alone, and lit up the lean, leathery features with the eternal unlit cigar in place. "Who are you?"

"Barlock is the name—Homer Barlock. Perhaps you have heard of the Barlock Line? I have an oil-concession, by the way, in which I might interest you. There is still a block of stock which you could have, if you aint too—"

"Barlock—the American!" exclaimed Ernst. Morgan, little less startled, heard a gasp from the Princess, behind him. "I thought you were dead!"

"A mistake, Count, a mistake," said Barlock cheerfully. "I'm a long way from dead, and I have a message to give you."

Ernst whirled, shot an order in German to his men:

"Cover this imbecile also—let him have it with the others, when I give the word." Then he turned again to Barlock. "Well, what is it?"

"Darned important, Count—confound it!" Homer Barlock, now in the full gleam of the headlights, took the cigar from his lips and looked at it. "By the way, have you a match?"

"Oh! With the greatest of pleasure," said Ernst ironically. He took a box of matches from his pocket. Barlock accepted them, took one out, then paused.

"I SPEAK German myself," he said in that tongue. "The message, Count Ernst, is just this: within thirty seconds you'll be dead. If these men of yours fire one shot, they'll be dead likewise. That's all."

And turning aside, he scratched the match and held it to his cigar.

Count Ernst stared at him, frowning, then turned his head, opened his lips to give an order.

It was never given. As though the flame of that match were a signal, there was a sudden crash of rifles, a spurt of flame from the darkness at one side.

Count Ernst whirled around. The flashlight fell from his hand. He fell back against the barricade, his body collapsed, and he seemed to fall into a limp, terrible heap of torn garments.

"Surrender, and go unpunished," cried out a ringing voice from the darkness. "One shot, and there will be no quarter given. *Quickly!*"

One moment of chilled and terrible silence; then babbling voices burst forth. The officer came scrambling out into the glare of the headlights.

"We surrender—we surrender!" he called.

Voices broke forth, curt orders, the sound of tramping feet. A number of men gathered about the car, indistinct figures. Homer Barlock came edging through them to the side of the dazed Morgan.

"Good Lord, Barlock!" exclaimed the newspaper man. "What does this mean, anyhow?"

"Business efficiency, feller," said Barlock complacently. "I slipped out and got together a few parties who are interested in my oil-concession. We rounded up a few war veterans and came along, figuring you would come this way. I was afraid the old chap and the boy might get nabbed, you see. We'll send 'em back and go on from here, if you feel like it."

"With the greatest of pleasure," said Morgan, and pressed the starting-button.

THE END

Our old friends the Hell's Angels squad come back to us in this lively story of the Foreign Legion in action.

By WARREN HASTINGS MILLER

Illustrated by Charles Fox

The Battle of the Soap

SIX Bréton tirailleurs, with linked arms for mutual support, were staggering away from the Greek sutler's tent, singing ebulliently:

'Gardez-vous la menu—houp!
'Gardez-vous la menu—houp!

Sergeant-Major Texas Ike thought it a silly song, for it meant no more than, "Lookit the eats!" But it was no sillier than the Légion's, *"Voilà le boudin!* (Behold the sausage!)" However, "Behold the sausage" had many ribald variations, when the soldiers' fancy laid verse to it. . . . But Ike was jealous because the tirailleurs had money enough to get drunk on, while the impecunious Légion could scarce buy a swallow. He listened while the six happy ones weaved off through the night to their encampment. With grinr satisfaction he heard them pounced on by indignant sergeants. The Army was prompt with its retributions upon the wealthy!

Just then Papaduklios, the Greek sutler, himself appeared in the front of his canteen and crooked a finger at Ike.

"Ah, *pauvre gars* without one sou! Fetch the Hell's Angels, Sergeant. You shall have something warming too! Those pigs have paid for both. A liddle game of *le pokair,* you on'stand." He grinned and Ike nodded joyously. Papaduklios was an elderly and portly Greek, and the Légion held him in high esteem. Like the rest of his compatriots, he followed the advance guard of the Army in its field operations at the risk of his life, hanging to the tail of the marching columns with his donkey-train and tents. But while the Army pup tents were going up and the camp lines were laid down and fortified with brush, his establishment was going up too. When off-duty hour came, there he was with shop open for business. His present outfit had been erected that day. Its front consisted of packing-boxes laid up as a child lays blocks, and bore the ambitious sign, *"Fournisseur de l' Armée."* Within were kegs of liquid nourishment, soaps of an atrocious perfume, mirrors and safety-razors, matches, *tabac,* cards, writing-paper and envelopes, hair-oil in gaudy bottles, pocket-knives and gewgaws of various descriptions.

His customers were all about him in the sleeping camps. A battalion of the Tenth Tirailleurs from Casablanca, a battalion of the Fourth Zouaves from Mogador, two batteries of the mountain guns, that could go on their mules anywhere the infantry could, a squadron of the Fifth Spahi and one of the local *goum*

Hell's Angels crowded into the space between boxes and shelves, while their Greek served out strange, fiery liquids.

of partisans under their Intelligence officer, and Ike's battalion of the Légion. The latter had become Légion Mounted, for these long-range operations against the tribesmen from west of the Tafilelt. There was a mule for every second man. With his partner holding to the stirrup, they made the most astonishing marches, one hundred and fifty-three kilometers in two days being a record set during the Riff war in a forced march for the relief of Fez. All were now *montée* but Ike's own special cavalry unit of the Hell's Angels, which rode fast Barbs and carried two automatic rifles, with ammunition for the rifles on a led horse; that invention of Ike's had proved too valuable to be disbanded when the battalion had turned Mounted.

PRESENTLY Ike returned to the canteen with his squad—Corporal Criswell, Calamity Cyclops, Anzac Bill, Di Piatti, Mora, and Rütli, the little Swiss gunner. They were all thirsty. And the sign bore, in small letters under its official headline, the legend, *"Maison de confiance."* A life-saver that, for penniless Légionnaires. This *confiance*—credit—was a discreet privilege that the Greek extended only to non-commissioned officers and the Légion. The latter could by no possibility ever repay him, but, *"C'est égal!"* the Greek would shrug. "I must be at the Front each night; and how would I and my mules ever arrive if it were not for the Légion?"

There was something in that. He fleeced the other organizations outrageously, and they retaliated by letting him shift very much for himself on the march. The Légion repaid these long credits by saving, at frequent intervals, his whole establishment from being kidnaped by enterprising bandits. The tribesmen would almost rather have Papaduklios' goods than a collection of rifles and cartridges resulting from some successful ambush.

Hell's Angels crowded into the space between boxes and shelves, while their Greek served out strange, fiery liquids that made one look twice at the label. *"Santé!"* He raised his glass. "You gentlemen will keep an eye on me tomorrow?"

Ike blinked the tears from his eyes raised by that corrosive throat-wash and protested: *"You* aint goin' along tomorrow! Don't do it, Papa Duck! Them's Aït Yafelman we're mixin' with, oncet we git inter the mountains. They'll raid you good, if they don't do nothin' else. You stays *here!"*

Papaduklios shrugged his thick shoulders. "It is a point of honor," he said. "I am but a poor *commerciant,* a noncombatant; but have I ever failed the columns yet?"

Hell's Angels pricked up its ears at the idea of a sense of honor in the breast of this fat and rascally sutler. He came along after them somehow, and nobody cared. The battalions cursed his robber prices, forgetting that he risked his life to be with them at all. No military commander was responsible for his safety. There was no high sense of devotion to France—or to the world at large in the Légion case—such as obligated the soldier to advance under fire against the predatory tribesmen of the Djebel Sarro. This alien Greek had no protection but his pocket-revolver and no patriotic duty calling him to lay down his life if need be—just the point of honor of being there for the convenience of the Army, with his shop set up and his mules tethered, when the smoke of battle had died away.

"Good man!" gurgled Anzac Bill. "This gullet, for one, will be perishin' after a day of climbin' and shootin'! What can we do for him, Sarge?"

"Nawthin'," said Ike, chewing. "We rides tomorrow, to hell an' gone ahead of the columns up the right flank of the valley. The Spahis takes the left flank. Légion Mounted an' sixty-fives will be the advance infantry. That leaves you, Papaduklios, hangin' to the tail of the zou-zous—who don't like you none. Better stay here with the tirailleurs. There'll be plenty business."

"Pouf! Who's going to look after you boys if I don't?" objected their stout Greek. "My rival Coustakis comes over here from Erfoud tomorrow—now that all is perfectly safe! Let him! Me, I go with the columns!"

IT seemed a kind of religion with him, that slogan. Ike shook his head; the Greek hadn't a "Chinaman's chance" to get through. The enemy would spy him from afar, toiling along behind the Zouaves, and all their strategy would center around him as bait from that moment. The swoop of a cutting-out raid, spitting death from its rifles, and off would go Papaduklios and his mules, shepherded by a milling mob of bandits. Ike could see it all without effort. And Hell's Angels far in advance, miles away from the loot of their precious canteen!

"Well, hev it yore own way, Papa," he said. "But I'm warnin' you! —One thing we *can* do, boys," he told the squad. "Lieutenant Hortet was an old zou-zou, onct. He's hobnobbin' now with the old-timers of that outfit. Some of them birds dates back to the Kabyle wars, when even Algeria wasn't so safe. What say we tip him off about this ornery Greek, seein' he's bent on gittin' hisself killed?"

Motion seconded by the giant Criswell, and carried, Hell's Angels adjourned to Lieutenant Hortet's tent. That grizzled old Gaul, whose numerous scars were an epic of the old Army of Africa, shrugged indifferent shoulders.

"You Anglo-Saxons are sentimental! So the Greek feels his honor stirring in the breast, *hein?*" he demanded. *"Eh bien,* there is a tradition among the zou-zous, and that tradition is to loot the Greek at every so-favorable opportunity. They are the oldest corps in the Army, and they have suffered from these rascally sutlers for the last hundred years. A little bird tells me, Sergeant Ike, that Papaduklios would be safer with the tribesmen tomorrow than if he attaches himself to the Zouaves!"

HORTET grinned sardonically. Ike rubbed his nose and yanked at his forelock, a sign with him of perplexity. "He treats us pore Légion roadhawgs fine, Lieut'," he said. "Credit, seein' as we aint got no money; and then kinder forgits the bill anyhow."

"Bah! You pay the bill! Always the Légion has an eye to him; have I not seen it, when you children of sin should be attending to the battle? Let him follow the Mounted, then."

"He cain't do it, Lieut'," Ike protested. "Them birds moves too fast for loaded mules to keep up. An' us six will be with the *goum,* miles ahead."

"He'll *have* to keep up," said Hortet. "Name of a name, the zou-zous would like nothing better than to see him falling back to them! There are many convenient ravines, you understand, and many ancient scores to settle."

It looked bad for Papaduklios! Enemies ahead of him in those mountain ravines, enemies behind in the marching columns—plucked either way! He couldn't possibly keep up with the Légion Mounted, his only friends. It was a point of honor in the other corps to separate the sutler from his belongings, without benefit of francs, if any opportunity presented itself. Even the Légion raided him, when it was drunk.

Ike said: "You remember when he j'ined us at Midelt with jest two kegs of cognac on a lone mule? All the goods he hed in the world, that was. And the slugs was singin' around plentiful that day. That likker went down good, I kin

tell you, after 'twas all over! An' him the only one brave enough to come up from the base. Lookit him now: everything a soldier wants, an' still right with us, slugs or no slugs! The least us birds kin do is to give him a mite of protection, seems like."

Hortet remained cold to that appeal. "Is it that this battle is run for the benefit of sutlers?" he asked gruffly. "Let him stay here with the tirailleurs, if he cannot drive his mules fast enough for the Mounted."

There was nothing to be got from the logical old Frenchman. Di Piatti, however, drew Ike aside, a grin covering his handsome Florentine features.

"Strategy, Sarge—she wins!" he told the morose Ike, and proceeded to unfold a scheme. Hell's Angels guffawed as they heard it. It was a good scheme, and not without its elements of humor. . . .

Next morning dawn was scarce paling the eastern desert over the Tafilelt oasis before the *group mobile* was striking its tents and boiling its morning coffee. It was all as methodic as machinery, that rising. Brief *"preeps"* of the sergeant-majors' whistles marked the schedule, from turning-out to route-step. Hell's Angels saddled its Barbs and stowed the automatic rifles in their leather boots while their big pot of coffee was coming to a boil over the embers of their camp-fire. Near by, a dark mass of blue burnouses wrangling horses with Arabic oaths, was the *goum* of Moroccan cavaliers under its Intelligence officer, Captain Leseur. Beyond these were the red, white and black burnouses of the swanky Fifth Spahi, and yet farther on, the mules of the mountain batteries. All these four-legged units were near to a brawling stream that provided pools for horses, pools for the mules, who are most fastidious drinkers, lavatories for the infantry; highest of all, a dam reserving drinking-water for men and officers.

A pale glow of serried peaks tinged with rose hung high in the blackness to the north. The sun's shafts were striking the summits of the Grand Atlas thirty miles away. All was rebellion in there, mountain tribesmen in their *bordjs* who had no love for the Moroccan Government. A fringe of the Army surrounded it on all sides. Battalions in the Forbidden Sous, lately opened up to the world by its Grand Caïd, the Glaoui, under the auspices of Resident-General Steeg; battalions in the Mean Atlas, road- and fort-building further and further up the valleys, increasing the area of security; and now battalions encroaching from the south by way of the Djebel Sarro. The war for security—it meant much to the colonists of the fertile plains, the mining-companies in the foothills, the loyal tribesmen of more than two hundred Ouleds and Aïts—Arab and Berber clans—tending their orchards and raising their flocks in those immense lowlands that extend from Agadir to Fez.

THE infantry was mustering in the gray dawn. Red fezzes of the zouzous, white-covered kepis of the Légion, masses and ranks of men. A bugle flourished over at the General Headquarters tents, under Commandant Knecht, the senior ranking officer. It was the signal for the cavalry to be off. The hawk-nosed and bearded Spahi filed out in a column of twos on their dappled gray Barbs, their short Lébel carbines slung easily over the left shoulder. The *goum* mounted in its usual happy-go-lucky disorder, every man for himself, about fifteen Arab troopers in the blue burnouses of their corps. Ike, mindful of the Légion pride in its discipline, mounted his squad with brief gingery yelps. In a column of twos, with the led horse in the center, they filed on after the *goum*. The Greek's tents were already down and being packed when they passed him. Ike paused for a word.

"You goin' jest the same, Papa Duck?"

"What else can I do?" The Greek looked up at him from among his Arab "boys" with the fervor of one driven by an ideal. "I shall follow the Zouaves."

"Don't ye go near them thieves!" Ike warned. "Hortet, he says they aims to git you today."

"Ouff!" The Greek eyed him reproachfully. The gratitude of soldiers to the poor sutler who served them! All they could see was the price of *tabac* in Meknès compared to its price at the Front.

"You stay with the Mounted if yo're bound to go," Ike advised.

"You know I can't keep up with them, Sergeant," said Papaduklios quietly.

"Don't seem reasonable, does it?" said Ike, chewing. "Them mules jist carries a man, an' you heavy-loaded. . . . Waal, you scuts up some ravine an' comes along on yore own, if you can't make it—take my advice."

The Greek looked unhappy. That way meant discovery by the first wandering *djich* of mountaineers—attack, capture. His only safety lay with some marching unit of the Army. "There's discipline in the Zouaves. Their officers would not let them raid me," he suggested without much hope.

"Yeah?" Ike grinned frostily. "It won't need more'n three of them, falling out on some excuse, to drop back an' fix ye up with a nice raid. And then where are yuh? They'll swear yore Arabs started the row. Them zephyrs'll have everything you own afore the orficers gits through findin' out what it's all about!"

The picture did not look inspiring. "The savages!" Papaduklios growled. "I shall do my best to keep up with the Légion, then."

"Yore best bet, sonny," said Ike. "Duck up some ravine if you cain't make it. Then we'll know whar you is," he said darkly. "Us birds is supposed to be an observation-unit. . . . So long. —Come on, gang!"

Papaduklios groaned as they rode on after the *goum*. Any ravine in the Djebel Sarro was sure to be a death-trap. On the whole, he would rather be looted by the Zouaves than have his throat cut by the mountaineers! But he grimaced disdainfully at the idea of just staying safely at the base camp. . . .

The squad had other matters than Papaduklios to think about, presently. They could see the Spahi filing along the crest of an opposite ridge, on the lookout for the first sign of the enemy in some artful ambush. Their own objective was a village of huts crowning a promontory high up on the right flank of the valley. The Ouled Yakoub lived there, the sole Arab tribe in this neighborhood. They were a pastoral people, their terraced wheat-fields yellow with ripe grain on

the slopes below, their flocks of sheep and goats grazing on the steeper slopes that led up and up, to lose themselves at high altitudes in the chaos of the Grand Atlas. The village did not look promising, as Hell's Angels and the *goum* neared it. No women or children about; no dogs barking; no hens. Captain Leseur spoke to Ike with misgiving. "We are too late, I fear. For weeks they have been sending me messengers: 'Hasten! Hasten! The Aït Yafelman will burn our crops if you do not come!' I am their father and their brother, they say; but it is difficult to remain loyal when they see none of our troops."

SLOWLY they worked up the terrace paths toward the village. Its gates were closed; it seemed deserted. Then a lone horseman rode some distance out on the plateau, stopped, waited.

"It's the Sheik," said Leseur. "Five months I have been working with him. Promises, exhortations to hold his tribe at least neutral. . . . Now we shall see."

He and Ike rode ahead to meet him. He sat his horse immovable, eying them with the peculiar calculating stare of the Arab. A smile cracked his brown features as he shook hands with the Intelligence officer.

"Ça va?"

The Sheik shook his head. "Go away with your men. Tell them to ride back. Depart; if not, we fire!"

He was brusque and brief.

"Where are your men?" asked Leseur.

"There—and there—and there!" The Sheik pointed with jabs of his finger at ambushes in the heights all about. The *goum* and Hell's Angels were completely at their mercy. How many would fall at the first fusillade? To kill or take hostage this ambassador, unarmed as he was—distasteful, that resource!

"Your women, children, and flocks?" asked Leseur.

"Up there." The Sheik pointed to heights piled on heights, valley sloped above valley. "Tell your general to go back. Yesterday at the Aït Yafelman notables told us they would burn our crops and drive away our flocks if we did not join them. We have joined. No further into the Djebel Sarro come ye!"

Leseur could have wept. Five months of pacificatory work with them, of friendly contact, of helping them with seed and agricultural advice about their flocks, gone for nothing! So, often, the Intelligence officer saw all his labors for peace and friendship vanish. The Army had so much to do here on the Saharan side of the Grand Atlas! The Ouled Yakoub had had to wait their turn, and it had come one day too late.

"Look at your harvests, Sheik!" Leseur appealed. "Ripe. Food to tide you over the dry season. The Army will surely burn those terraces if you fire on us. It is marching now. You will see the heads of its columns within two hours. Reconsider this! The Aït Yafelman will desert you if it goes against them. Wait but till noon. You will see more soldiers than you ever dreamed of!"

The Sheik eyed him stonily. Promises! Always the Army was coming, but it never arrived. But the Aït Yafelman were here—they held his own people under their fire if they did not do their duty; they held their women and children and flocks as hostages. He shrugged his shoulders.

"Insh' Allah!" he said. "Go, while you may. We are ready to fire."

"You'll be sorry, Sheik!" Leseur put out his hand and the Arab gripped it strongly. It was the last gesture of amity between them. Rapidly he rode off toward his village, and as rapidly Ike and the Intelligence officer breaknecked down to their own men. Zero hour, as it were, would strike precisely when the Sheik regained the gate of his village. They had lost the first trick, the loyalty of this Arab faction. There were tears in the Intelligence officer's eyes. The pity of it! One day's delay by the deliberate Army—which marched and camped as the Roman legions of old did in this very territory—but the failure would be chalked up against his corps just the same. Also the position of the *goum* and Hell's Angels was now most precarious. There was not a atom of protection for them. The terraces all faced the wrong way to be used as breastworks. They could be swept by fire from above.

Yeeow! Bang! A single shot rang out from the heights. It was like the match starting a great conflagration, that one insignificant shot. The *yeeow* of its slug howled over the *goum*, which burst into an explosion of wheeling horses.

Ike yelled: "Action front with them sho-shos, Criswell!"

Yeeow! Yeeow! Yeeow! White puffs of smoke showed on the vast slopes of rock and brush. The wild, thin yell of derision: *"Yi! Yi! Yi!"* floated down. Ike and Leseur were still immune till they had regained their commands, but Hell's Angels and the *goum* had scattered, seeking cover, terrain irregularities, anything. A distant crackle of musketry came from the Spahi on the opposite ridge and their horses could be seen deploying in open order at a springy gallop. They had made contact with the Aït Yafelman themselves.

It was like stirring up a hornets' nest, this advance up the slopes of the Djebel Sarro! And there was a third element to be reckoned with, the redoubtable Aït Hammou. They lived here, and they were not likely to be off on some raid with this advance menacing their home district. That came to Ike's mind in

a brief flash of thought as he galloped on down to the squad, now buried in the tall wheat, their horses crowded into a bight in the terrace walls. Hell's Angels had met the Aït Hammou before and had been roughly handled. Their sheik was a master of strategy, a native Stonewall Jackson. How were they likely to come into this engagement, with him managing it? Ike was reflecting on that as he tossed his reins to Mora guarding the mounts and scrambled into the wheat to rejoin Corporal Criswell.

The latter had both "sho-shos" going from emplacements scooped behind terrace walls and was waiting for further orders. The guns drummed in occasional peppery bursts, but were not accomplishing much against the tribesmen in their hillside lair of boulders. Neither were the Ouled Yakoub accomplishing much. Their slugs thrashed the wheat, but it was remarkably effective cover. The blue smoke from the Lébel hardly gave a man's position away. And he had but to move a yard if it got too hot.

"Fine an' dandy, Jim," Ike commented. "But we aint, somehow, doin' our job. We's supposed to be a mobile combat unit. Lookit them Spahi! Workin' out around their flank an' feelin' 'em for weak spots, they is. Aint no one coverin' this side of the valley. We'd orter leave this to the *goum* an' git on our own job."

Di Piatti, near by, chuckled. "About time we did something for that Greek!" he agreed. "Some one's going to loot him this day, and it might as well be us, eh?"

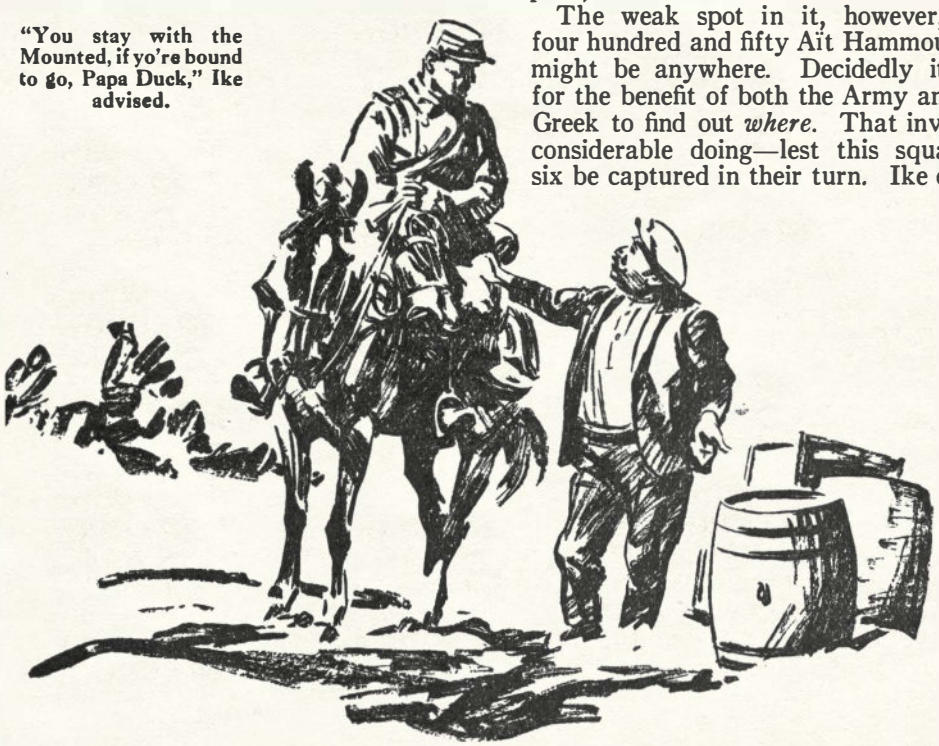
He was recalling to Ike their original plan, which had to do with dressing themselves in burnouses taken off dead tribesmen and then raiding Papaduklios in them. Whereat the zou-zous would form square and repulse the invaders valiantly, and Hell's Angels would make off with their Greek, as if captured by some daring *djich* of tribesmen.

Ike said: "I was thinkin' of them Aït Hammou, fellers. Where are they? Anyone know? You kin bet yore sweet life on one thing, though; they'll be up some ravine, jist waitin' for our infantry supports to git by. Then down they comes inter our rear, an' thar you is! We're supposed to find out anything like that an' sorter develop it."

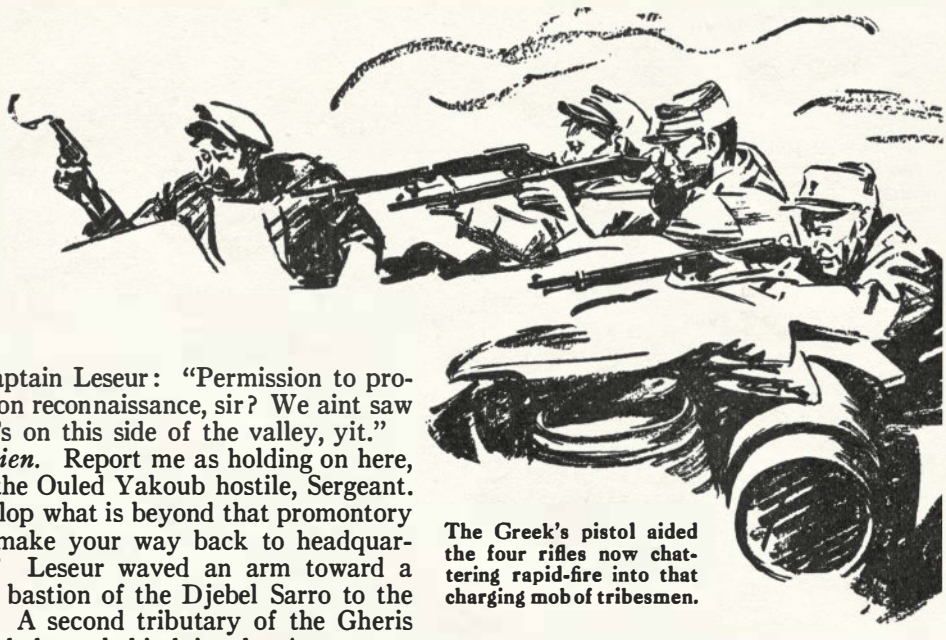
Di Piatti growled. "Nice thing to lose our Greek to the Aït Hammou! All that good cognac and *tabac*. . . . You told him to fade up some ravine if he couldn't keep up with the Mounted, too."

"Shore. The Zouaves would go after him, two-three of 'em. Along we comes an' overpowers 'em, like. 'Twas a good plan, Di Piatti."

The weak spot in it, however, was four hundred and fifty Aït Hammou who might be anywhere. Decidedly it was for the benefit of both the Army and the Greek to find out *where*. That involved considerable doing—lest this squad of six be captured in their turn. Ike called



"You stay with the Mounted, if yo're bound to go, Papa Duck," Ike advised.



The Greek's pistol aided the four rifles now chattering rapid-fire into that charging mob of tribesmen.

to Captain Leseur: "Permission to proceed on reconnaissance, sir? We aint saw what's on this side of the valley, yit."

"*Bien.* Report me as holding on here, and the Ouled Yakoub hostile, Sergeant. Develop what is beyond that promontory and make your way back to headquarters." Leseur waved an arm toward a steep bastion of the Djebel Sarro to the east. A second tributary of the Gheris flowed down behind it, the Army map showed. There was a pocket in the hills there, surrounded by precipitous cliffs.

A burst of rapid fire from the *goum* covered their "unhooking," as Leseur would have put it. In a storm of whistling lead Hell's Angels slipped the "shoshos" into their boots, mounted, and rode off along a flat terrace of wheat. A turn in it soon shut them off from fire from the Ouled Yakoub. Looking east, Ike could see the whole valley below. The mountain guns were already barking, their shells dotting the upper slopes at long range. The Mounted had parked its mules and was deployed in open order, a long mile of men going into battle. A brown caterpillar topped with red fezzes and the slanting gleam of fixed bayonets was the column of zou-zous coming up in support. And midway between them toiled a small, compact, brown dot of pack-animals that was the entourage of their honor-ridden Greek, "Papa Duck."

HE looked lonely and forgotten, that valiant sutler. The Légion, deployed in the stern business of war, had no time for him now. That column overtaking him at a fast quickstep would have plenty of time for him as it swept by in ranks of burnished steel. It would detach a few of its members in a looting party if they had to improvise sprained ankles or sunstrokes to accomplish it!

Ike looked at the big promontory ahead. The wheat terraces had long since given way to precarious going along goat paths. It now was turning to slide rock, treacherous and slabby, designed by Satan himself to skid a horse beyond any hope of recovery. Ike shook his head.

"We're responsible, boys, jist the same. Knecht, he'll give us hell if we don't see if there's no hosstyles layin' low up that creek. Dismount an' build a road, fellers. Us Légion slaves shore knows how to do that!"

The squad could be seen in various insecure attitudes laboring with pick and spade on that hellish slope. A sketchy path grew. Bad places were cleared and leveled for a yard or so. Along it the horses were led, snorting with fear. They passed around that beetling shoulder and the second valley opened up below.

Ike, Anzac Bill, and Calamity Cyclops scouted ahead, peering over tufts of gorse cautiously. But the pocket enclosed by frowning heights was totally empty!

It would hold a regiment easily, that little pocket scoured out by floods of melting snow water. But, look as they would, the place seemed deserted. Ike was not used to having his preconceived ideas, based on military logic, totally upset this way. He couldn't accept it.

"'Taint natural," he said to Bill. "Thar's the Légion gone by. Thar's them zou-zous comin' up in column. Thar's the durned Greek like a hunk of bait atween them, an' they aint no hosstyles hyar to take advantage of it! 'Taint reasonable, Bill. Nature gave 'em this place on purpose for a flank attack, yet that foxy sheik of the Aït Hammou aint doin' nothing with it!"

Bill gurgled. "Loot! The blarsted Greek is fair askin' for it! He's what this war's all about, if you arsk me. Look, Ike! Swelp me if the bloke isn't comin' this way!"

He grasped Ike's arm and pointed. That new development was taking place under their eyes. Papaduklios, desperate at the overtaking column of Zouaves in spite of prodigious whacking of his mules, was swerving off in search of a refuge. If he could get a reasonable distance to one side of their advance, no stragglers would dare detach themselves to go after him without incurring preemptory recall by their officers. It would be just too brazen, that maneuver! His mules were ambling toward the mountain bases on this side of the *oued*. They were laden to the limit with boxes, bales, and barrels of good things to make a soldier's mouth water. They splashed across the brook just as the head of the Zouave column crossed their rear.

It seemed as if that combination of loot and a vulnerable marching column was almost too great for human nature to resist. If the Aït Hammou were here they were exercising an iron self-control! It looked more incredible than ever to Ike—and then Calamity electrified them all by the sharp call: "They're here, Sarge! Watch them bushes awhile!"

He was pointing down at the talus at the foot of the promontory. Hundreds of bushes dotted the boulders down there. Ike was startled to see one of them move forward, then another, in a stealthy and slow advance that would not be perceptible at all to the marching Zouaves, since the gray-green tufts were coming right at them.

Ike leaped into action. "Turn loose them sho-shos—quick!" he yelled, jumping around the turn to where Hell's Angels were waiting. "Them bushes—spray 'em good!"

THEY were at least a thousand yards away at a downward slant, but it was the best Hell's Angels could do in the way of a warning to the Zouaves.

Whang! Calamity, their crack little one-eyed sharpshooter, had let go with his Lébel. The effect was astonishing. A distant bush rolled over and on down the slope. A brown gandourah lay sprawling where it had been, the man's rifle gleaming in the sun. The ruse was an old one in the Sahara. The Aït Hammou *had* been here, in this pocket. They had occupied themselves in cutting thick, tufty gorse, and with each bush held overhead, had been creeping out of the ravine to get as near the marching Zouaves as possible before springing their attack. The squad saw a sort of apparition of sunlight on steel barrels sweep through the bushes as each tribesman turned to look back and up to see where that lone shot had come from. Then Hell's Angels let go all together, rapid-fire. The raving of the two machine-guns added to the din. They had no time now to bother about *which* bush!

That burst was precious in its effect. It gave the Zouaves a priceless instant of time to halt and right-face the two right files in line of battle while the Aït Hammou were distracted for a moment and a scattering return fire came singing up from them around the squad perched on its bastion. Then their sheik called them to order and a withering volley smoked out from their long irregular line. It was sickening, that Mauser fire! The zou-zous were packed four deep and extremely vulnerable. They fell prone in ranks under the frantic shrilling of whistles—but not all of them fell scatheless! A good quarter of them were tumbled in disorderly heaps, rear files, front files. A thunder of crackling musketry ripped out low over the barren ground from them, but they had nothing but bushes to aim at. Hell's Angels were doing better up here. The tribesman needed both hands for his rifle now and his bush lay in front of him with a long brown gandourah stretched out behind. They peppered those exposed marks unmercifully!

And the Greek? Papaduklios had gone down in a heap. His mules, living and dead, formed a sort of barricade in a

nest of boulders across the *oued*. He and his Arab boys were popping over it with what weapons they had. They were nearest of all to the Aït Hammou ambush and were being swept by fire from both directions. The squad groaned at all that good cognac leaking out of bullet-ridden barrels—but Papaduklios was more than ever the prize of the whole war now. Let it once penetrate the Aït Hammou intelligence that he was no advance post but a sutler, having no end of loot all about him—and no command of their sheik could restrain them! They would trade the zou-zous for Papaduklios with a shout, all honor and glory lost in a massed attack on his goods!

Ike was thinking that out with his homely common sense. The Aït Hammou were advancing relentlessly in spite of the galling fire from up here. Their bushes moved ahead, a boulder behind each man now shutting off the worst of Ike's fusillade. Their sheik was enduring it, wasting not a shot on them. His prize lay ahead, the zou-zous, exposed like flies on the opposite slope and trying awkwardly to extend their line in open order. Once he got near enough, the Aït Hammou would rise and charge yelling across the *oued*—and their keen yataghans would play havoc with that frazzled column!

Ike said: "Boys, we gotta make them hosstyles go git that Greek; an' we gotta save him too! Fust Aït Hammou gits among all them boxes an' bundles, he raises a cheer an' it's all off with the zou-zous! Three-four of us down there could bring 'em a-singin'. He's right on their flank, whar they crosses the *oued*."

CALCULATINGLY Ike eyed the sutler's lair. The Aït Hammou sheik would not pass it without attack if there was considerable firing from it. He was too good a soldier to leave a formidable position in his rear. Hell's Angels approved of the plan, so far. They weren't helping the fight much up here, except for the two automatics. To reach Papaduklios had the double advantage of saving their canteen—and taking the entire Aït Hammou line in flank as it charged. Anzac Bill spat and said: "She'll work, Sarge, if some one rides to bring back a company of the blinkin' Légion. Otherwise the show's a suicide-party, if you don't mind."

"Sho is, anyhow," Ike drawled. "You hoof it, Bill. . . . Criswell, you an' me an' C'lamity an' Mister Dee, we tobogans down thar *pronto*. Riitli an' Mora covers us with the sho-shos. . . . Let her ride, fellers!"

THUS simply did the rescue of Papaduklios begin. They slid and floundered down that difficult promontory through brush and rocks and stunted pines. They arrived in a zone of spent fire from the zou-zous that howled and stung with chipped rock spattered by flying lead. They crawled into the rear of the Aït Hammou—with devastating effect. And they reached the Greek's redoubt in a final dash across the *oued* that caused outcries of astonished Berber curses and slackened up the whole Aït Hammou advance while they took counsel on what this irruption of Légion soldiery from their rear might mean.

Papaduklios was defending his nest with just enough shooting to keep inquisitive tribesmen well away from it. Ike said: "I hate to give away any of this stuff, Papa Duck; but that there mule, he's got to sorter run away, like. What's he got onto him?"

"Soap. But—but *why?*" Papaduklios barked his protest. Ike laughed.

"Last thing them Aït Hammou ever uses, but she'll hev to do. Git, thar, you fool critter!" He kicked the animal to its feet and ejected him forcibly.

The mule ambled out aimlessly, a bobbing mountain of pack-load, and was promptly seized by a brown hand on its reins reaching out from an innocent tuft of gorse. A yell came from that tribesman, fierce and filled with delight. More yells, a crescendo of them, culminating in the war-cry: "Loot! *Rezzou*, brothers! Upon them!"

Moving bushes converged on them rapidly; then they were dropped and a yelling and shooting drove of brown gandourahs rose and swept toward the Greek's redoubt. He wept and raved: "For why you do dat, Sergeant? For *why?*" But his pistol aided the four rifles now chattering rapid-fire over boulders and pine into that charging mob. A spray from the automatics up on the promontory helped, but more and more of them were coming. It had worked perfectly, that mule sent out for bait! A shouting chieftain, standing high on a rock, was trying in vain to recall that disgraceful diversion of his forces. Ike left him to Calamity. He was too far off for any but fancy shooting, and he himself was too busy working his bolt on tribesmen who were close-up and urgent!

The attack recoiled, gathered more strength, surged for them again—more determinedly than ever this time. Ike spared the yelp: "Hold 'em, Hell's Angels!" jammed in a fresh clip and poured it to them with barrel red-hot. They all fired desperately; the four, the Greek, his Arabs. They weren't getting much help from the zou-zous, who were using the respite to dig in. Ike cursed: "Dern 'em! . . . Well, we saved their bacon, if we did have to use you to do it, Papaduklios!"

"*Eh!*" said the Greek, comprehending. "I am the sacrifice, then?" he breathed in fervor. "I, the poor sutler; for the honor of the Army!"

"Shore. You's wuth two battalions to them Aït Hammou! You's loot. 'Git that Greek!' is all they's thinkin' about now! Us birds is sorter throwed in fer good measure, ef some one don't give us a mite of help pretty *pronto*." Ike sniffed sardonically.

Indeed it looked that way. The Aït Hammou were forming for the final rush. They had been crawling like snakes through the boulders during the lull; here the gleam of a rifle-barrel, there a rag of cloth glimpsed moving behind a bush. They were experienced fighters and knew just how to wipe out a position like this. After that first rush had cost too many of them, the more certain method of working in close through natural cover was encircling Hell's Angels like a net. Ike piled three clips handy and prayed for the Légion Mounted.

AND then they heard a song over the hill, a bellow of a song, cadenced in a marching rhythm, in vigorous tramping measures:

Mais oui! Nous n'avons ba-nanas!
Nous n'avons ba-nanas ce jour!

It was in French; but that tune—shagged shamelessly from the Hallelujah Chorus—is good in any language! Hell's Angels responded hysterically with the shout: "But *yes!* We have no bananas!" and pounded their Greek. The Légion was coming to get him. They had the story from Anzac Bill, and he wasn't going to get away, not he! Over the crest of the swale suddenly appeared a long line of battle deployed across the *oued*. That drum-beat song shouted from its two hundred throats. It swept down the flank of the Aït Hammou, rolling them up like a blanket with the stabbing crackle of its musketry. Ike roared: "Hell, fellers! Nawthin' to it now! —Start the shebang, C'lamity!"

The sharpshooter's rifle cracked and a tribesman popped up with a screech out of a lair near by and fell over on his side. The rest broke cover and scuttled away through the boulders—pursued by horizontal death from the Légion line, by ravings from the redoubt, by plunging fire from the automatics on the promontory. Like a flock of soaring vultures they fled around the mountain base and scattered into the hills—and it was over.

IKE dropped his hot rifle with a mighty sigh of relief as he dashed the sweat from his brow. The Greek was rolling on the ground and laughing uncontrollably, whether from hysteria or from unexpected salvation they could not tell. Then Lieutenant Hortet came in hurriedly, followed by Anzac Bill and an anxious crowd of the Mounted.

"You have saved all the canteen?" Hortet asked Ike apprehensively.

"All but one mule, Lieut."

Papaduklios' cackles broke out afresh. Hortet turned on him brusquely:

"For why you laugh, Greek? It was a moment of great disaster; all our cognac, our *tabac*, the battalion of zou-zous—"

"*Soap!*" Papaduklios choked apoplectically. "That mule! Every man had a carton of soap under his arm as they ran away! When he gets back into the hills and can examine his so-unwelcome prize— *Oh, mon Dieu!*"

The Greek held his fat sides and gasped. The Légion guffawed. To have traded the rifles of the zou-zous—all but theirs—for a mule-load of soap! Delicious, that irony on the never-washed tribesmen! It tickled the grim Légion sense of humor.

Hortet, who had little use for soap himself, joined in the cackle. Then he stamped his foot and put on a face of wrath. "*Allons!* This is supposed to be a battle, imbeciles! Fall in, there! *Houp!* Back to the att ck on the Ouled Yakoub village!" he barked at the nearest sergeant. "Greek, you come with us."

He turned then to Ike: "Regain your horses, Sergeant," he ordered. "You will follow the Aït Hammou and keep them under observation. *Diable!* They will thirst for revenge when they unwrap the so-valuable soap, no?"

They all cackled again.

"*C'est la guerre,*" Ike admitted, grinning. "C'mon, gang!"

Thirty-three Fathoms

By RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS

Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson

IN the tiny divers'-room on the salvage tug *Fortune,* Tim Royd held in his hands a smooth rubber hose. It looked a good deal like a garden hose.

Although the tubing was over an inch in diameter, the bore was only half an inch. Three layers of processed rubber, with two layers of fine linen between, made up that hose; and it was guaranteed to stand a pressure of five hundred pounds to the square inch.

But the section that the red-headed, stocky Tim Royd was examining would not hold more than a few pounds of air. The outer layer had been slit, and very neatly mended. The four inner layers had been scraped and cut away, so that the hose, although almost perfect outside, was a diver-killer.

Tim Royd grinned pleasantly at the strained, white face of his diminutive tender. John Baker was constitutionally a worrier. Now he was horrified.

"I'd rather discover it on the top than two hundred feet down, Bake," Tim said.

"I told you there was something dirty about the job," muttered Bake. "And I'll bet this tells what happened to Jake Curry."

The grin on Tim Royd's broad, homely face vanished. The late Jake Curry had been Tim's instructor in diving, and a square shooter. Five months before, Jake Curry had made his last dive at this very spot.

The salvage tug on which Tim Royd was the new master diver had been moored the day before in a circle of six buoys in the open sea a few miles off the Long Island shore. Each of the buoys was made fast to a heavy anchor on the bottom, and the six together now held the *Fortune* steadily in one position against the thrust of tide, wind and wave. Below her—two hundred feet below her—lay in the twilight of the ocean floor the wreck of the three-thousand-ton steamship *Southern Star.*

The cargo-ship, Joseph Green, master, from Bristol to New York, had been cut down by the liner *Gloucester* one foggy October day. Thirty of the foundering ship's thirty-three men had been picked up.

Tim Royd's usually care-free face was grim. Jake hadn't lasted long on the ensuing salvage job.

Fifteen days after the accident, the *Fortune* and a smaller tug, towing a wire drag, had hooked into something on the bottom. Although a November gale threatened, Jake Curry had gone down. Thirty-odd fathoms was a tough depth to work in.

Jake had shortly reported by telephone that he was on the forward well-deck of the ship they sought, and that he had made fast a buoy-rope to the rail. Then—his hose had ruptured, and the safety valve had carried away.

Tim knew well what a blown hose could do at thirty-three fathoms. Jake hadn't drowned. The tremendous pressure of the sea above him, no longer equalized by compressed air in his suit, had flattened him out, flesh and bones. It was as if some enormous pile-driver had crashed down on him. Divers call it a squeeze. It is.

The coming of winter had put a stop to salvage operations then.

BAKER took the weakened hose out of Tim's hands.

"Go down, and you'll never see the top again," he croaked. "Didn't Selkirk come out and then pass it up without going over the side? Something shook his nerve. He's no quitter, even with thirty-three fathoms to beat."

Tim's mouth shut like the jaws of a grab. Then it opened. "If Jake's squeeze was no accident, somebody on this tug last fall fixed it," he said. "The same gang is aboard now."

"But who? What for?"

Down

A diver turns detective, solves a mystery of the sea in a wreck far under water—and has to fight hard for his very life in consequence.

"I have a hunch that it'll be safer diving secretly tonight than it will be tomorrow," Tim explained.

"Don't know. Maybe somebody didn't want him or Selkirk to work. Why? Perhaps the answer's down in the wreck."

"If we could stall on diving and try to watch—"

"I'm not a detective; I'm a diver," Tim retorted. "Jake was a friend of mine. I'm diving in order to find out who murdered him."

Baker wiped the sweat off his wrinkled, monkeylike face with a hand that shook. As Tim Royd's tender he held Tim's life in his hands.

"What are the orders?" he demanded.

"Get everything set for a dive today," Tim said briskly. "Keep my gear under padlock in here. Take a good long squint at the air-flasks, and see they've plenty of pressure and that the gauges are right. I'm fond of air."

"You'll be going down this afternoon?"

"I will not," Tim Royd replied. "This swell is too bad."

The tender stared at the squat, red-headed diver, but Tim grinned and left the room. He walked to the rounded stern of the tug and stood looking down at a weed-covered manila rope that disappeared at an angle into the gray depths. This was the descending line that Jake Curry had made f st to the rail of the *Southern Star*. Buoyed, it had stood up under a winter's gales.

Although the depth made diving perilous, the task on the sunken ship was not too hard. Tim's job was to get up the safe in the master's room.

"Simple—but Jake Curry, who was no sap, lost his life before he could even get going," Tim mused.

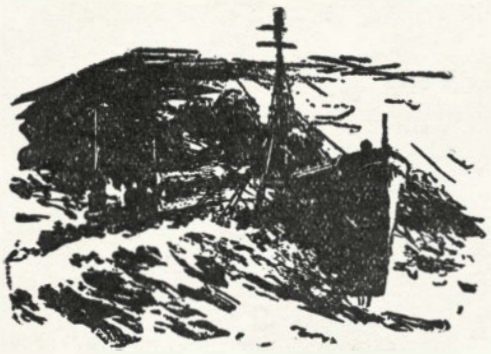
While he was still staring at the line, the hearty voice of Captain Joseph Green broke in upon him.

"All set to go down and get my safe for me?" the ruddy, big-bodied ex-master of the *Southern Star* demanded.

Tim Royd glanced sharply at the fat, genial captain. He distrusted everyone on the tug. The steamboat inspectors had exonerated Captain Green at the collision hearing. The liner had been making time through the fog, and his own vessel had been moving at less than half speed. But nevertheless Green now had no ship. Both he and his mate had applied for jobs at day's pay on the *Fortune*, to give information about structural details of the sunken ship.

"What's all the fuss about this safe?" Tim asked. "The average safe in a cargo-boat generally holds about seventy-five dollars in foreign currencies, and maybe a bottle of good brandy for the captain. Why does it pay somebody to hire a salvage tug to get this safe?"

The Captain chuckled. "My safe is different. You should read the newspapers. Y'see, we were two days out of Bristol when I received a radio from Scotland Yard that a coal-passer on my



ship was actually a fellow named Burrage, secretary to Baron Oakhurst. This lord, something of a miser—though he called himself a gem-collector—had sunk a couple of hundred thousand pounds in big stones—diamonds, rubies, emeralds and a few pearls as well. He could hold a good part of his fortune in his two fists, just in case England went communist. Good idea, but his trusted secretary stole the lot one day when the baron took them out of the safe-deposit vault to do a bit of gloating.

"But Burrage wasn't so smart. Scotland Yard managed to trace him to Bristol, and found that he had bought the seaman's papers of a drunken stoker and shipped on my vessel.

"When I got that radio, I went down into the stokehole and picked out Burrage by the blisters on his hands. He was in a state when I had him ironed! Mr. Dodge, my first officer, found the stones concealed in a chamois bag hung from his belt. I put the bag in my safe and radioed a report to England."

"Then that blundering liner sent the jewels to the bottom?"

Captain Joe Green nodded with sudden resentment. "And my ship with them," he replied. "It was a clear case against the *Gloucester*. She came tearing out of the fog, and her stem went into us like a knife into butter. We didn't last ten minutes."

"What happened to Burrage?"

Captain Green coughed. "I gave orders to the carpenter to release him, but there was some confusion on board during the ten minutes before the *Southern Star* sank. I got off all my crew except two men who were killed outright in the engine-room. The carpenter swore that Burrage broke away while he was releasing him. But Burrage never turned up on the liner."

Captain Green looked hard at the diver. "There was no panic, y'understand. Just confusion. I didn't even have time to get that little bag out of my safe. Jewels don't amount to much when human life is in danger."

Tim Royd's smile was a bit cynical.

"This human life is going to be in danger to lift those jewels off the bottom," he pointed out dryly. "And Jake Curry's lost his human life on the job already."

The master of the *Southern Star* nodded solemnly. "I'll never forget Curry," he said. "I was on deck when they dragged aboard that crumpled bit of rubber and canvas that held what was left of the man."

"Yuh," agreed Tim Royd. "A squeeze at that depth is a thorough job. Once the air-pressure inside the suit goes, it's fare ye well."

He questioned Captain Green at length about the exact position of his room, then walked forward.

Mr. Dodge, the cadaverous ex-mate of the *Southern Star*, was standing near the engine-room door, glancing down at a grimy stoker who was loafing away an easy watch. The mate ignored the diver.

THAT afternoon Tim Royd did no diving. Captain Milton, master of the salvage tug, looked hard at him when he declared that there was too much of a swell. But Milton went no further than staring; he made no comment, for Tim Royd had a reputation.

By the time the sun had set, the last vestiges of a brief April gale had vanished. Save for the long low roll that is the breathing of the Atlantic, there was no motion at all.

Tim climbed up to the bridge to assure the two master mariners that tomorrow he expected to be able to accomplish the whole job.

"Hooks down; chart-room walls and roof jerked off by our derricks; captain's room unroofed; a sling around the safe, and up she comes," he summarized. "I'll be decompressing on my way to the surface, fifty minutes after I hit the bottom."

"Hope so," grunted Milton. "April's a bad month to work in the open sea."

"It's a worse month to work under the open sea," Tim Royd asserted emphatically. "My hands will show you that when I get back to the surface."

That night about eleven o'clock John Baker, his thin, simian countenance wrinkled with worry, was still fussing over gear in the divers'-room when Tim

Royd came in softly. The big tug was dark and silent; save for a man on anchor-watch drowsing on her foredeck, her crew had turned in.

"Nothing else seems to be wrong," Baker admitted cautiously. "I pressure-tested the hose. But I'm going to sleep in this room."

"You're not sleeping anywhere," Tim Royd said in a low voice. "I'm going down tonight."

Bake stared at him with bulging eyes. Tim Royd slipped off his coat. He had on three suits of woolly diving underwear, and two pairs of socks.

"I've a hunch that it'll be safer diving secretly tonight in the dark than it will be tomorrow in the light," Tim explained.

"But—"

"You and I can work it alone, Bake. If any one man should come aft and see the hose and life-line over the side, you rouse up the tug. I want no spectators—or plenty. Just say I decided not to waste this flat calm."

Briskly he lifted his suit off the hook by the door.

"I'll put on the shoes, belt and helmet —all the heavy stuff, standing on the ladder by the descending line," he said. "No telephone; we'll use line signals. You watch that hose, Bake. I'm taking down one o' those thousand-watt submarine lights."

"Wh-what do you expect to do below?" the gloomy tender demanded.

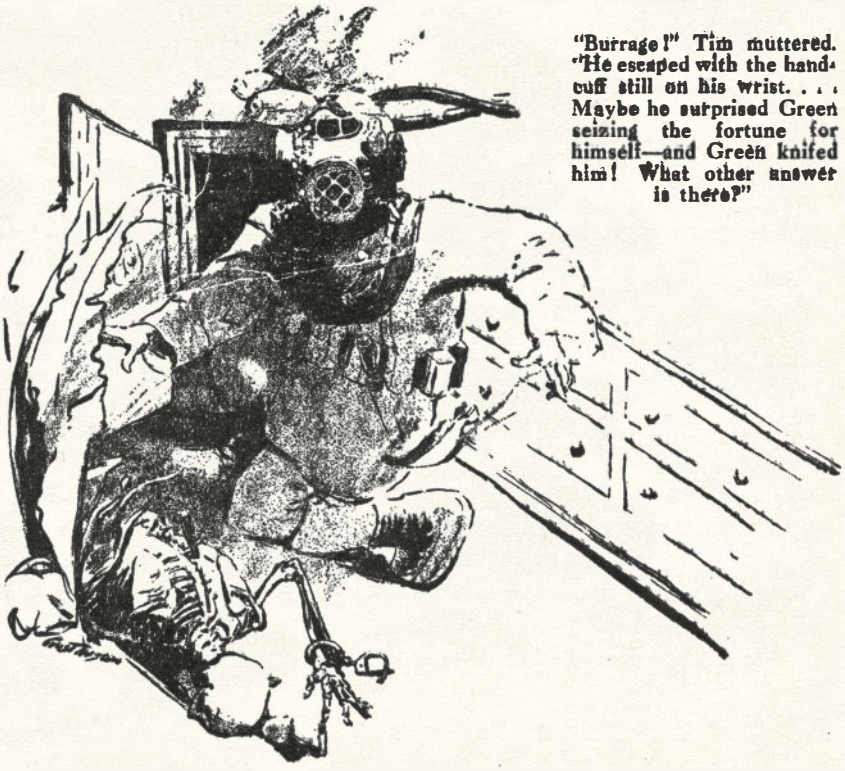
"Just take a look," Tim answered crisply. "Jake never had a chance to do that. Let's get started."

Bake obeyed without another word. His stocky young boss had made up his mind. It was a hazardous but not impossible feat for a diver to go down with only one man to tend him—when that man happened to be John Baker. He knew everything that had to be done on the topside, as he knew how to eat or walk.

They went softly out onto the afterdeck.

The salvage tug with its special lights displayed in its rigging lay quietly in the circle of buoys. Occasionally the running lights of a steamer showed between them and the distant coast; a glow in the sky stretching from west-southwest to east-by-north indicated the direction of the land. The moon was rising in a sky that was almost cloudless, and the chill breeze that drifted across the glittering water had no strength in it.

Tim Royd lent his helper a hand. Then he slipped into the bulky, cumbersome rubber suit, and stood motionless by the rail while Bake fitted the breastplate and



"Burrage!" Tim muttered. "He escaped with the handcuff still on his wrist. . . . Maybe he surprised Green seizing the fortune for himself—and Green knifed him! What other answer is there?"

buckled on the leaden-soled shoes. With Bake's help he got on the ladder, and Bake strapped on the hundred-pound belt and made sure that the diver's knife was firmly fixed in its sheath. He made fast the thousand-watt light to Tim's chest with a lashing.

"Good luck!" Bake muttered. He looked carefully around the dark, deserted deck, then set the helmet on the top of the breastplate, and locked it with a quarter-turn.

The air rushed into the copper globe, and Tim reached toward the descending line. In another instant the water was lapping over his helmet.

He clung with one hand to the weed-covered rope, and with the other opened up the escape valve in his helmet. For a minute he hung there balancing his weight against the buoyancy of the air in his suit while he tested out the valves. At last Bake glumly tapped the top of the helmet.

Tim Royd, with his legs wrapped around the steeply slanting descending-line, started down. The sea was bitterly cold, and he wore no gloves. The air was roaring into his helmet through three vents which distributed it around his head. He descended, now and then increasing the air-pressure in his suit with control- and exhaust-valves.

He was in absolute blackness. The rush of the air was the only sound he could hear. He was depending upon only one sense—touch—the feel of his hands on the rope down which he was moving. Pressure, that formless burden, was dropping on his body and mind.

Suddenly his leaden soles touched something with a jar—the iron deck of the *Southern Star*. He stood for a moment on the slanting surface, adjusting the escape-valve on his helmet.

Tim knew where he was. Jake Curry had told the men on the topside through his telephone that he had fastened the descending line to the rail of the well-deck just below the break of the bridge-house. Then he had died.

TIM switched on his light. Shielding his dazzled eyes from the direct glare, he looked around. He could make out the loom of a wall beside him. It was covered with weed and barnacles, but he knew it was the wall of the bridge-house. Twenty feet above was the bridge. He increased the air-pressure in his suit a trifle until he felt himself almost lifting off his feet. Then he signaled to Baker to take in slack, and ascended alongside the slimy iron wall. In another instant he was gripping the rail of the bridge.

He climbed over, searched for awning stanchions above that might foul his air-line, and made himself heavier by releasing some air from his suit. He pushed along the bridge to the higher side. Small fish, attracted like moths, swirled around his light. He caught a glimpse of the engine telegraph, and stopped.

The corroded brass handle stood at Full Speed Astern. Here, in the depth of the cold sea, was imperishably preserved mute evidence of those last few minutes of travail.

HE moved toward the bridge ladder, and descended the sloping, slippery steps with steady care, gripping the slimy rail with one hand and dragging along his light and its line with the other.

Down on the saloon-deck he shuffled over against the wall of the house. He knew exactly where to go, for he had learned from Captain Green every detail of the bridge and saloon deck. This wall he touched now was the wall of the captain's room. The entrance was further aft.

He felt a sudden tug at the line he trailed behind him. That was a question from uneasy John Baker up on the stern of the *Fortune*. Tim answered with a reassuring single jerk.

He kept on until he reached the door that led into the deck-house. It was open—invitingly wide. Tim paused. This was the ticklish part of the job—entering the house with that long, vital hose trailing after him down the bridge ladder.

Above him in the black opacity of the sea, shrouds and guys to foremast and funnel, or the long radio antenna, might be fouling or chafing his lines. There might be almost any unforeseeable obstacles ahead.

"I'll take a look," he muttered. Lashing the light to his chest, he lifted a heavy foot over the sill. With arms stretched out ahead of him, he stepped into the passage.

Suddenly the light on his chest glared more fiercely; then cut out. Utter blackness came down on him like a physical weight. He stopped. His hand came up as if to rub his eyes, but as his fingers touched his face-plate, he forced down his arm. Fear that he might have been stricken blind by some vagary of the terrible pressure he was withstanding

seized his mind. Inside his helmet he shook his head.

"Those damn' lights—shorting again!" he grumbled. "Now what do I do?"

He stood there a moment. Then, setting his jaw grimly, he took a step ahead. Fumbling with his numbing hands in that utter blackness, he drove himself on. His right hand touched a part of the wall which was not smooth. It was the edge of the panel—the panel of a door—the door to the captain's room.

He found the knob. It would not turn. Corrosion or rust. He realized that the door was open an inch or two. Bracing himself against the other side of the narrow passage, he strained hard at the rigid barrier. The exertion set his heart to thumping like a motor running wild. He persisted. Suddenly the door moved slowly on its hinges. He kept pushing until it was wide open. He stepped through it into the captain's room.

His feet caught against soft things on the floor. The tide had not penetrated this closed room and swept it clear. These things dragging at his feet were the captain's clothes and bed-covers and other furnishings of the room. Above his head, no doubt, was a clutter of buoyant articles floating against the ceiling.

Slowly he felt his way along the edge of the room. Suddenly he stopped. His hand had encountered the hard, unmistakable rigidity of iron. He was touching the safe. Cautiously he knelt in front of it and ran his hand over the face. He touched the handle and the combination dial. Then he realized that the door was ajar. The safe was open.

"Open!" he muttered in bewilderment. "Open! That's a break!"

With mounting excitement he strained at the door. The finely pivoted hinges yielded without much difficulty, and the safe door swung wide.

Touching sodden masses of paper, he searched the safe with eager fingers until he found the cash drawer. This pulled out easily; it was not locked, either. Carefully he thrust his hand in.

It was empty, save for the water which, like air on the surface of the world, permeated everything. Empty! And in the cash-drawer Captain Green had said that he had kept Baron Oakhurst's million in jewels.

IN the Stygian darkness Tim knelt, trying to think. Only the master of the *Southern Star* knew the combination of that safe. And with those jewels inside, Green would not be so thoughtless as to leave it open.

Stunned, he felt about mechanically on the floor in front of the safe for the chamois bag which would mean the end of his quest. The safe open!

His hand touched a bit of hard, curving metal. He pushed it aside, then discovered that it was attached to something.

He felt it more carefully, puzzled as to what it was. There was a short chain attached to it. The next instant his fingers touched the bones of a man's wrist, encircled by a metal ring.

With gritting teeth he reached out and discovered a body, stretched out on the floor. It had long since lost its buoyancy.

"A body—the body of a man with a handcuff on one wrist!" he muttered. "And—Burrage broke away from the carpenter while he was releasing him!"

Conquering his repulsion, he ran his hand over the head and chest. His fingers touched something hard. He felt it. His hand closed on the haft of a knife. The blade was driven deep between the ribs of the body.

SUDDENLY Tim Royd's brain, clouded by pressure though it was, moved swiftly to a conclusion.

"Burrage!" he muttered. "Burrage! He escaped with the handcuff still on his wrist. Let's say he rushed up here after the crash, for a last shot at the fortune he had stolen and lost. Maybe he surprised Green—the only man who had the combination—seizing that fortune for himself. And Green knifed him! Is that why Jake Curry was killed? Because Green could not have any man go down to discover proof of that murder and robbery after he thought his secret was safely sunk? What other answer is there? I'll damn' soon find out!"

Tim's hand clutched at his own knife as he thought of Jake. His face was taut and strained as he backed out of the captain's room. Maybe he was wrong, but he must get up to the tug. His heart was cold in his chest.

"The water wasn't deep enough," he muttered. "Divers would have been useless in a few fathoms more. Green joined the salvage tug to watch the search."

His nostrils quivered, and his cold fingers dug into the palms of his hands. He fought the water that opposed his passage out onto the deck.

Toiling up the bridge-ladder, he could feel Bake on the surface slowly taking in

the slack. It felt good. On the bridge he swung himself onto the rail and gave two pulls upon the line—an order to be lowered. Opening his exhaust-valve, he slid down along the side of the bridge-house to the well deck. In another moment he touched bottom on the iron plates. The descending line was only a few feet away from him, but it took several minutes for his numb hands to find it.

He pulled three times upon his line, the signal that he was ready to come up, and waited for Bake's answer. It came, and he signaled with five impatient jerks.

"God, if I only had a telephone," he muttered in a fury as he waited. "I could warn Bake—to tell Milton—rouse the crew!"

Something sliding down the descending-line touched his knuckles. It was a heavy iron bucket shackled to the line, with a stout rope fastened to it. He unshackled it and worked himself into a position astride it. Then he pulled four times—the signal to haul up. He closed his exhaust-valve a little, so that he would rise by his own buoyancy as John Baker took in the slack of the lines.

TIM did not know how long he had been down; but his dive was only half over. Despite the terrible secret he had learned, he must take as much time to come to the surface as he had spent on the bottom, or virtually commit suicide. His blood was full of nitrogen from the compressed air he had been breathing; the gas must bubble out of his veins under slowly diminishing pressure. To ascend at once, would mean a case of "bends"—terrible agony and then probably death. He must wait—wait astride that bucket, with Captain Green, unsuspected and unwatched, at liberty on the salvage tug.

"If he sneaks aft tonight for a chance at our gear—" Tim mused; then he resolutely dismissed the thought.

Baker hauled him up a few fathoms; then the bucket, clear of the descending-line, ceased to move. Tim Royd waited, kicking his weighted legs, and thrashed about with one arm and then the other in an effort to keep his blood circulating.

The water had lost its sharpest bite. That was a bad sign. It meant that he was getting numb.

Hard waiting. Minutes passed.

"A diver's got to have guts!" he warned himself. "God, if that tug only had a decompression-chamber!"

At last the bucket moved again, then stopped. More decompression. Tim Royd opened the exhaust-valve of his helmet. He could feel the easing of the pressure on his body. He looked upward through the top-light of his helmet, hoping to catch a glimpse of some light from the moon.

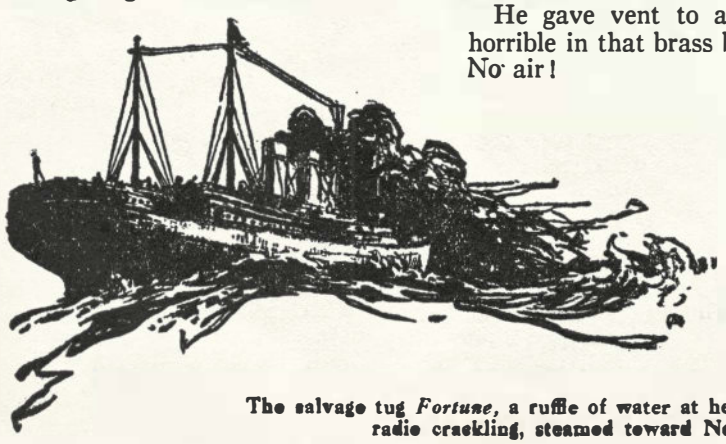
But he was still too deep beneath the surface; the blackness overhead was as intense and absolute as the blackness beneath.

Again the bucket moved toward the surface. This time Tim Royd caught a gleam of silvery light from overhead. The worst of the pressure was off him now. But he moved his limbs with difficulty, and his hands had no more feeling than wood.

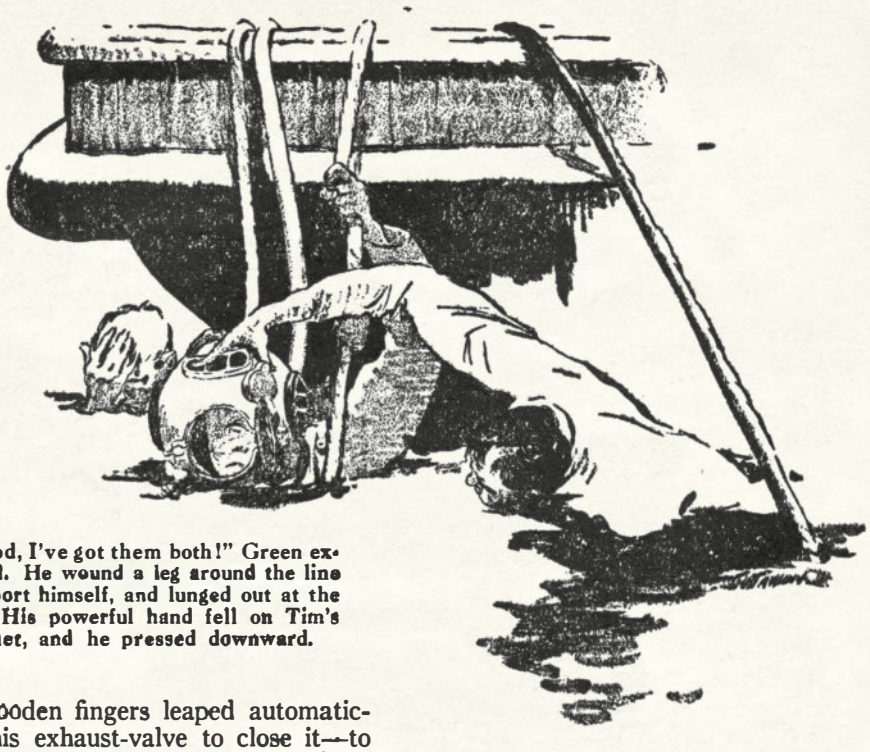
Time dragged by. Only the wrath that surged in him kept him fighting against the drowsiness induced by the chill water. He slogged on with arms and legs to keep his sluggish blood moving. Again the bucket lifted him upward. Through the top-light he could see in strange distorted fashion the moon rising high.

Suddenly the steady stream of cold air around his face ceased to flow. His air was cut off!

He gave vent to a cry, muffled and horrible in that brass ball upon his head. No air!



The salvage tug *Fortune*, a ruffle of water at her blunt bow, and her radio crackling, steamed toward New York.



"By God, I've got them both!" Green exclaimed. He wound a leg around the line to support himself, and lunged out at the diver. His powerful hand fell on Tim's helmet, and he pressed downward.

His wooden fingers leaped automatically to his exhaust-valve to close it—to save what air he had. Inside that helmet was oxygen for only a few moments more of consciousness and life.

He slipped off the bucket—found himself floundering unsupported. His lines were slack. He tried to swim, and suddenly touched the slimy thickness of the descending line. He laid hold with his stiff fingers and pulled himself hand over hand toward the surface.

His helmet broke through the water. He was under the counter of the tug, in the blackest shadow. No head was looking over the side to aid him. The air he breathed was foul; his heart was jarring in his chest; he felt dull. His hand lifted to the wing nut that fastened the hinged face-plate of his helmet. If that nut was screwed down too tightly, he would suffocate here on the surface just as surely as he would thirty fathoms below. But a desperate hand has strength. His fingers bled under the pressure, but the nut turned.

IN an instant the plate swung open; he breathed in the reviving air of the April night. The air was gushing out of his suit; the leaden belt and the leaden shoes now were dragging him downward with devilish malice. He tightened his grip on the descending rope, and tried to call out.

But suddenly he closed his lips. To his ears came the sound of two men gasping and straining on the deck just above his head. There was a struggle going on up there. He guessed then that his long air-line, stretched out for many feet along the deck must have been cut. This was no failure of Bake's that had so nearly ended his life!

Suddenly he saw the man above him—Bake himself. The small tender, fighting gamely, was thrust over the stern of the tug. He hung there, clutching frantically at the arms of the man who was trying to throw him into the sea. In the moonlight Tim Royd could make out Bake's contorted face. A big, powerful hand had Bake by his scrawny throat, choking off the breath and voice alike.

It was the hand of Captain Green. The shipmaster's face, round, huge, with veins distended in his forehead, showed in the moonlight.

Baker made a last effort. His thrashing feet got a purchase against the rail. He gave a powerful heave of his braced body. The movement sent him hurtling into the water, but he dragged his enemy with him.

Tim Royd reached out a hand and pulled the floundering tender over to the descending-line. Bake clutched it feebly, too dazed to realize who had helped him. He clung to it, trying to get some sound out of his mangled throat.

"The air-line!" he croaked. "Cut! Pull—Tim—up! Pull—"

Green was swimming strongly. He stroked with powerful arms toward the stern of the tug. Suddenly he saw the looming helmet of the diver hanging helplessly there, weighted by two hundred pounds of gear, with the exhausted tender beside him.

"Royd!" he gasped exultantly. "By God, I've got them both!"

He pressed on toward them. One of his gripping hands caught hold of the line to which was fastened the iron bucket. It hung over the stern a few feet from the rope which supported Tim and Bake.

Green, his eyes gleaming, wound a leg around the line to support himself, and lunged out at the diver. His powerful hand fell on top of Tim's helmet, and he pressed downward.

The grasp of Tim's numbed fingers on the slimy descending line weakened. He found himself being forced inch by inch under the water. The leaden shoes and the hundred-pound belt aided in dragging him down. Once the water reached that open face-plate, he'd be through. . . . A trickle of water splashed into his face.

Tim Royd's right hand leaped to the diver's knife on his belt. He jerked it out of the sheath and thrust at Green. The Captain drew back with swift agility. He escaped the lunge, but the sharp blade slashed the rope to which he was clinging. It parted. For an instant Green disappeared under the water, then floundered to the surface a few feet away.

His arms beat the sea with strokes as powerful as ever. But despite the vigor with which he flailed at the water, he did not reach the stern. He stopped swimming and ducked under the surface. A moment later he came up, coughing.

"The line!" he gasped. "Caught round my leg! Can't—"

Tim realized what had happened. Green had entangled his legs in that line to support himself. When Tim had cut it, the weight of the bucket dragged Green down. It took all his strength to keep his nose above water. He could not reach the stern. Nor could Tim or the gasping tender reach him.

CAPTAIN GREEN'S head went under. In an instant his desperate arms had forced him up again.

"Help!" he choked. "I'll split—fortune— Help!"

The weight of the iron bucket pulled him down once more.

Tim shouted. For a full minute, while voices and flashing lights on the tug replied to Tim, Green fought on, drifting a few feet away.

Then slowly, inexorably, the bucket dragged him under. Captain Joseph Green sank downward to join his ship in thirty-three fathoms.

THE salvage tug *Fortune,* a ruffle of white water at her blunt bow, and her radio crackling, steamed toward New York.

In the tiny room for the divers and their gear, Tim Royd lay in his bunk and John Baker lay in his. Neither man gave much indication of life or interest in life. But finally Bake pulled himself up on one elbow to look at his red-headed boss.

"All right," he said grudgingly. "You got away with this crazy stunt. But what good's it doing you? Green may have hidden the jewels where they'll never be found."

Tim Royd yawned. "Sure," he agreed.

"Then—"

"Did I say I was a detective? Bake, old man Curry came down to me one night in a dirty sea and tideway. I was caught on the bottom with three turns of my air-hose around the propeller of the ship I'd been working on. I'd been there three hours, and was about gone.

"Well, Jake unscrambled me. Then, though he'd been resting ashore after a hard day when they sent for him, he finished my job for me. When he came up, I was in the decompression-chamber feeling sorry for myself.

"He turned loose that crooked grin of his. 'No reasonable man would mind a diver passing on now an' then, boy,' the old man said. 'I mean, provided he finishes the job he's down on, before he leaves the bottom for the pearly gates. But this job's done, lad—an' it's all in the family who done it.'"

Tim halted and stared hard at his copper diving-helmet in its place on the bulkhead. Baker began to protest:

"But Jake couldn't be blamed—"

"It would have bothered the old man in heaven or hell to feel that his last job hadn't been cleaned up. Well, it's done now. The jewels aren't in her. It's done —and it's all in the family who done it."

He yawned again. "Turn off your air, Bake," he mumbled. "I'm corking off—till they think up the next one."

"Hoarder's Gold," a colorful novelette of swift-paced adventure at sea and ashore —and one of Richard Howells Watkins' best stories—will appear in an early issue.

Illustrated by the Author

Fanged Vengeance

The race is not always to the swift nor the battle to the strong—even in the African wilderness which this artist-writer knows so well.

By WALTER J. WILWERDING

MIDNIGHT, moonlight and the monotonous threnody of insect legions. The shrill piping of the crowned plover and the raucous crying of galagos, punctuated with the high, questioning *"who-oo"* of the eagle owl. A place of seeming peace, where birds and little soft furred things called and played in the mystic light of the African full moon. But in the stretch of dense bush, growing between forest and grass plain as if to blend the two, there was hissing, growling and low cursing. Murder had been done in the deep shadows. Even now the murderers, besmeared and bespattered with the blood of their victim, were disposing of the remains.

A mongoose came through the bush in his undulating fashion, which resembles nothing else as much as the movements of a playing porpoise. Raising his grizzled and banded form stiffly erect, and moving his triangular head viperlike from side to side, he sniffed, hissed, swore through set teeth, and dropping on his short legs once more, went away from there as though the place were cursed.

One of the larger of the mongooses,—of which there are almost twenty varieties, ranging from the size of a weasel to that of a cat,—he resembled his better-known cousin from India in general form, but his body was marked with a series of dark bands, from which he derived his name. His kind are found in Africa from the Cape to Abyssinia. Sometimes they hunt in troops of several dozen members; but this one hunted alone.

He grumbled and mumbled to himself as he went, his thoughts afire with the scene he had just witnessed. Something, with outstretched claws, sprang upon his following shadow. He executed a side-flip underneath a thorn bush, cursing in exasperation and fright. *"Phht, phew, phfrr!"* What a place this was! One could not venture out of one's burrow on a respectable hunt for food without running into gibbering, cackling, bat-eared and evil-smelling murderers, or being pounced upon by silent-footed many-clawed ones who waited evilly beside the trails. Something should be done about it! Something was done right then and there.

The serval that had pounced at him was questing about to see where his in-

tended victim had gone, when an African black cobra, rising swiftly from the earth with a graceful, sweeping motion, struck at the spotted cat like a thing electrified. The big bush-cat yowled in terror, but struck back with unsheathed claws. Swaying to one side, the cobra struck once more. Again its fangs found flesh. Feebly the cat struck back; then, tottering giddily, it crawled into the shadows and died.

Now this was exactly what the mongoose had been praying or cursing for. He should have blessed the cobra for having so easily, so quickly, with such finesse, removed one of his enemies. But if Chiro, the big male banded mongoose, had blessed a cobra with anything but his needle-sharp teeth, he would not have been a mongoose. Meat did not come by the yard every day, and here were two good yards of it. At once the serval was forgotten in the red fever of the hunt. The cobra saw Chiro's stealthy approach; its evil hood swayed like a raised pendulum in the moonlight. Like the swiftly moving shadow of a passing bird, its malevolent head darted forward and down—but Chiro was not there when it struck.

Again and again the cobra raised its hood to strike at this creature that crouched before it with arched back. It was as if it struck at nothing, for always Chiro contrived to be some other place when that deadly head came down.

After a time, some glimmer of what this was about seemed to simmer into the cold brain of this thing of venom, and it tried to retreat, but Chiro was always there before it, running in as if to attack, and vanishing from the spot when the cobra struck. And then the cobra began to tire; its strikes were neither as swift nor as frequent. Once more Chiro rushed forward. The cobra struck. Deftly Chiro moved to one side, just far enough to evade the stroke. Then—one fleet movement, and the cobra's head was in his teeth. There was a lashing, curling, convulsive twisting of six feet of scaled length, a soft crunching sound, and the battle was finished. Chiro dragged the limp form, tail still a-wiggle, into the thorn bushes, and prepared to feed at length, but—

A big black muzzle, armed with a most formidable set of teeth, poked into the bushes with a horrid cackling laugh. The beast towered over Chiro as an elephant towers over a pygmy, but Chiro, reckless with fury, sprang at that muzzle and bit the beast in the nose. A throaty growl, a murderous chop of yellowed teeth! But Chiro was some other place when those teeth closed. Well it was for him, or he would have been present in two pieces. The bat-eared robber dragged the length of cobra out into the open, and at once undertook to make it disappear.

Chiro flamed with anger. He rushed from spot to spot, circling about, jumping up on a log, better to view this outrageous scene. He cursed; he snarled; the hair upon his body stood out and made him appear twice his size, and his tail was swollen like that of a cat with its back up. He raised himself upon his hind-legs and whistled shrilly. All to no avail. This beast had no respect for the rights of anything else on earth.

Soon there was nothing left to rave and complain about, and as others of the bat-eared thief's fiendish crew, having finished their nefarious business in the thorn bushes, were coming this way to see about the dead serval, Chiro thought it best to leave this vicinity.

AS he went mumbling along the trail, he met a jackal coming to the meat scent. The jackal snapped at him; for meat is meat to the jackal, wherever it lies or runs. But Chiro had had quite enough of being snapped at. Burying his teeth in the jackal's muzzle, he hung on. There followed a wild race across the veldt, the jackal yapping at every jump, and Chiro hanging on doggedly,

swinging like a rag doll. Finally, crazed with the pain in his muzzle, the jackal turned into the thorn bushes. The raking thorns making the game a bit too rough for Chiro, he released his hold, leaving the jackal to yap his wild way into the moonlit haze.

Whereupon, finding himself free at last from swaggering rascals, Chiro again pursued his hunting. He caught some striped lizards that barely whetted his appetite. Then a veldt-rat essayed to cross his path; and fortunately for Chiro, but not for the rat, he caught it and fed.

He finished his meal by catching a few gerbilles, which look like kangaroo rats, and as it was now well toward morning, he directed his course toward the home burrow: a deserted ant-hill in whose underground galleries he made his home. Here he curled up in sleep, to dream of cobra fights, and huge bat-eared beasts that snapped at him as he passed.

CHIRO lived alone. A few short weeks before, he and his mate had started out of the burrow for the evening hunt. His mate went first. A slavering bat-eared brute, sniffing about near the burrow's entrance and hearing movement within, had stepped to one side to wait. She had no sooner emerged than the evil-visaged one snapped her up and bolted her down. Small wonder, then, that huge nightmarish creatures with bat ears filled Chiro's dreams!

Evening again found him hungry and eager for the hunt. The lurking dangers had taught him caution, and so he came furtively to the entrance of his burrow, first sticking out his flat head to quest about with his beady eyes before emerging.

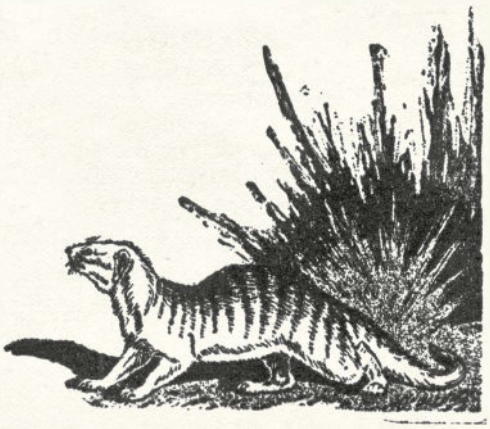
His way took him through a jungle-choked *donga* to the edge of the bush, where, in the high grass, a francolin covered a nest of eggs. It was an easy matter to pounce upon the brooding bird and make a meal of her. And now the nest of eggs offered a tempting finish to his repast. He bit a hole in one and had started to suck the contents, when the heavy padding of feet caused him to sit stiffly erect. He had not long to await his visitor; the slouching manner of his coming already identified him. Again Chiro had to surrender his food to this ruthless bat-eared freebooter.

He had had just a taste of one of those eggs; and eggs, nice warm eggs, kept chasing each other around in his fiery brain. He kept along the trail that led to a *shamba* at the edge of the bush country. Eggs were in his flaming mind, and the taste of them was in his mouth—eggs he must have. He knew just where these could be obtained. Sometime ago he had gone egg-hunting at this same village, and he now found the poultry-house without difficulty. His nose already brought him the warm, stuffy smell of roosting fowl.

But those who inhabit this land know full well that many kinds of night-hunting creatures also inhabit the place, and the poultry-house was well protected from such as these. He sniffed about at every crack or possible opening, but no entrance presented itself. Finally he found a place where rats had burrowed, and here he went industriously to work to enlarge the burrow. It took a lot of digging that he did not particularly care about, but the thought and taste of those eggs kept him at it. He had promised himself eggs, and eggs he must have.

At last he made an opening large enough to admit his sinuous form. In the nests there were eggs; the indolent natives had not attended to their removal this evening, being too intent on a dance and a *pombe*-drinking-bout to think of such things as egg-gathering. The sounds of tom-toms were vibrating in the night, but Chiro did not worry about these, for he had heard them many times before. He even seemed to know that when the tom-toms boomed, he could go about this egg-hunting business undisturbed.

But there were some other things to attend before finishing the eggs. So many warm birds upon the roosts must have first attention. The place was soon filled with cackling, fluttering, excited and terrified fowls. Chiro was having a party of his own. His brain flared with



the killing lust. Soon only those fowls upon the rafters and on the higher roosts remained alive, while the ground was covered with feathered bodies.

Whereat, being a bit exhausted and filled enough with the blood of his victims, he again bethought himself of those eggs. He had turned toward the nests, when something long, mottled, varnished-appearing and cold of eye came slithering easily through the entrance he had made. A rock python had come to the *shamba,* hunting rats. Smelling the fowls and seeing the hole Chiro had made, it needed no special invitation to insinuate its muscular form into that opening.

This was not a large python. Had it been, it could not have crept through the hole. But even an eight-foot python is no inconsiderable enemy. Fixing its lidless stare on Chiro, it advanced in that quick, easy, sliding way that pythons have. If it recognized the nature of the beast it attacked, it gave no sign of it. Rats it had come after; fowls had diverted its attention; another beast it had found. It came to the hunt with no uncertainty about its bearing.

Now, Chiro was no infant in size himself. He was as large as a big full-grown male ferret, and was stouter in build. Eight feet of python was a plentiful job for him to tackle, but he thought not of the eight feet of smooth muscles; he fought the head alone, knowing full well that once the head was finished, the rest was done along with it. Warily he circled, as the python advanced.

For an instant the python stopped with raised head; then with a swift, convulsive movement of its body it surged forward, striking at the same time. Chiro moved quickly to one side. Perhaps the python anticipated this; maybe it had fought with a mongoose before. Even as Chiro moved swiftly to one side to avoid the stroke, a coil was thrown forward and over him. He struggled quickly to free himself, biting into the tough muscles before he withdrew. This was not to his liking.

Venomous snakes were different: they fought with their fangs alone. This one fought with both teeth and coils. Chiro was not free for long before the python advanced again. Once more it struck; once more its coils were thrown over that banded, grizzled form. This time a coil was around Chiro, and he bit fiercely into the tightening muscles, slipping free just as the python struck again. He had barely time to avoid that stroke. His efforts with the chickens had tired him. He was not as quick as the occasion required. This business was getting rather serious.

AGAIN he circled about warily, keeping away from the constantly advancing serpent. Chiro's mouth was open now, showing his needle-sharp teeth. Nose wrinkled and hair all abristle, he awaited the attack. The fowls cackled nervously from their high roosts.

Perhaps it was by design that he kept the python away from the roost props where it might get a tail-hold, and maybe it was also by design that the python maneuvered to get him into a corner. A sibilant hiss came from the python. Chiro hissed back, bracing his short legs for a quick leap. Then everything happened at once. The python's head flashed forward. Chiro streaked aside to avoid it. The python threw coil after coil over him. Chiro slid from under one coil to be encircled by another. He grasped the python's tail in his mouth and bit through to the bone. The python came at him with open jaws that bristled with sharp teeth. It looked like the end.

Somehow, Chiro twisted in that coil to meet the advancing menace with teeth of his own. He caught the python by the nose and bit until his teeth met. Another coil was twisted forward to envelop him. Tail-hold or no tail-hold, it seemed the python would crush the life out of him. The coils started to tighten, but Chiro hung on to that scaly nose like a leech. Slowly, painfully, while the very breath, his pulsing life, was

being squeezed from him, he chewed his way along the python's head until he reached the eye.

The python pulled back with might and main, tightening his coil-hold at the same time. It seemed that Chiro must be pulled in two if he kept his hold, but keep it he did, biting through the serpent's eye, slowly advancing his jaws fraction by fraction until at last, when death for him was very near, his jaws were at the place where the evil brain gave orders to those eight feet of coiled muscles. Deep into that primeval brain Chiro sank his teeth. He set his jaws to bite and bite. Slowly the coils relaxed; his breath came back; the ache in his ribs eased. For a long time he lay there, keeping tight hold on the python's head, while he regained his breath and rested.

Finally, when only the convulsively moving tail showed that there had once been life in that smooth length of serpent, Chiro released his hold and backed away. Here was meat in abundance, but he wanted none of it. He retreated to a nest, to suck eggs and curl up for a nap.

He may have slept for an hour, perhaps more, when a scratching sound awakened him. He raised his minklike head to sniff and stare about. Being rested now, and having had enough of this place, he scampered to the hole to make his exit. But he had hardly poked his nose out before he knew who was doing that scratching outside. A rascally crowd of cutthroats had smelled the dead fowls and had come to the scent. The black curse of the jungle upon these devils! Even now they were engaged in scratching about to try to force an entrance. Chiro watched his chance; and all seeming clear, he emerged to scuttle across the compound. A slouching, bat-eared form rushed at him from the shadows, and just as Chiro made the cover of a bush, snapping fangs made a great chop within an inch of his back. Ah, well, in the wild as in other places, misses don't count. He was soon on the way to his burrow.

FOR a time, then, Chiro was too busy to worry about bat-eared murderers, for he acquired a new mate, and it was not long before there was a family in the home den. As soon as the little fellows were well enough grown to accompany the old ones, the whole family went hunting together. The little ones

had to be taught the ways of the wild and the art of hunting. Often, while the female stayed behind to watch the young, Chiro would go ahead a bit and show them just how a gerbille, a grass-mouse or a veldt-rat should be caught. He took them on the hunt to the rocks where many lizards scampered about; he took them into the high grass after grasshoppers. Now and again he ran upon a snake, and then he gave them a real display of his skill in hunting.

A night came when he had occasion to show them how to stalk and capture as large an animal as the veldt-rabbit. Pouncing upon the unwary rodent, he fastened sharp teeth in its neck and brought it down. The female and young hurried up eagerly to help dispose of such an abundance of meat, and were so engrossed in their feeding that they failed to see the sneaking approach of the bat-eared murderer. He was almost upon them, for they fed in the thorn bushes where the view was obscured, when Chiro saw the leering brute. At once he rose erect and whistled a shrill warning. The alarm came so suddenly that the family scattered in all directions. Inadvertently, the female ran near the bat-eared slayer. A snap of fangs and—Chiro was again without a mate.

For some time Chiro lingered near by with the three young, sniffing, whispering and mumbling—hoping his mate might come along. But after a while he seemed to sense that she was lost to him forever; and, bristling and muttering, he led his young back to their den.

His loss made him sullen, but the young must be taken care of, must be

trained for their life in the wild; so each evening near sundown he led them in the hunt.

One night he lost a young one to a leopard that waited near a trail as the mongoose family came on the hunt. Another night he lost a second one to an eagle owl that swooped down silently from above. Perhaps he was too intent upon the hunt, too eager to show them how the thing was done, instead of watching them closely, as the female would have done. At any rate, he was now left with one young one, and to this one he clung eagerly, for he had been much alone; he still missed his mate and yearned for the company of his kind.

ZEALOUSLY he guarded this last one; the task was simpler, for one was easier to manage than three. Then one evening he took the little one with him to the open veldt, to hunt for grass-mice. They were eagerly intent on the hunt near the runways of the little rodents, and paid no attention to a herd of topi feeding near by. These silky-haired antelope are grass-eaters, and so Chiro had no quarrel with them. They in turn paid scant attention to him, being ever on the watch for large beasts of prey while they grazed. But unknown to Chiro, some large beasts of prey were lurking near by: those hateful bat-eared creatures that had given him so much trouble in the past. Finding no food for their greedy appetites, they hung about near the outskirts of the antelope herd, hoping to pull down a helpless young one.

Several female topi with young accompanied the herd, and near these the murderous crew skulked. Finding one a bit detached from the rest, they rushed in boldly to the attack, for they are ever bold where the helpless are concerned. And the topi herd, thrown into a panic by this sudden attack, stampeded in a body. Chiro looked up from his hunting, heard the pounding hoofs and saw the herd coming toward him. He whistled a sharp warning to the young one as he darted for a thick clump of thorn-bush. But the young one must needs first rise erect to see what the trouble was about; and that moment's hesitation almost sealed his fate, for a huge bat-eared form snapped at him just as he disappeared into the cover of the thorns. The fangs missed his back by a gnat's length.

Chiro looked furtively from their hiding-place in time to see three hulking bat-eared assassins following the topi herd. They had missed their prey, because a watchful topi mother had used her heels on the foremost of them, giving her offspring a chance to get away. Now they followed in the hope that they might repeat the attack more successfully. One had been nearly successful in taking the last of Chiro's young. Another mark on the score against them!

Again, in the moonlight, in the velvet black of the African night, Chiro hunted with the young one. He took the little one along the old trails, visiting the old scenes, for a wild animal keeps a certain district for his home and hunting-grounds, feeling strange and uncomfortable in a new place. His love and yearning for the place he calls his home is as keen as with humans.

Of late they had been bothered considerably by one huge lone bat-eared killer. No doubt this was the same one that had murdered Chiro's mates, and who on different occasions had robbed him of his prey. When lack of grazing drove the game herds and accompanying meat-eaters far away, this old slayer picked up a scant living as he could, plundering the sheep- and goat-herds of the native blacks, and stealing the prey of the small hunters of the wild when chance offered it.

Chiro was exasperated by this bat-eared brute that followed them like an evil shadow. It spoiled their hunting, for they must be ever on the alert to keep from being snapped up themselves. They snatched what they could in the way of small prey, scampering off into dense thickets with it, where Chiro and the young one ate without molestation; but it jangled their nerves to be forced to seek a living in this manner.

ON one of those black tropic nights when, seemingly suspended over the earth by unseen wires, only the stars lit the veldt and bush country, Chiro and his young one heard the footfalls of this malignant bat-eared creature following on their trail. But the two kept steadily on, Chiro stopping now and then to sniff and look about. In and out among the bushes and rocks they threaded their way, searching the low spots near marsh and stream. Chiro seemed to be hunting for something that was not easy to find. On and on he led the little one, ever questing about, until at

last, when baboons were already calling in their hollow booming fashion, and Chiro knew that the dawn was near, he came upon the thing he was seeking. It may have been by intent; it might have been simply in the course of his hunting. Who can know or tell?

IN a stony bit of ground near a sunken water-hole he found it—a thing of sinister design; perhaps some might have thought it a thing of beauty. And if color and pattern alone give beauty to a thing, then this was indeed beautiful. Cerulean blue it was, cobalt, purple, olive, yellow and black. The colors shaded and blended into one magnificent ensemble and design, as though some master-craftsman had woven them on a loom. But the creature that wore them was a horrible thing: short, fat and ugly, awesome and frightful to look upon. It was as though the lords of the underworld had opened the very doors of hell to let this thing loose upon the earth. Its flat triangular head was set with two pale, lidless, slit-pupiled eyes. Its blunt nose was arrayed with a number of spikes or horns. Men had looked upon those horns and called it the rhinoceros viper. After nature had fashioned this super-venomous thing, she must have relented, and colored it with many hues to warn all living things against it.

Fast as chain lightning was its stroke, but it was slow of movement otherwise. Its neck was bent into an S; its malevolent head was poised above its thick form. So it waited for anything that might venture near.

Full well Chiro knew the nature of this viper. The little mongoose also seemed to sense the peril that lurked here, for it came up hissing with hair all a-bristle. In some manner that wild creatures employ with their young, Chiro signaled for the young one to take to cover. As the little one ran for the shelter of the bushes, Chiro circled this thing of venom warily, one eye on the viper, one eye and both ears for the bat-eared assassin following. Around and around he went, and ever that flat head, those cold reptilian eyes, followed his movements. Never did Chiro move in close enough to draw its strike, always circling far enough to keep the viper coiled and at attention. And now the bat-eared murderer that followed Chiro came close; his heavy footsteps clumped upon the stones as he rushed near in his dragging, slouching manner. Ah-ha! The little

mongoose had again found food. He must hurry up and rob him of it.

Had he brains for anything else than his loathsome deeds, the bat-eared plunderer would have seen the wary movements of the mongoose and exercised care himself. But greed made him imprudent. He hurried up to see what Chiro was about to feed on. And Chiro jumped nimbly to one side as the hulking brute came on with open mouth, ready to gulp up whatever the mongoose had caught. His staring eyes were almost upon the viper before his nose told him of his great peril. His forefeet slid on the rocky ground to stop his impetuous rush.

But it was too late! The ugly horn-studded head whipped forward and caught him full in his open mouth—upon the very tongue.

"Ahragh! Whoo-ough-uh, woo-ugh, wooo-ooo!" The great brute sprang into the air; he rolled upon the ground; he kicked his feet jerkily and bit the grass, the earth, the stones about him; then—he quivered and lay still.

CHIRO sat up straight, as a reed stands in a marsh. He did not hiss, growl, nor even curse as he looked upon this drama. Dropping to his short legs, he whistled shrilly to the young one, and the two set out cautiously upon the trail for home.

The bat-eared brute that lay there so still upon the stony earth was huge in comparison to the mongoose, had towered over Chiro even as the elephant towers over a pygmy; but the little pygmy with his poisoned arrows can bring down the giant elephant.

Chiro mumbled to himself as he turned to look about, before following the young one into the burrow. No doubt he was telling himself that he had at last evened the score a bit with the ghoulish bat-eared hyena clan!

The Wilderness

Are you one of our many readers who have had adventures that deserve record in print? (For details of this contest, see page 3.)

THE greatest adventure epic since the march of the Covered Wagon is being written in a thousand declining counties throughout the land as the wilderness returns, and the bear and the wolf reappear.

In the summer of 1922 my two pals and I made our first trip into the hilly counties of Northern New York. We were surprised to find that villages, and farms as well, were few and far between. Once off the highway and its roadside stands and summer hotels, the countryside appeared half-deserted.

Glens Falls was the last stop of any importance. Thence on we enjoyed almost perfect quiet amid a peaceful countryside broken only here and there by timber towns of almost frontier appearance. Several hours later we left the highway and rode up a dirt road for several miles to our destination—a once-thriving pioneer hamlet reduced to a single farmhouse. All other buildings were now completely covered by the green wall of forest which had advanced to within two hundred feet of this last outpost.

A lanky gentleman of backwoods appearance came forth to greet us. He announced himself as the postmaster. The duties of the office, he continued, were growing less onerous each year. The lumbermen had long passed on to new forests farther west. The growing sons and daughters of the old farm families had hiked down the road to the paper mills and the textile centers. The stores and homes had one after another been abandoned; each summer saw another part of the neighborhood fill with tangled brush and sprouting pine and hardwood.

As we city fellows stood spellbound before his graphic tale of the rise and fall of the village, the old mountaineer swept his arm around him. He extolled the hunting prospects, the return of wild animals innumerable, from bear and deer to wildcats and wild birds—and his estimable services as a guide to these recovered wonders.

We are quite willing to let him prove his tale. For the small sum of one dollar, with a few cigars thrown in, he led us to a camping spot which I dare say can hardly be improved on for those who desire to leave civilization entirely—and we passed a splendid vacation undisturbed. Not one mortal man, not one civilized sound, in this frontier scene only a few hours' ride from humming cities and daily newspapers!

During the intervening twelve years, in eight of which we camped in Northern New York, we realized that a portentous change was going on as people gravitated more and more within reach of the great metropolitan centers and their far-flung surrounding suburbs.

This January, 1934, I was reading my evening newspaper in New York when I noted with excitement that wolves had been seen again in the neighborhood of our camping place—the first wolves to appear in New York State in sixty years! I dispatched a letter to my friend the postmaster, with the result that—work being dull—I was soon on the way north in my old car.

The weather was bitterly cold as I slid off the cleared road up against a snowbank on the postmaster's lawn. The next morning we were off to a point where the wolves had last been seen. A posse—the third in a week—had been hastily organized, and by grace of the postmaster, I was to be in it.

The wolves had aroused great commotion throughout these sparsely settled counties. They had attacked farm-hands, destroyed cows and other livestock, and terrorized the country so that parents were keeping school-children inside and themselves going about armed. Rangers

Comes Back

The story of a wolf-hunt in what was once a thickly settled region in the East.

By JOHN A. PIQUET

who trailed the animals identified them as genuine gray timber wolves of the most savage variety. Some thought that the cold winter had driven them down from Canada in search of food. However, as there have been colder winters in the sixty years, and plenty of hunters, the people soon admitted that the presence of the beasts was due in large part to the now largely deserted character of so many sections of the northern counties of the State. Emboldened by the growing absence of man and his works, the pack, estimated to number perhaps fifty animals, had returned at last to their ancient haunts!

The posse was divided up into groups of about seven men each. Our orders were to follow an old trail into the hills, and this we did faithfully through waist-high snow and at a ridiculously slow pace. By two o'clock in the afternoon, tired and discouraged in the gloom of the tall pines all around us, we decided to retrace our steps. We did not want to become lost in these woods at night—at a temperature of thirty degrees below zero.

Suddenly a faint whistling sounded distantly from the east. It was the signal! Somebody had seen the wolves! We knew how impossible it was for us to get quickly to the general location of the whistling in all that white silence of wilderness. So we merely tramped on as rapidly as we could toward the main road to get the news.

We had hardly come out upon it when the very marrow in my bones seemed to shrivel up. There ahead in the valley below, a quarter-mile away at least, stood a large gray animal! It resembled a heavy police dog, only bigger and longer. In a moment the old postmaster had raised and carefully sighted his "bear" rifle—and fired. In the clear air we saw the bullet flick the snow off the bank just to the right of the wolf's position on the lonely highway. And then—

The great animal whirled around and made straight up the road—in our direction! And from the bend in the road behind the wolf came a dozen more—they seemed a hundred as they sped up the highway toward us. I grasped the postmaster's arm in an agony of fright. He dragged me up the snowbank behind some pines as the others nimbly followed suit.

"Don't worry!" he yelled. "The wind's blowing this way. The wolves are not after us. *Somebody's chasing them this way!*"

I fumbled with my rifle, and got it ready, to do or die. It was only a few seconds before we heard the quick patter-patter of the wolves along the road. My six companions rose as one man and fired a broadside into what to my dazed senses seemed more like a greyhound race than a pack of heavy timber wolves on the run. The six men click-clicked their repeaters as one, and fired another volley up the road after the scudding beasts.

"Well, I'll be hanged!" cried the old postmaster with a scowl. "What a fine bunch of shots we are!"

"Guess they smelled us dead ahead," remarked another, "and just took an extra bound or two right past our fire!"

From the tenseness in their voices I suspected that these men, experienced only in hunting deer or cornering a single bear with a pack of dogs, were almost as unnerved as I was to see a dozen wolves all at once. I guess they just blazed away in excitement—while as for me, I discreetly said nothing about my still fully loaded rifle.

SITTING in an old hotel bar that night, we had a grand powwow with the rangers and the rest of the hunters. We learned the pack had split in all directions, some for the tall timber ap-

parently, and the rest had barely been glimpsed here and there along the roads. Not a wolf was shot. That was actually done later by hired big-game hunters.

I learned also from a ranger that a similar hunt was going on in Pennsylvania, less than an hour's ride from Pittsburgh. A pack of savage animals was ravaging the farms, destroying sheep and livestock and decimating the small game. It was not until two months later that I was able to get a full report of the proceedings. Trained hunters finally caught up with the marauders, and found that the wild dogs they were chasing were in reality coyotes. They were so identified by experts sent to Coraopolis by the Carnegie Institute. At a sportsmen's dinner in Pittsburgh stuffed skins of the coyotes were shown to old hunters from Wyoming. They also could not tell the difference. No pack of wild dogs, it was said, could have cleaned out the small game as rapidly as these coyotes did once they began their rampage. And the explanation of this invasion is that certain sections of the once completely settled State of Pennsylvania have in the last forty years reverted rapidly toward the original state of Appalachian wilderness.

This spring I was curious enough to drive to the "coyote" spot and found there the same condition of abandoned farms and declining hamlets I had come across in Northern New York. Thence I drove into that great stretch of hills that cover some hundred and seventy miles in the center of the State. Once it was the great oil and lumbering region of the nation, and here also came the first full rush of the covered wagons, breaking up into thousands of farms throughout the valleys. Yet for stretches as long as seventy miles between I saw only eight or ten houses. The region is in fact now one of the wildest in the East, and with the best hunting north of the Potomac. The forest that was slaughtered by 1905 has already completely re-covered the mountains and crept down into the deserted valleys.

The game has returned with it. The scream of the wildcat is heard again in the lonely groves. The wild turkey, introduced a few years ago from the South, has bred with amazing rapidity, and now that rare bird struts again in his old-time haunts. Beaver have become so numerous that the game-laws have been lifted to prevent wholesale destruction of young trees. The wilderness comes back!

The Pirate Junk

Captured by pirates—and held for ransom.

By CAPTAIN WALTER GRAHAM

I WAS on the bridge of a small Norwegian salt ship, the *Star*, on a run from Hongkong to Wuchow when I encountered an adventure which I have no wish to repeat.

My English chief officer, Mr. Kingman, and I were the only white men on the craft; the crew was composed of twenty-nine Chinese. We kept very much to our quarters up forward and as is the custom on the China Coast, large wire gratings blocked us off from the rest of the ship. The engineer was a wrinkled old native, Lim Sung, on the *Star* since his youth and in whom its owners had implicit trust. The other Chinese were the usual nondescript sailors found along the coast.

On the 18th of May, 1931, we were a day out of Hongkong, bound up-river, when we saw a suspicious-looking junk, close-hauled to the wind, slide by us with no one showing on her decks but a young lad at the tiller.

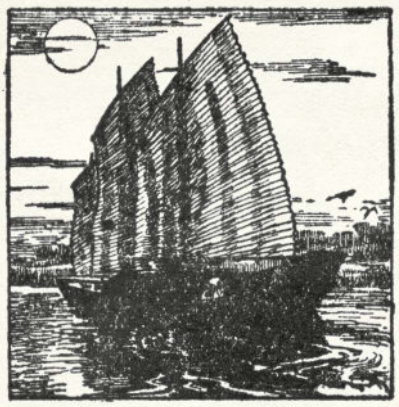
"That little boy, sir, couldn't have hoisted all that sail," Kingman had said, pointing to the junk. "Wonder why nobody's on deck? And the hatches are all closed, sir."

"Well, no matter, Kingman," I answered, yawning. "I'm catching forty winks. If anything turns up, call me."

I went through the wheelhouse to my quarters where, hanging on the wall as in all foreign officers' quarters on the Coast, was a rifle, pistol and an old-fashioned boarding-cutlass. One never knows what may happen in China.

Night fell and the bo'sun trimmed our lights. The river is well marked by the Chinese Customs and we set our course by the lights along the banks.

We had no regular watches, Kingman and I usually holding the bridge by mutual consent. I was in the habit of staying on until two A.M., when he took over.



"Quiet as a millpond," I said when he came out to relieve me. "Haven't seen a thing." I showed him our position, wished him good night and turned in.

It seemed to me I had just finished my nightcap and hit my bunk when something brought me abruptly out of sleep. I could hear pattering feet on the deck below; some one was slamming down the wire gratings. Then I heard Kingman's voice: "Captain Graham! Captain Graham!"

I was out of bed with a bound and through the door into the wheelhouse. The old Chinese quartermaster at the wheel was shaking so he couldn't stand still. As I ran past him to the bridge I heard him mumbling some strange prayer in Chinese. Out on the bridge I saw Kingman buckling on his pistol-belt. Before I could speak he pointed to the bow.

There was a junk dead ahead. She evidently had come up from behind us, then luffed about and was waiting.

I could see that her decks were crowded with yelling men, brandishing knives and pikes. Some had short clubs and one or two had pistols. With each turn of our screw the towering masts and yards of the junk seemed to loom more menacingly over the deeply laden *Star*.

"Shall I ram her?" Kingman shouted.

"Ram her, hell!" I answered. "I'll show these yellow devils!"

I had been so concerned with the threat ahead that I had failed to look behind. Now as I turned to go for my pistol, I chanced to look down the ladder to our own decks. What I saw froze the blood in my veins. No wonder Kingman had slammed down the gratings!

There was our crew,—all of them, it seemed to me,—pounding on the wire and screaming to get at us. The leader was a towering Cantonese whom I recalled as being a new man shipped for that voyage. The whole story now was clear—they were in collusion with the crowd on the junk! It was Kingman and I, against overwhelming odds. . . .

I buckled on my pistol-belt, grabbed my cutlass and had taken up a skyrocket in the hope that I could attract aid with it, when I heard the first shot of the raid. It was from the junk and the bullet crashed through the bridge window and buried itself somewhere in the ceiling.

I yelled to Kingman, and ran out onto the bridge, my pajamas flapping behind me in the chill night air.

The junk now was close at hand, on the starboard side. As we came abreast of her I was in the act of lighting a match and putting it to the rocket when her yards were squared around and I saw that the front of the yards—the side we hadn't seen as we came up behind her—was black with men! I dropped the match, fired my pistol full into the mass, and had the satisfaction of seeing one devil drop writhing to the deck. Then Kingman let go; the next instant we collided, and men began dropping upon us—fairly raining, from the blackness.

Evidently the attack had been rehearsed, for everything happened simultaneously. While one crowd engaged us, another opened the gratings and our own crew came swarming up. Then the beat of the propeller died out and I knew that they had overcome Lim Sung and his aides. In the mêlée I chanced to glance aside in time to see our quartermaster go down with some brigand clubbing him.

I fired my pistol four times into the mob and I saw Kingman firing likewise. Then I started laying about me with the cutlass—but it was useless. Suddenly the world seemed to go black around me, something hot ran out of my hair down my neck, and the entire scene faded.

WHEN I came to, my arms had been securely tied behind my back; I had been thrown in a corner of the wheelhouse and a short distance away I saw Kingman, similarly trussed up. There was a nasty spot on his head and his nose had been bleeding. Three ruffians were standing guard over us.

I listened a moment and again heard the pattering of feet on the deck below. There was much guttural shouting; I could hear the banging of hatches and knew our cargo was being pilfered. Suddenly through the door behind me came the Cantonese who had led our crowd.

He was proudly wearing my heavy ulster. Another I saw had on my smoking-jacket. All were puffing on my cigars. One was laden with the blankets from off my bunk. They passed me without a word and from their movements on the bridge outside I knew everything was being transferred to the junk.

When they had finished, Kingman and I were dragged to our feet and shoved roughly out on deck. We were passed over the side, none too gently, and down to the deck of the junk. A moment later the lines were cast off, we drifted slowly downstream and the *Star* melted into the gloom of the night.

Eventually poor Kingman recovered consciousness. He asked for water, and received instead a knock on the head that sent him sprawling. That gave me a clue as to what treatment I could expect.

We were in a vile-smelling, dimly lighted hold. I could hear the lapping of water on the other side of the hull from where I was leaning, and soon came the grunts of the crew and the creaking of rigging as the sails were hoisted. We squared away. I was trying to estimate the number of our attackers, when a dull throbbing came into my head and again I lost consciousness.

SOME one was kicking me. I opened my eyes and for a moment was blinded by the glaring sunlight that shone full in my face. I managed to look up. The hatch had been removed and I saw Kingman on the deck. I turned; the person kicking me was a dried-up little native who continued trying to stir me as he shouted guttural orders to a crowd of his men. With great difficulty I got to my feet. The ropes were taken off my wrists and I was shown by motions that I was to climb out on deck with my chief officer.

When I got there I saw that we were anchored off the Canton River, in one of the many small tributaries. It was early morning. The sun was already high and as I looked around I saw a heavy black smudge off on my left, low down against the horizon.

"That must be Canton," I said to Kingman. Instantly, before he could turn to look, a Chinese rushed up and struck me across the face. A score or more men were standing around the deck and they started to do likewise, but the wizened leader shouted them back. Others were removing the *Star's* cargo into smaller junks tied alongside. Several women and children stood near by. It was evident that we had been taken to the pirates' stronghold. Several hours later we were brought ashore and confined in a filthy grass hut hidden in some reeds. A bit farther on I could see the huts of the main village. All this time I had been without clothes and my chest felt raw; breathing was difficult. Kingman was no better off. The Chinese had denuded him of every stitch save his shorts, and he was keeping me company in a hoarse cough. Neither of us had been given a bite to eat.

When our guards appeared, grinning, with dirty rice bowls full of some kind of soup, I indicated that we too were hungry. But the guards only grinned more broadly and began to eat without a further thought of us.

We were kept in the hut that afternoon and into the early evening. When it was dark outside the dried-up little leader returned and indicated that we were to move. As I got up, I ached in every joint. Kingman was spitting blood every time he coughed. We were in a bad plight.

I attempted a conversation with the leader in the little Cantonese I knew, but from his dialect I gathered that he was a Hakka and we could arrive at no common ground. All he would do was grin.

Kingman fared no better. "For God's sake, give me some clothes!" he moaned, shrugging his shoulders and coughing—but to no avail. They merely grinned.

"Let me send chit to my friends in Hongkong—they give you money," I tried. But my efforts were equally futile. More grins and much shaking of heads.

Nevertheless I knew I was on the right trail. They were not kidnaping us for pleasure. It was possible we were being held by agents of the big kidnaping trust which had terrorized all South China; if this were the case, representations were already being made to our employers. The price would be high and if the deal followed precedent, weeks would pass in bargaining.

WE were taken from the hut—it was bitterly cold—and placed in a line of well-bundled-up figures. Ropes were attached to our bonds, front and back, and we were hauled around as though we were cattle.

"If they'll only run!" I said to Kingman—when again I was struck by a fist.

They started leading us away, shivering and stumbling, into the gloom, I

ahead and Kingman following. At first we went over a marshy ground that cut our bare feet on the sharp reeds; then gradually we struck a slight rise and came to a rocky terrain that soon had us both crying out with pain. I could feel the blood, hot and sticky, oozing between my toes.

I DON'T like to dwell on that first night—or, for that matter, on any of them. We were hidden by day in grass huts; one day we spent sleeping in a wheat-field; we were moved at night.

The second day I managed to tell Kingman that I suspected relief was on our trail and this opinion seemed borne out by the way our captors kept us constantly on the move.

My feet seemed in tatters. I was half dead with pneumonia. They were feeding us with occasional bowls of a sort of fish stew, greasy and far from clean. But we ate it; if we hadn't, we would have starved.

On the third night, our guards were thrown into a worried conference after a messenger had arrived from somewhere with a chit for the leader. I knew then that we were being followed—whether by native soldiers or police I could not tell, but I was certain that our constant moves were to confuse our trail.

On this third night when, after the conference, Kingman and I were separated and I saw him led stumbling and half dead off on a side trail, I was too weary and worn to shout encouragement to him. Within my sight, he toppled to the ground, exhausted. One of his guards prodded him to his feet with a heavy, pointed stick. I turned away. . . .

On the fifth or sixth day I saw again the heavy smudge which I believed to be Canton. But now it was on my right. We must have been circling behind it all the while. Also, and most important, my guards had dwindled in number; now there were only four. Where the others had gone I had no idea.

Here, I thought, was my chance. I took good care to note our twistings and turnings and keep that black smudge in mind. Harassed and desperate, weak though I was, I was resolved to make a dash for liberty at the first opportunity.

The chance came on the seventh night. My willingness to accede to their constant moving proved their undoing. I was being led by a single rope around my middle which ran to the man behind me. I discovered that he merely took two or three turns around his belt with it. That discovery, I think, was the greatest thrill of my life.

We were passing through an expanse of marsh when we topped a small rise and there came the most cheering sight it has ever been my privilege to see: Glimmering and sparkling before me in the moonlight was a broad expanse of water! It could be none other than the river. Far upon my right was a dull red reflection in the sky—a big city—Canton!

My guards stopped suddenly on sighting the fires of a small village dead ahead. They decided to avoid it, as they had avoided every village. They went off to the right and I took heart. Reeds shoulder-high were on each side of us, and ahead—I could tell almost the number of feet distant—was the river.

As we lost the fires of the village, I summoned all my strength and gave a tug to the rope around my waist. It fell away from the guard's belt and I plunged into the reeds. Before my dull-witted captors could recover from the surprise I was crouching down, fifty yards away in the reeds, and praying as I had never prayed before.

Suddenly I heard their guttural voices off on my left. I moved away. They were afraid to light torches for fear of discovery at the hands of the villagers. I kept moving; finally my feet were splashing in the backwash of the river. I started toward the lights of the city.

THEN without warning came another surprise. I tripped over something, fell flat on my face. Simultaneously I heard a voice almost in my ear. My heart fairly stood still!

It was a boatman. I had fallen over the mooring-line of his sampan. He came out and found me. He turned out to be, of all people, a retired member of the Customs, and spoke pidgin English.

I stayed with him and his family in the tiny village that night, warmed with hot food and buried under voluminous sheepskins. The next morning he took me to Canton. I was put aboard a gunboat of the Chinese navy and rushed to Hongkong. The *Star* had preceded me, little the worse for her adventure. Some three weeks later Kingman turned up. His captors having been disappointed in their request for a ransom, he was allowed to wander to Canton by himself.

Thus ended the greatest adventure of my life.

A Reporter

Some high lights of a newspaper man's career—by the man who last month gave us "Pictures of Disaster."

I HAD had one other experience with Fred while I was still a copy boy. And I'll never forget it. It happened midway of a Saturday afternoon in March, 1911. The office was almost deserted when the first flash came. It was nearly five o'clock before Fred and I reached the north side of Washington Square.

Across from us a vast mushroom of smoke hung low above the trees, and as we ran through the crisscross paths, we could see and hear a great hissing tongue of flame leaping up through the center of that enveloping black hood.

Fred was in front of me running strongly, when suddenly he staggered and stopped, then collapsed on a bench with his hands over his face.

"You go on, kid," he said. "I can't."

I went on and through the fire lines. High above me—I think on the thirteenth floor—the figures of young girls were clustered on the window ledges. Flame licked out at them. One by one their light clothing caught and blazed. Then one by one they fell, shrieking and afire. One hundred and forty-eight girls died in that fire. I saw at least sixty bodies laid in a long row beside the curbing, clothes burned away. The heavy glass and concrete sidewalk was broken by the impact of their fall.

Fred was gone when I came back through the park. I turned in my captions and a general memorandum at the office and went home, but I couldn't eat or sleep. I walked up and down Riverside Drive until dawn.

Weeks later I learned why Fred had collapsed. His first big story as a young reporter had been the *General Slocum* disaster when twelve hundred excursionists perished when the ship burned to the waterline in the East River in 1904. He had reached the shore while the hulk still smoldered and he had put out in a rowboat and brought in twenty-eight bodies. He never had been able to cover another fire.

In 1914 I went to New Orleans. For the next three years I shuttled up and down the Mississippi Valley from the Gulf to the Great Lakes. And then the war came along. I fought that epic struggle all over the red clay hills of Georgia and came out of it with a shiny new second lieutenant's uniform—and no money and no job. So I became a newspaper reporter in Kentucky.

There I covered my first murder, my first kidnaping and saw a "race riot" in which eight people were killed—and none of them were negroes.

The kidnaping was one of the most bizarre stories I've ever encountered. A wealthy land operator—we'll call him Smith—had moved into Lexington when the war boom sent tobacco prices skyrocketing. He was a spectacular figure.

Imagine the vast excitement when his eleven-year-old son vanished from the steps of the post office building in the heart of the city at high noon.

Newspaper men swarmed into town. The father announced that a detective agency would represent him in all contacts with both press and public. He also admitted that a ransom note had been received demanding twenty-five thousand dollars. And that was all.

For three days we tried to pry the lid from the story. Rumors flew as they always do, and hints of the sinister character of the ransom note predominated.

Now, I had read my full quota of detective stories, and this was my first mystery. I took it very much to heart—so much so that I bought a derby and a bulldog pipe. With the iron hat on my head, the briar between my teeth and a voluminous trench coat swathing my one hundred and thirty-five pounds, I slogged through the spring mud in a ceaseless sentry-go around the victim's house.

And I stumbled on the note.

There were several children in the family, one of them a young girl of about sixteen. So strictly were they guarded that none of us had had a word alone with any of them. But on the third night

Remembers—

By ODGERS GURNEE

of the story, as I was watching the house from a stable-corner, the kitchen door opened and the daughter came out. She saw my hat, my pipe and my army shoes.

"Are you a detective?" she said.

I almost swallowed my pipe. "Yes," I assured her, and invited myself on the steps. It developed that she was simply wild about detectives, so you can fill in the blanks. It didn't take much urging for her to slip upstairs to her father's desk and bring me the ransom note.

It was four pages long, printed in pencil, and the most vituperative missive imaginable. The important paragraph was at the end. It told the boy's father to leave the twenty-five thousand dollars in a package in the municipal waste-can in front of a certain store on Main Street at 7:30 o'clock that night!

That *was* news. The store was directly across from the County Court House; the spot picked by the kidnaper was the busiest street in the city. And as I finished reading, the time was ten after seven.

I left with shameful haste, circled the block and came back to the front door. The guards barred my way, but after a brief parley they agreed to let me talk to Smith.

I offered to make a deal with him. First I told him I knew when he was to plant the money and where it was to be put. If he would take me along, I would keep the secret. He agreed.

Ten minutes later Smith left alone in an old roadster with a package of clipped newspapers covered with small bills tied in a writing-paper box.

Following him in a sedan, I rode with his brother and an armed guard. Half a dozen plain-clothes operatives were hidden in a store flanking the designated entrance, and several more were stationed in the darkened lobby of the bank building across the way.

We cruised slowly along Main Street. Smith parked his roadster and walked back, aimlessly "window-shopping." At the waste-disposal can, he stopped, stretched, then reached down casually and laid the package on top of the litter.

We waited—ten, fifteen, twenty minutes. No one came near the trash-can. Then a little negro boy riding a bicycle turned from a side-street into Main and approached, lazily peddling. Just in front of the can his wheel wabbled, and he fell off. He stood up, leaned against the can and looked in. Then he leaped onto his wheel and raced away.

"Get that kid!" The guard's voice snapped us into action, and we tore after the vanished cyclist. But in vain.

Fortune, however, had favored me again. I had recognized the boy and his bicycle because he delivered my laundry. I excused myself and got a cab. In his mother's shack, out near the race-track, I found the boy, trembling with fright.

A tall man with a yellow raincoat and horn-rimmed spectacles, he told me, had stopped him in front of the afternoon paper's office (my rival paper). The man had offered him twenty-five cents to get a tied-up parcel which he would find in the trash-can. But some instinctive fear had seized him at the moment of reaching for the package, and he had run away.

I hurried back to Smith's house.

"The kidnaper," I told them, "is a tall young man wearing a yellow raincoat which probably is reversible. He also wears horn-rimmed spectacles, which probably have window-glass for lenses."

I felt very proud of myself when I reached the office. I laughed indulgently as I looked across the street and saw the star reporters from out of town filing their stories in the telegraph-office.

Little did they know that they were being scooped cold by the local boy who had made good!

I wrote at least three thousand words. I told about the note, the small fortune that had nestled for half an hour while hundreds passed. I told of the frightened emissary and described the kidnaper. The managing editor gave me a by-line in 12

point bold face. I could scarcely wedge my head into my derby hat when I finally signed "30" and went off for a long sleep.

I awakened about ten the next day. The sound of raucous shouting filtered into my third floor front. It increased in volume. I heard one word, "kidnaper," and I leaped for the window. Newsboys were screaming an extra—and they were selling the afternoon rival paper. The boy had been found.

For three days, while the whole city hunted him, he had been held prisoner in the bath of a room in the town's biggest hotel. The kidnaper had disappeared.

My story had been an hour's sensation. Now it was dead as a salt mackerel. I laid my pipe in the bureau drawer and my derby on the shelf. . . .

After further years of newspaper work in Kentucky, Chicago and elsewhere, I realized the dream that seems to beset every news-man: I bought my own paper.

Perhaps that requires qualifications. The paper in question had folded up because the owner had made a bad guess on a municipal election. It was the only paper in an industrial city of forty thousand souls—a city with seven banks.

So I talked the bankers into forming a trusteeship under which they wrote the overhead, and I guaranteed to pay eight hundred dollars a month to them.

My plant had a replacement value of approximately forty-five thousand dollars. It included a good rotary press, two comparatively recent models of linotype machines, a big flatbed job press, stereotyping equipment and a lot of advertising and headletter type.

It looked like a perfect set-up. With forty thousand citizens, thriving stores and steel booming, I couldn't lose. . . .

But it developed that only seven thousand of the forty thousand citizens could read English. Fully seventy-five per cent of all advertising done by the local merchants was in native-language handbills —Polish, Spanish, Czech, and so on.

For the next year I'm sure I averaged sixteen hours a day on the job. I was managing editor and publisher, advertising manager and business manager. Sometimes I doubled as printer's devil. And then I woke up. I discovered that if I kept on working sixteen hours a day for twenty years, I would be sole owner of the paper—and by that time it would be necessary to buy a new outfit and stick at it for twenty years more—and so on *ad infinitum*.

I gave the paper back to the bankers.

The Time Card

It saved a foundryman from being baked alive.

By NOEL WICAL

IT took place in July, 1933, at the Ohio foundry where I worked in the coreroom, making cores and baking them in gas ovens at around 500 degrees F.

You see, our step in casting a motor head, a sewer pipe, or whatever it was, amounted to this: we really made the hollow part of that casting. Molders, in the next step, poured iron round the cores which we had made from fine lake sand, oil-treated to harden when baked in our huge ovens for two hours—or four. Some cores were baked nearly all night; Henry Smithson—our deaf old night watchman—would shut off the gas and open these ovens around three A. M.

On this particular day I was at the time clock, fourteen or fifteen minutes before the four-o'clock whistle. My day's work finished, I was fishing my time-card from the stack so I could breeze out on the hour—as it was our practice there in the coreroom to nick off a few extra minutes now and then.

Boss Charley Davis came up to me.

"Keepin' Eastern or Central time?" he asked.

I grinned apologetically.

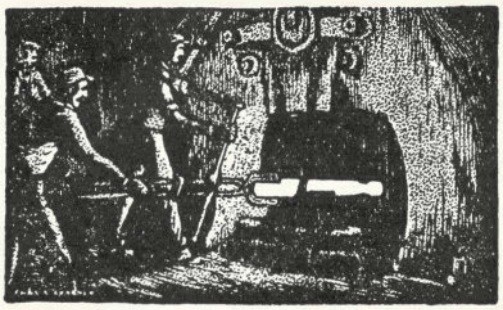
"Have to tighten up," he explained good-naturedly. "The office called me on it. So putter around at something for the next few minutes. Or get your blamed hide out of sight."

"K. O., Charley."

I understood how it was. Should one of the heavier cannon come along, it would have been bad for both of us.

I pocketed my time-card and looked for some little job to coast out on. Going across the room, I didn't stumble onto anything of the sort. So I entered the overnight oven and went down the length of it. I could loaf in there without harm to anyone; and no one at the door could see what was at the rear, it was so dark.

I walked the twenty feet to the rear wall. On both sides of the aisle the gas-pipe shelving was crowded with "green" cores, ready for the night baking which



started at quitting-time. I found a three-foot stack of iron core-plates, used to hold cores when baking, and sat down on them just as I had on those cold mornings when we came in here early to warm ourselves by the oven's left-over heat.

I took out my time-card and tried to make a note or two on it—without success; it was too dark. I was somewhat tired; and before I realized it my eyelids were closing and I began to dream. I saw myself in the president's office. The president—as I recall it—was offering me a ten-dollar raise. As he pleaded and demanded, his office grew warmer and warmer.

I awoke with a start. The oven was black. I was sweating freely. I jumped to my feet. The sweat covering me chilled for an instant. The door was closed, barred. The gas was blazing!

I ran to the door and pushed. It held. I pounded, called out:

"Joe! Joe! Charley!"

I stooped over, putting my mouth to the small slit between the heavy door and floor. Some one now would hear me!

"Happy! Hey! Charley!"

I waited breathlessly, unwilling to admit the horrible truth. But no one came. There was no sound. Of course they had gone. Some one—Joe, probably—had lighted the pilot at the entrance, barred the door, and turned on the gas. They were all gone. And there, under the iron grating floor I stood on, were blazing the four room-length burners. A thousand little blue tongues—licking greedily.

Panic shook me. The temperature would go to 200—then 300—400—up. No, I wouldn't suffocate. The small fan at the top blew in oxygen for the blaze. But I'd bake—then roast—then burn.

No one to get me out. No one in the entire building, except Henry Smithson, the night watchman. But Henry was deaf!

Henry would open the doors about 3 A. M. Then he wouldn't know my fate unless my charred left-overs were leaning against the door and fell forward. Or unless he smelled scorched meat!

I madly beat the door. I kicked it. I screamed like a soul in hell. My feet were getting hot. They'd soon fry, for the grating was beginning to turn pink in places. I ran up and down the grating, trying to relieve the torture.

I snatched two plates off the stack where I had sat. I swung them against the five-inch metal door. The door failed even to dent. I dropped the two plates by the door, then got an idea and ran for more. I made a little platform of them about two feet high, and stood on it. At least my feet wouldn't brown before the rest of me. . . .

Though there was oxygen about me, I soon became groggy; and the plates under me were beginning to warm.

The iron grating was now deep red. I cried out insanely: "Henry! Henry Smithson!"

A thought came. Could I wiggle the door, just the least bit, so Henry making his rounds might possibly take notice? I pushed and grunted. Five inches of metal—barred tight—wouldn't move a hair's-breadth.

In desperation I leaned over the two feet to the floor and tried to force my handkerchief through the slit under the door. Perhaps Henry could see that. But it wouldn't pass under.

I went into my hip pocket and jerked out my time-card. It went easily through the crack.

Clenching it, I slid it forward, then backward—forward—backward—faster, faster. . . .

The heat had closed in, like a tight rope about my neck. . . . I fell into a black hole.

SEVERAL years later I opened my eyes. I was cool and comfortable, and lying on a core-room work-bench. Some one was doing something to my feet. Another some one was holding a strong-smelling bottle under my nose. I lifted my head slightly. A local doctor was bandaging my feet. It was Henry Smithson who held those smelling-salts.

Making his rounds, Henry had come through the coreroom to check over things. By the merest chance he saw the moving card. When he threw open the door, I pitched forward, out like a light. He put me on the floor and ran out for help. I had been in there forty-five minutes—my last forty-five minutes in that or any other foundry!

UNKNOWN SOLDIER

(Continued from page 5)

desert in the distance. The battle proceeded in orderly, drill-book fashion, the Spanish foot soldiers fighting their way yard by yard toward the Riff position.

Suddenly across the desert swirled a low cloud of dust.

"Riff horsemen!" shouted Ashmead Bartlett, sighting them through his field glasses.

"Trying to roll up our flank, the beggars," grunted Lewis.

I said nothing, my eyes glued to my glasses. The Riffs galloped wildly along the rear of the Legion line. Their long burnous capes fluttered in the wind, their long rifles cracked; we saw the kneeling Légionnaires hastily group themselves to meet this unexpected attack.

Now the Riff horsemen slung their rifles, drew their scimitars. The steel blades flashed in the sun. We could hear their battle-cry—"Allah ab Allah!" The turbaned horsemen leaned far out of their saddles. Their flashing blades hacked right and left, meeting bayoneted rifles, cutting into flesh. On, on the Arab stallions thundered. They trampled the thin line of Légionnaires into the sand.

Our general hurried the Spanish cavalry forward to engage the Riffs. The supports charged across the sand. Instantly the desert was a seething mass, Spaniards and Riffs, fighting desperately hand to hand.

Suddenly out of the mêlée one soldier emerged. He carried another one limply athwart his back. We saw him staggering across the sand.

"He'd get the Victoria Cross with us for that." It was Gippy Lewis speaking.

"If he gets through," commented Ashmead Bartlett.

Stirred by the sensation of having seen all this before, I watched the burdened soldier struggle on, the bullets spurting viciously into the sand about him. The Riff horsemen swept onward, leaving the desert spotted with dead and wounded Spaniards. The Riff foot soldiers now charged like a cloud, firing from their hips as they came. But the burdened soldier trudged doggedly ahead of them.

"He's down!" shouted Lewis, his voice a high falsetto.

"No, he's up again."

The soldier had fallen, recovered himself, struggled up and staggered onward. We forgot the battle, in watching this little drama, praying fervently that he might come safely to our lines.

Spanish supports now met the charge. The Riffs wavered and slowly retreated back to their first position.

In the confusion of the fighting troops I lost sight of the single soldier and his burden, but I had marked the spot where last I saw him. I hurried toward it, my heart beating furiously. Some premonition told me what I should find.

Yes, there surrounded by a platoon of protecting Spanish soldiers, I saw Captain Cortez, his hip shattered by a sabercut. He was looking down on another soldier dazedly. It was the youth I had noted that morning on the march—Private X, death already glazing his unfathomable eyes.

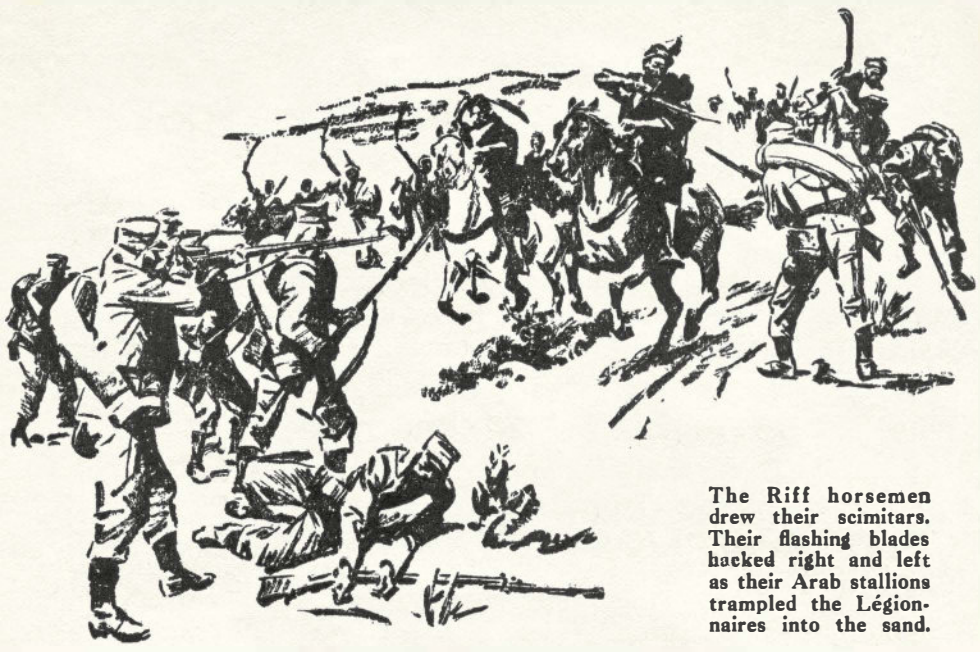
IN the World War I abandoned newspaper work for the colors once more. In France I served as a major of field artillery. Early that September morning in 1918, the second day of the Meuse-Argonne fighting, I was ordered to move my guns beyond Montfauçon, to support the infantry advance.

The rumble of the battle, like a spasmodic storm, filled the background. Shells in a steady slow stream sailed overhead. They burst, exploding stinking fumes over the earth. A French battery, flanking the road to Montfauçon, returned this fire with precise regularity, as did a thousand other French batteries spread along that unfolding battle-line.

Battle-planes flew overhead, met other battle-planes, soared, dived, darted like fighting hawks, then one or both glided through the sky, spitting fire and trailing smoke, the plane rolling, swerving, tumbling, a riven thing, to earth.

My guns limbered, I trotted my batteries forward along the road toward the new position. We were halted at the rim of a stream spanned by a newly built bridge. Across this bridge marched the infantry, iron-helmeted, olive-drab soldiers marching to the front trenches.

What were the thoughts of these men, moving to meet Death? Already they knew the fate that must surely come to many of their numbers; wounded trailed back along the path, the stench of rotting bodies fouled the air. Yet as I looked in those young faces I saw no



The Riff horsemen drew their scimitars. Their flashing blades hacked right and left as their Arab stallions trampled the Légionnaires into the sand.

trace of fear. Excitement, yes, nervousness, muttering talk, that strange intangible light in their eyes. It was as if they marched across that bridge from life into eternity.

I started. It was as if I saw a ghost. There, crossing the bridge I recognized Private X. The same face, figure, indescribable swaggering carriage. The eyes looking into mine from under the rim of his steel helmet I could never forget, could not mistake. Glinting, somber, steely, soft, unfathomable. As I stared fixedly into them I imagined they smiled into mine, a faint smile of recognition.

"But he's dead!" I whispered.

The moving line passed on.

"Bridge ready for the guns, sir." It was my adjutant reporting.

I signaled the march. Behind me the battery commanders growled—"Forward!" In a moment horses, guns, limbers, clattered across the bridge.

Haunting pictures out of the past raced through my mind as I trotted my guns forward to the new position. Obviously the man I had just seen was not Private X. Twenty years since '98. More than ten since the Riff war, and here was the same soldier, the same age, different only in uniform. Impossible—yet the resemblance was uncanny.

Besides, Private X was dead. Granting that by some extraordinary circumstance the campaign-hatted soldier I had seen wounded to death in Cuba had recovered and enlisted in the Spanish Foreign Legion, something not beyond the bounds of possibility, it was impossible that I should see that same soldier here in France, marching with all his youthful *élan* in the ranks of the A. E. F.

Yet I had looked again into those unforgetable eyes.

Impossible! Under the stress of battle, no sleep for the last twenty-four hours, the unceasing pounding of the guns, my imagination was stirred into abnormal activity. Because the soldier had all the youthful characteristics. . . . My speculations ceased. The exacting work of coöperating with the infantry filled my mind.

Fierce bayonet fighting was taking place through the barbed-wire entanglements called No Man's Land. Unending *tat-tat-tat-tat* of machine-guns, hand-grenades burst incessantly, splotches of red flame, spasmodic rifle-fire, the background rumble of a thousand cannon; all the details of battle echoed in our ears. Across the entanglements swept a wind bearing the odor of decaying bodies, powder fumes, gas. Yet, yard by yard, our soldiers pushed closer and closer to the enemy trenches. A rally and charge, a shout, and they swept into them.

Followed minutes of startling activity. The mopping-up squads cleaned out the trenches. Feverishly the positions were consolidated, the trenches turned into forts to protect our soldiers. The enemy poured an unceasing enfilade machine-gun fire from three hidden nests. Still

our soldiers rushed their work on the newly captured trenches.

Suddenly enemy reinforcements appeared sifting through the broken wire entanglements. We could discern groups of green-gray uniforms, coal-scuttle helmets, long viciously bayoneted rifles. Trench-mortar shells exploded among our troops.

Slowly, fighting desperately, grenades bursting in their faces, our soldiers slunk back through No Man's Land. The position they had won, was lost.

Watching the stragglers sifting through the entanglements, I was startled to see one soldier carrying another. The picture struck me like an unexpected electrical shock. Within I was conscious of indescribable emotions. I seemed lifted out of myself, somehow held in mid-air, a supernatural being viewing this extraordinary incident as one seeing a play for the third time.

The wind swept aside the battle fumes. Clearly I could see the burdened figure staggering through the entanglements. He tripped over a dead body, fell headlong. He staggered up, gathered his stricken comrade, came on again. Machine-gun bullets cut the mud at his very footstep.

Then I caught sight of movement among our soldiers. I saw them climb out of their trenches. Saw them dash forward, firing at will, into the face of the enemy.

Heart beating wildly, I watched Private X, for so I called him to myself. He strode on, his helmeted head high above his shoulders. A moment he stood out between the two lines. As I watched he fell. The terrible thought smote me:

Killed by his own comrades!

IT is not my custom to attend memorial services in Arlington on Decoration Day, though I live in Washington. The crowd, flamboyant orators, elaborate ceremonies—no, I wait until night brings peace. I know a hidden path leading into the cemetery. Last Decoration Day I crept along that path. The moon bathed the tombs with rays of shining silver.

From grave to grave I wandered, communing with friends fallen in Cuba, in the Philippines, in France. In spite of ghostly shadows they were not dead to me. I saw them alive, brimming again with youthfulness, reckless, laughing—I could hear them. . . . Abruptly I felt myself trembling on the verge of some mysterious revelation. It was as if I peered down a dim tunnel where a flame flickered, the flame of Life. A sighing of the wind and it was gone.

I found myself beside the tomb of the Unknown Soldier. There came to me the words of the old poem:

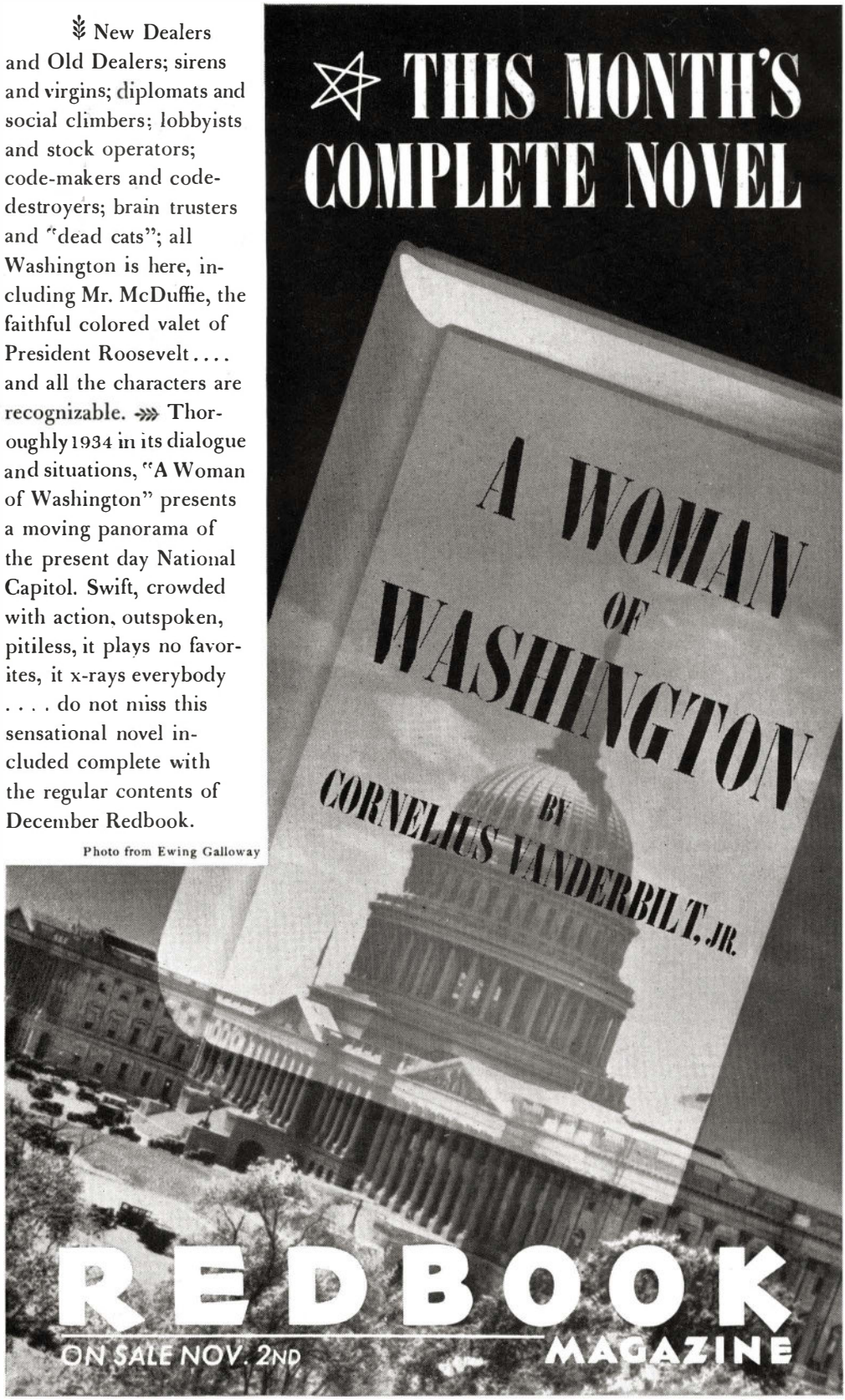
How sleep the brave who sink to rest
By all their country's wishes blest!
When Spring, with dewy fingers cold,
Returns to deck their hallowed mold—

As I whispered the verse a shadow seemed to materialize beside the tomb. I stared into the moonlight. He! There! Smiling that strange, unearthly smile through those strange, unfathomable eyes! I caught a gleam of recognition, a friendly nod, as one old comrade to another.

"Who are you?" I breathed.

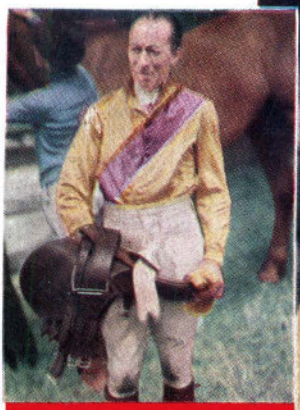
Somberly those strange eyes looked into mine. Then, like the last fading notes of Taps, I heard three words:

"I am Youth."



New Dealers and Old Dealers; sirens and virgins; diplomats and social climbers; lobbyists and stock operators; code-makers and code-destroyers; brain trusters and "dead cats"; all Washington is here, including Mr. McDuffie, the faithful colored valet of President Roosevelt.... and all the characters are recognizable. ⋙ Thoroughly 1934 in its dialogue and situations, "A Woman of Washington" presents a moving panorama of the present day National Capitol. Swift, crowded with action, outspoken, pitiless, it plays no favorites, it x-rays everybody .... do not miss this sensational novel included complete with the regular contents of December Redbook.

Photo from Ewing Galloway



WHEN YOU FEEL "ALL IN"—

CRAWFORD BURTON, gentleman rider, twice winner of the Maryland Hunt Cup, dean of the strenuous sport of steeplechase riding ... a Camel smoker. Everyone is subject to strain. Hence the importance to people in every walk of life of what Mr. Burton says below about Camels.

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MRS. CHARLES DALY, housewife, says: "Camels pick up my energy ... and have a delicate flavor that a woman likes."

REX BEACH, famous sportsman, says: "When I've landed a big game fish I light a Camel, and feel as good as new."

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Mr. Crawford Burton, the famous American steeplechase rider, says:

"Whether I'm tired from riding a hard race or from the pressure and tension of a crowded business day, I feel refreshed and restored just as soon as I get a chance to smoke a Camel. So I'm a pretty incessant smoker, not only because Camels give me a 'lift' in energy, but because they *taste so good!* And never yet have Camels upset my nerves."

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ALL TOBACCO MEN KNOW:

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Camel's costlier Tobaccos never get on your Nerves