FEBRUARY 1939 THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE VOL. 68 No. 4

BLUE BOOK

OF FICTI ADVENTURE

FEBRUARY

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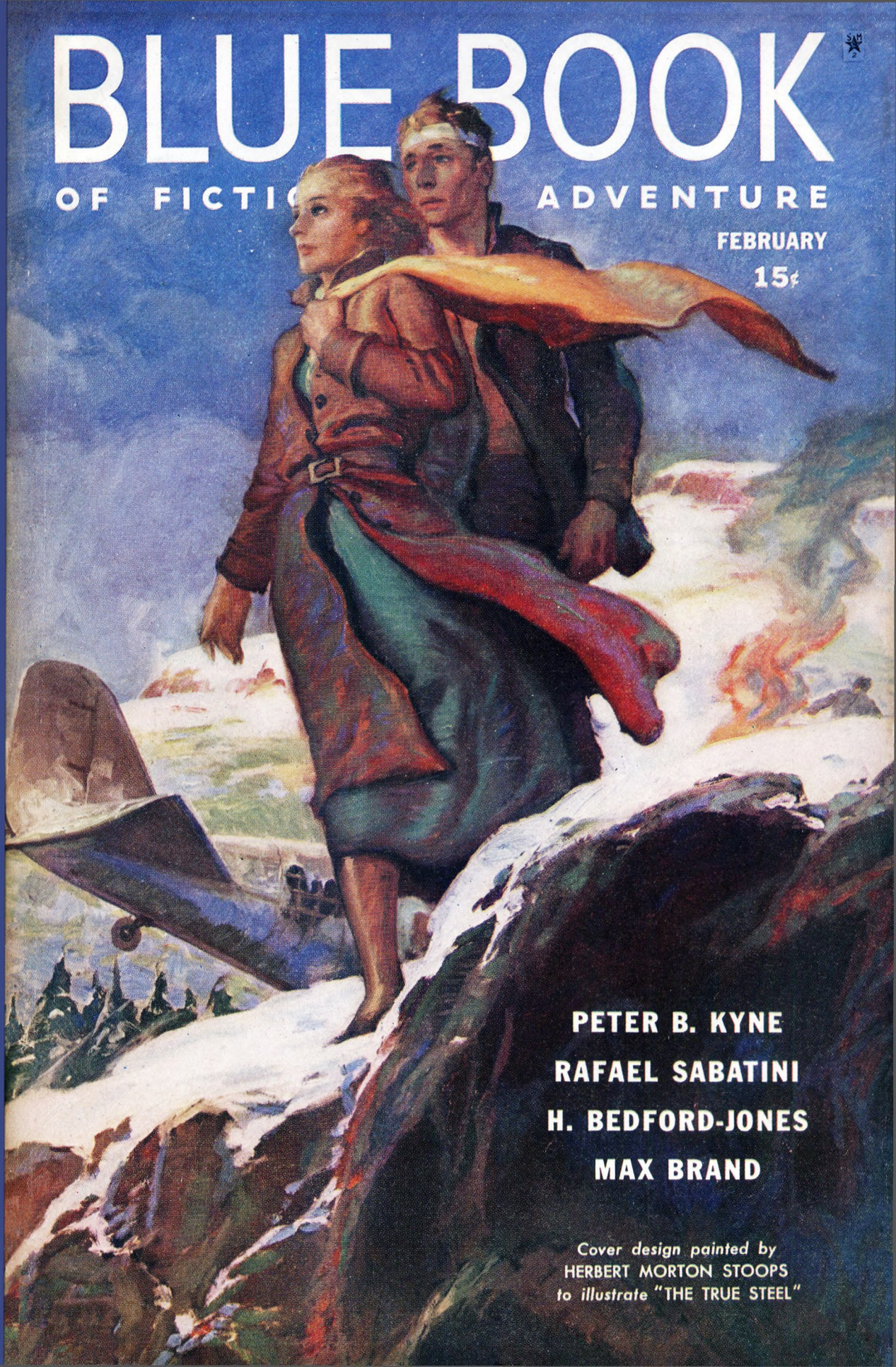

PETER B. KYNE

RAFAEL SABATINI

H. BEDFORD-JONES

MAX BRAND

Cover design painted by
HERBERT MORTON STOOPS
to illustrate "THE TRUE STEEL"

"Murderer!" shouted Rand. "Wait till we get back—" The words were swept away; the boat was off at terrific speed in tow of the wounded whale. (See "Hanging Johnny," starting on page 25.)

BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

FEBRUARY, 1939 VOL. 68, NO. 4

Eight Short Stories

A Novelette of Air Adventure

An Extraordinary Serial

Prize Stories of Real Experience

Cover Design — Painted by Herbert Morton Stoops to illustrate "True Steel"

Except for stories of Real Experience, all stories and novels printed herein are fiction and are intended as such. They do not refer to real characters or to actual events. If the name of any living person is used, it is a coincidence.

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Prize Offer for Real Experiences

THERE is material for a novel in every person's life, it has been said. Whether this is true or not, we do believe that in the lives of most of us some experience has occurred sufficiently exciting to merit description in print. With this idea in mind we shall be pleased to receive and to print true stories of real experience, running from one thousand to four thousand words each. For each of those accepted each month we will pay, according to our appraisal of its length and strength, an average price of $50.

In theme the stories may deal with adventure, mystery, sport, humor, — especially humor!—war or business. Sex is barred. Manuscripts should be addressed to the Real Experience Editor, the Blue Book Magazine, 230 Park Ave., New York, N. Y. Preferably but not necessarily they should be typewritten, and should be accompanied by a stamped and self-addressed envelope for use in case the story is unavailable.

A pen name may be used if desired, but in all cases the writer's real name and permanent address should accompany the manuscript. Be sure to write your name and correct address in the upper left-hand corner of the first page of your story, and keep a copy as insurance against loss of the original; for while we handle manuscripts with great care, we cannot accept responsibility for their return. As this is a monthly contest, from one to two months may elapse before you receive a report on your story.

New England

A vivid account of the tidal wave of September 1938—by a girl survivor.

WITH two other girls I had gone to spend the day at Newport and lunch with the H—s. About three o'clock Eleanor H— took us in her car for a drive. There was a high wind, but nothing alarming at the time, and Eleanor decided that we would take the famous Ocean Drive, congratulating us on having a windy day, as the surf would be so fine.

We rolled past the fashionable Bailey's Beach and Viking Beach next to it, then went up the hill about a half-mile. The road, where we stopped to get a view, was about thirty feet above the water—which was a magnificent sight, leaping over the high rocks and throwing spray far into the air.

Suddenly the water dashed over the road; and Eleanor, looking ahead, exclaimed: "We must turn and get back to town at once! Look at the way the water is coming over the road ahead of us!" She backed around, but a sudden wave dashed over us, and the car came to a standstill just in front of a small house up on the cliffs.

The engine was dead, doused with salt water. Nothing would start it!

A man behind us came over to us and said: "I parked here thinking that the cliff would protect me from the force of the wind, but the house is beginning to rock so that I'm afraid it will fall. You had better get away as fast as you can, and I'll follow."

We told him the engine was dead, so he said he would push us; but when we had gone only a hundred feet or so, another wave broke over us, and *his* engine stalled. Just ten minutes later the house and cliff on which it (and we) had stood, simply crumbled into the raging sea. It was the tidal wave!

There were a dozen or more cars around us, all in the same fix. Presently the waves became so high that our car would be lifted with each one and turned clear around. We feared the terrific backwash would draw us over the cliff. On the land side was a green meadow, sloping down to a fresh-water pond, about a quarter of a mile below in a valley. Along the edge ran a heavy wire fence, with strong posts and wooden supports between. Horses fed on the slope beyond the pond, quite high above the valley, and on the sky-line was a large mansion.

"I am going to get out and ask that young man to advise us," I said; but my three companions were sure that the wind and the waves would be too much for my strength.

The waves actually came *over* the roof of the car by that time, and were so filled with

Hurricane

By HELEN HOLCOMBE GREENE

sand and seaweed that we could not even see the car of our young man, at times, though it was only twenty feet behind us. Watching carefully, I noticed that directly after a very big wave there was an interim, and as our car had finally been swirled against the fence, away from the ocean side, I determined to get in touch with the young man. Taking off my shoes for better footing, I got out on the lee side of the car. Instantly the fierce wind blew me flat on my face (Newport papers said 110 miles an hour was recorded) but I crawled and dragged myself along until the man could see me, when he at once jumped out of his car. I told him our predicament. and he said: "I'll just abandon my car. I can't do anything with it anyway, and I may be of help."

He had already saved us from going down with the house and cliff; and he saved us again from certain death by his knowledge and good judgment.

We returned to the car by keeping our backs to the wind and stooping down, holding to the lowest wire of the fence—very heavy round wire, luckily without barbs.

Mr. D— was a nice young fellow, and soon he had Eleanor, who was quite hysterical, calmed and quieted. "The first thing to do," he said, "is to look over our terrain and decide on our best position if we have to abandon the car." Then he opened the door, on the lee side, and tied it, or wired it, to the fence, as he feared it might jam.

We knew that high tide would be at five P.M., and by six P.M. it would begin to go out, even in spite of the hurricane.

Mr. D— had picked out a spot, a hundred feet up the fence, where the meadow land was a foot or two higher than where we were. This was to be our objective in case of abandoning the car.

About five o'clock the water came within two or three feet of the left side of the car, and wave after wave showered us with sand, seaweed and spray. Suddenly Mr. D— gave the word. "Out, as quick as you can! Hook arms, and don't let go. No one can stand alone. Backs to the wind, and for God's sake, *don't let go!*"

I stepped into a hole as we got out and sprained my left ankle, but I didn't let go, and we struggled along, sideways, to the crest of the slope, in the very teeth of the gale.

The five of us huddled together, our backs pressed tightly against the wide wooden top of the fence, *(Please turn to page 142)*

General McNeil

Illustrated by Charles Chickering

The General pulled up his mule and made reconnaissance.

A spirited drama about a minor war by a man who knows a lot about wars, big and little.... We recall a small dinner-party in January, 1917. The talk turned naturally on whether the United States should go into the war. Everyone present was for it until Peter Kyne spoke up: "Look here," he inquired, "how many of you men have ever been in a battle?" None of us had. "Well," said Mr. Kyne, "I have, and it makes you sick to your stomach. I don't want us to go into any war." And yet when April came, Peter Kyne was the only man of those present who joined up. He came into our office on his way to training camp. "Yes," he announced, "I've had experience in the Philippines, and I have a lot of insurance, and so I reckon I'm worth about as much to my family dressed as on the hoof."... When you have read the story that follows, you will rejoice the more with us, that Peter Kyne is still on the hoof.

ABOUT noontime the jungle trail merged into a well-defined road through a banana plantation; before entering this road, the General pulled up his mule and made swift reconnaissance. Deciding presently that the fruit would not be ready to cut for about three weeks, and that therefore he was not apt to encounter any-

Plays a Hunch

By PETER B. KYNE

body on the road, he pushed on, and in mid-afternoon paused on the easterly edge of the plantation and gazed down upon La Libertad, his objective.

La Libertad was one of the Atlantic ports of the Central American Fruit Company. From the low hill where the General had paused, screened by the fronds of the banana plants, a well-kept, bituminized street with gutters led through the heart of the little town to the beach. On the north side of this street were the native huts; down by the beach the General noted a square two-story adobe building with bastions, and a red- green- and orange-striped flag drooping from a flagpole. So he knew this for the *cuartel* that housed the local garrison. On the south, and fronting on the shell road that wound along the beach, was a two-story adobe building with the Stars and Stripes floating from a roof flagpole and under the red- green- and orange-striped banner. So the General decided this building contained the administrative offices of the fruit company. He noted also, the neat bungalows of the American employees, a small power-house and a radio tower.

Well, it was the period of the *siesta* in La Libertad, and with the exception of the guard at the *cuartel* and the *cargadores* on the wharf and steamer, the native population slept. It was a good time, for a man who desired to be inconspicuous, to enter the town.

The General tied his mule to a banana plant, spread a rubber *poncho* on the ground, and upon the *poncho* laid his gear, with the exception of the saddle and bridle, then wrapped the folds of the *poncho* around it and tied it into a bundle. With this bundle under his arm, he walked boldly down the street and entered the general office of the Central American Fruit Company. To two clerks who sat on opposite sides of a large flat desk, he said in Spanish:

"I wish to purchase a passage to New Orleans on the steamer now loading at the company's wharf."

Both clerks appraised him critically; then one said: "The cabin accommodations are sold out, and we have no second class or steerage."

"It will be no hardship for me to sleep on deck in this climate."

"I will have to see the general manager about that," the clerk replied. He pointed to a bench for visitors, set against the wall just outside the counter. "Please be seated," he invited.

The General sat down, for he was weary, and the clerk disappeared through a door in the rear of the room. A moment later the street door opened, and a girl entered the office, went to the end of the counter, where there was an inkwell and pen, and commenced writing on picture post-cards.

"American tourist," thought the General. "School teacher, doubtless; taking a Caribbean cruise during her summer vacation." He noted the little motion-picture camera swung by a strap over her shoulder; he admired her dainty little Panama hat with the multi-colored puggree, her print dress and buck shoes; he noted that she had dark blue eyes and golden hair and was, altogether, a lovely specimen of her sex.

The girl glanced at him once, noting his conical-crowned wide-brimmed hat of a peon, his soiled sleeveless cotton singlet, his dirty khaki slacks, well ventilated at the knees, his worn *alpagartes* covering brown sockless feet, his brown haggard face and blue eyes that advertised extreme exhaustion.

WHEN the clerk had been in consultation with the general manager for five minutes, the General decided he was four minutes overdue. Much exposure to danger had imbued the General with the intuition of a predatory animal; he turned and looked out the front window across the town just in time to see the clerk entering the gate of the *cuartel.*

He rose, leaned across the counter and addressed the remaining clerk in English. "Son," he queried, "do you know who I am?"

"Yes, General."

The girl looked up from her postcard-writing.

"Your co-worker recognized me also," the General charged. "I suppose the Government radioed a minute description of me."

"I regret to inform you that is true, General. And there is a reward of approximately five thousand dollars gold on you, dead or alive, and preferably dead."

"So that accounts for the activity of your colleague!" The General lifted his bundle up on the counter and leisurely unwrapped it, revealing a wide leather belt appended to which were four leather pistol-cartridge cases, a machete in a scabbard, and two large pistols in open holsters. This belt the General buckled around his waist. From a haversack he removed a blue-steel cylinder from the periphery of which gleamed the bright brass heads of cartridges, picked up a Thompson machine-gun and fastened the magazine in place. He then hung the haversack over his right shoulder—and by its weight, the clerk decided it contained several more magazines.

The General lifted his hat and bowed to the girl. "Señorita," he said, "I beg your pardon for my rudeness in presuming to address you without the formality of an introduction, but the circumstances render it imperative. It is extremely

"I filmed the bloodless battle of La Libertad," she cried happily. "Good gracious, what a ferocious-looking personage you are, with all those weapons!"

probable that in a few minutes I will be taking on the garrison of La Libertad in a battle to the death, and my experience has been that the local soldiery are deficient in musketry and tend to do wild shooting. Please run back to the steamer."

The girl picked up her picture postcards. "Thank you, General McNeil—I recognized you from a photograph of you I saw in a recent magazine article; besides, it's hard for a white man to masquerade as a Central American peon."

The General pointed toward the *cuartel*. "Here they come, miss—a pompous little lieutenant and twelve men. Please get going."

"So that scrub of a clerk sold you down the river for the blood-money, eh? Well, he'll be fired and leave Sobrante on the steamer tonight. I'll see to it that he has a difficult time collecting the reward."

"Will you kindly scram?" the General begged.

"There is room for us both back of the safe, Miss Harkness," the clerk assured the girl. But the girl was already leaving the office, unbuckling the lid of her camera-case as she went. And presently the General stepped out into the street, when the lieutenant and his squad were about fifty feet from the building. He brought his Thompson gun up to be ready, and in the clear confident voice of one accustomed to command, cried: *"Alto!"*

PROMPTLY the squad halted and came to an order arms. "I am General McNeil. You have an order to place me in arrest, Lieutenant?"

The lieutenant saluted him. "That is true, my General. Be so good as to hand me your weapons. Surely one does not have to remind a man of your intelligence that you are one against thirteen."

"You whistle in the dark, my friend, to keep your courage up. You are thirteen against fifty, for this magazine contains fifty cartridges, and in three seconds I can kill you all." The General laughed softly. "Lieutenant, you should never approach an enemy in column of squads, even though you have been reliably informed that he is unarmed! Detail—*attention!* Right shoulder—*arms!*"

The detail came to a snappy right shoulder. "About—*face!*" the General ordered. The detail executed the movement, and to the lieutenant's broad back the General spoke: "Return to the *cuartel*, Lieutenant, and suggest to your superior officer that the order possibly is a mistake. Close the gate when you enter, and do not presume to emerge again until I grant you permission. Forward! *March!*"

THE detail marched back to the shelter of the *cuartel*, and the General, turning to enter the office again, saw the girl making a motion-picture of him. "I filmed the bloodless battle of La Libertad!" she cried happily. "What a pity I am not wired for sound! Good gracious, what a ferocious-looking personage you are with all those weapons draped about you. And you're so devilish cool, I suppose you find life in the tropics quite free of prickly heat!"

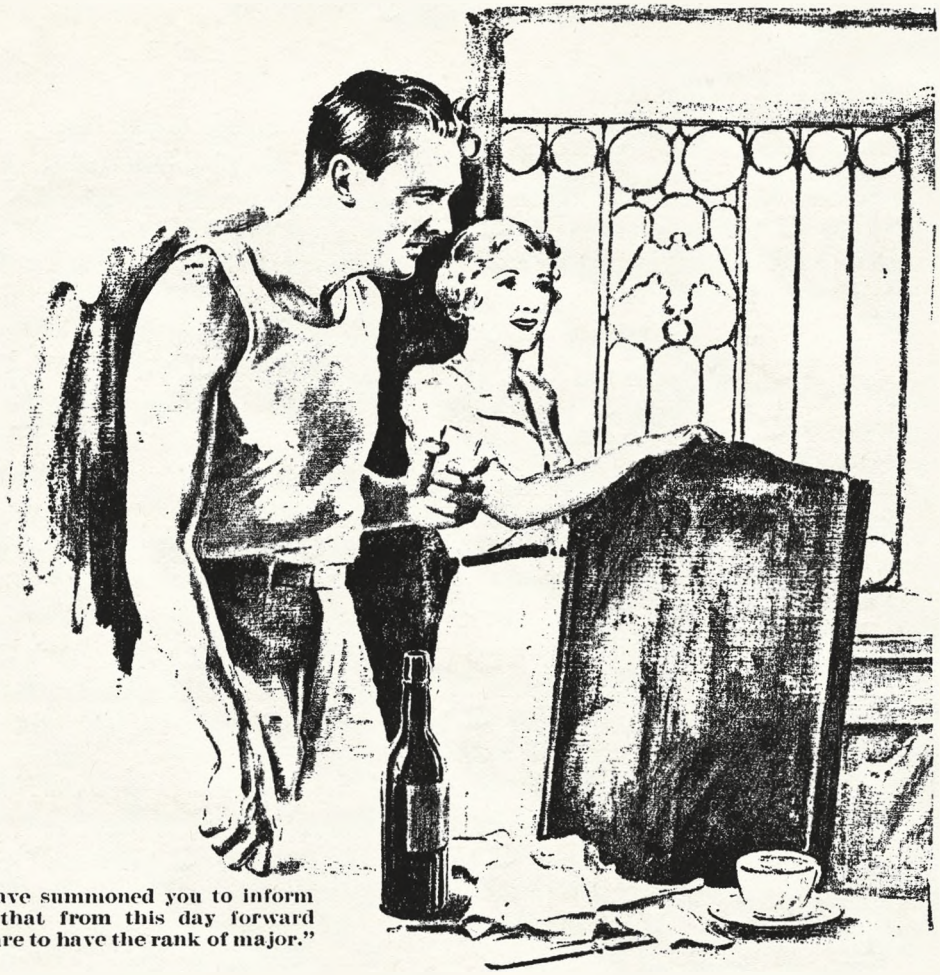
The General gazed down upon her severely. "Confucius wrote: 'Is it not sweet to receive messages from distant friends!' I suppose he originated the picture-postcard habit. I beg of you to finish your job of greeting distant friends and clear out of here. The lieutenant wasn't bluffed. He merely was discreet. In all probability there is a rear exit to the *cuartel*, and presently the entire garrison will filter out via that exit and lay siege to me in this office."

"Naturally. And you're so weary and hungry, the siege will not last very long. Consequently you would be foolish to go back into the office."

The clerk came out on the sidewalk. "General," he announced, "it would be well for you to leave La Libertad immediately. This office has been requested by the Government authorities in San Buenaventura to decline to sell you passage on any of its steamers. I'm very sorry. General manager's orders."

"I rank the general manager," the girl assured the General. "My dad's the engineer—I mean he's the president and controlling owner of the C. A. F., and he's aboard the steamer now. Come with me, General. Once aboard the steamer, the garrison will not dare attack along that open wharf. And they can't besiege you, because the steamer sails at ten o'clock tonight; and when the lines are cast off, your enemies can all take a big broad jump into the Caribbean sea."

The General gazed down upon her sadly and a little humorously. "You are so sweet," he declared. "But you are also unlearned in the ways of firecracker republics. The request not to sell me a ticket was made by President Moncada, and his request is always tantamount to



"I have summoned you to inform you that from this day forward you are to have the rank of major."

an order. And your dad takes orders from President Moncada."

"He does not," the girl cried.

"Well, he will this time, at any rate, because if he doesn't, he'll find an export tax on bananas clapped on the C. A. F. Your dad, being a business man, will not ruin his company to save the life of a total stranger."

"I'll go ask him," the girl declared, and departed hurriedly while the General reëntered the office, passed beyond the counter and lay down on the floor, in which position he was invisible from the street. And as he lay there, he heard the drone of distant airplane engines in the south; as the plane roared over La Libertad, one motor sputtered and cut out.

The General went to a window and gazed out at the plane. It was banking out over the bay, flying on one motor now; and as it banked he saw under the wing concentric circles of red, green and orange. He saw, too, that it was a flying boat, and so he knew it for one of the three Sobrantean Coast Guard ships. He watched it land well out in the bay, turn and taxi toward the beach; it came slowly in through a two-foot surf, so the General realized the wheels had been let down and that the plane would crawl up onto the beach to discharge passengers. Then, just as the black shiny tires appeared above the wave-wash, the remaining motor sputtered and died.

The clerk stood beside the General and watched the plane. Presently two men climbed out and began accepting suitcases from one still in the cabin; they carried the suitcases ashore and went back for more; then a third man dropped down into the wash and came ashore also; whereupon the trio, carrying two suitcases each, walked up the beach to the head of the wharf, out on the wharf and up the gangplank of the steamer.

"They've abandoned that Government plane," the General suggested; "so the smart thing for you to do, brother, is organize a gang of *cargadores* to haul it up beyond highwater mark and anchor it there. How like a spig to hop off without making certain he had gas enough for the journey!"

He went back into the office and lay down on the floor again. In about half

"I do not understand, my general. I called to receive your surrender."

an hour he heard the door open, and the girl called: "Hi, General."

The General got up, stood weakly to attention and bowed to her and the iron-gray man with her. "This is my father, John R. Harkness," the girl announced. "Father, this is General Stuart McNeil, commander-in-chief of the late revolutionary army."

"Ha," Harkness murmured coldly. "A soldier of fortune, eh? And anxious to make your get-away via our steamer. Well, I'm here to inform you, General McNeil, that you're out of luck if you expect this company to confer a favor on any soldier of fortune. You knew what you were doing when you thrust your nose into the late ruckus; you realized the price you'd have to pay if your side lost and the other side caught you, so—"

He paused suddenly as the General drew his machete. "If I hear another peep out of this peculiar father of yours, Miss Harkness," the General announced, "I'll cut his right ear off. Why, he's insulting. I haven't asked him for a favor, and I do not expect him to sell me a ticket, and you know why. I'm down and out, and in all probability I'm going to die tonight; but while I live, I'll be treated with courtesy and dignity or know the reason why."

"You clear out of this office," Harkness ordered. "I don't want these expensive plate-glass windows shot full of holes."

"Inasmuch as I do not wish my person to be shot full of holes, I'm going to stay, Mr. Harkness. And incidentally, I am not a soldier of fortune. Although my parents were both British subjects, I was born in Sobrante, and with the exception of the period I spent in school and college in the United States, I have lived here all my life. I vote here, and since I am not registered as a British subject in the office of the British Consul at San Buenaventura, the capital, it follows that I am a citizen of Sobrante and as such morally entitled to revolute whenever I wish to."

"I told you he was a gentleman," Miss Harkness told her father triumphantly.

John R. Harkness looked distressed. "Confound it, General, you're a frightful embarrassment to me."

"On the contrary, sir, you are a frightful embarrassment to me! You now wish to save me from a firing-squad, and you have the power to do so, but the price is prohibitive. I realize that. Indeed, I so informed your daughter."

"I'm sorry, General, but—"

"Doubtless many widows and orphans depend for their sustenance on the dividends from the C. A. F. stock the head of the family left them, Mr. Harkness. Naturally you can not sacrifice them for me, so please say no more about it."

"You are magnificent, sir."

"I'm hungry, too. If you want to be nice, send a waiter ashore with a dinner for the condemned man. I had some barbecued monkey two days ago. And speaking of embarrassment, try eating a monkey sometime. The one I ate reminded me of my old uncle Angus."

"I'll send you dinner, General," said Harkness; and he departed. The General said to the girl: "You scram, too."

"You lie down and go to sleep, while I keep watch. You wouldn't care to have the enemy surprise you, would you?"

"You overflow with sound ideas, Miss Harkness." And promptly the General lay down again back of the counter and almost instantly went to sleep. In about an hour two waiters came from the steamer bearing food in flaming chafing-dishes; they used a desk for a table, and the girl awakened the General, who washed his face and hands at a basin in the corner

and fell to on his dinner. John R. Harkness had even sent cocktails in a thermos bottle, a quart of Rhine wine and a four-bit cigar.

In the midst of the meal the General suddenly said to the clerk: "The company has a radio set-up here. I'd like to send a radiogram to San Buenaventura. I'll pay for it," he added parenthetically.

"Sorry, but we have been unable to raise San Buenaventura all day. Had a message to send for the local commandant. He's getting low on rations and wanted to prod the army quartermaster."

"Just some more of my hard luck. Young-feller-m'lad, you seem so friendly, I believe you would gladly do me a small favor."

"I would, General."

"Then scout around La Libertad until you find the commandant of the garrison, and say to him that General McNeil will be infinitely obliged to him if he will come here to discuss with General McNeil a matter of importance to both of us. As evidence of good faith, take with you and deliver to the commandant my Thompson machine-gun and all my ammunition, together with this belt and the pistols and machete."

"Have you gone insane?" Miss Harkness almost screamed. "You are signing your own death-warrant."

The General grinned. "Remember those lines from Lord Macaulay's 'Horatius at the Bridge'? I'll recite them in case you do not:

To every man upon this earth,
Death cometh soon or late.
So how can man die better,
Than facing fearful odds,
For the ashes of his fathers
And the temples of his gods?

With a jerk of his thumb he sent the clerk away. In about twenty minutes the latter returned accompanied by a captain of Sobrantean infantry, who very politely saluted the General, who smiled upon him and said in Spanish: "My dear Captain, pray be seated. May I offer you a glass of this delicious Rhine wine? Ah, thank you. My compliments, Captain. I have summoned you here to inform you that from this day forward you are to have the rank of major."

"I do not understand, my General. I have called to receive your surrender."

"You have reached an erroneous conclusion, Major. Last night the army revolted in San Buenaventura, the Moncada government fell, and the president, with two fellow-villains, fled in a Coast Guard seaplane. They landed here this afternoon, while you, doubtless, were enjoying your siesta, and are even now aboard the steamer. I announce myself to you as provisional president of Sobrante, and it is my order that you shall go aboard the steamer immediately and inform the ex-president and his companions that they are in arrest by my order."

THE commandant squirmed, for he was on the horns of a dilemma. If he elected to accept as the truth the General's preposterous statement and obey him, and it should develop later that the General had sold him a pup, so to speak, he would, in all probability, be shot by Moncada's order. If, on the other hand, he declined to obey the order of General McNeil and found later that he should have done so, he would, in all probability, be shot by order of General McNeil.

"You hesitate," said the General sharply. "Would I have surrendered my weapons if I did not know whereof I speak? Obey!"

The commandant sighed deeply. "I obey, my General."

"Do you know Moncada when you see him?"

"Yes, my General."

"Well, remember, if he is still the president, he will laugh and come quietly with you; but if he is not, he will go for his gun."

"I do not doubt it," the unhappy commandant promised.

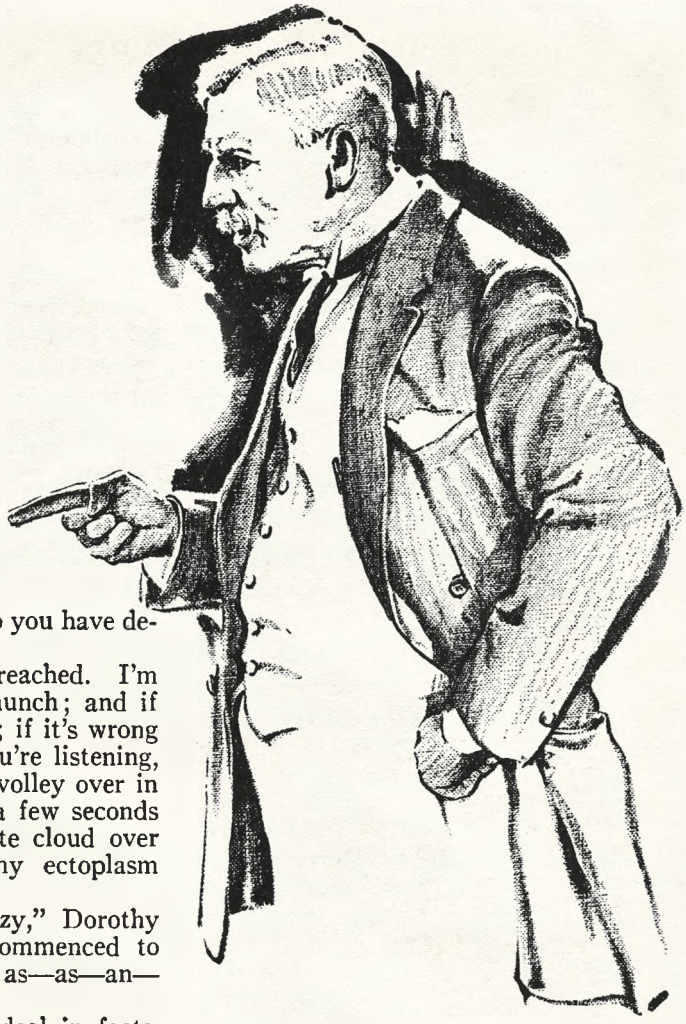
"I observe I have made no mistake in promoting you to a majority."

The General resumed his dinner. Suddenly he said to the girl:

"What's your first name?"

"Dorothy."

"If I should get to New York and a tailor that knows his business, will you come out to dinner with me and dance, Dorothy?"



"You're making love to my daughter right under my nose," said John R. Harkness. "Sometimes," said the General, "love happens — just like that."

"Gladly, my General. So you have decided not to die tonight."

"No decision has been reached. I'm merely playing a sudden hunch; and if the hunch is right, I'll win; if it's wrong —well, about sunset, if you're listening, you'll hear the sound of a volley over in the *cuartel* yard; and if, a few seconds later, you see a faint white cloud over the roof, that will be my ectoplasm headed for glory."

"You're driving me crazy," Dorothy Harkness declared, and commenced to weep. "You're as callous as—as—an—elephant."

"As a practical man, I deal in facts, not fancies, Miss Dorothy. And please dry those tears. Never weep until you have to. As the old saw goes, 'There is a tide in the affairs of men which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune.' And in warfare the man who stands still furnishes work for the sanitary detail. . . . When confronted with the necessity for doing something, do it. One may do the wrong thing; but if he does nothing, he will still be doing the wrong thing!"

He finished the last of the wine and lighted the cigar. "Really," he murmured, as he blew a smoke-ring, "God is singularly good, and the devil not half bad." He stepped to the window and gazed down the dock. "It won't be long now, Miss Dorothy. Here comes the commandant."

"Alone?"

"All alone."

Again the girl commenced to weep silently. The door opened; she heard the click of heels; and then the commandant was speaking in Spanish, which she understood perfectly.

"Sir, I have to report that I saw the late President Moncada on deck and approached him respectfully, not with my pistol in hand, but with the flap of the holster unbuttoned. I said: 'It is my duty to inform you, Señor Moncada—' And that was as far as I got."

"He reached for his gun, eh?"

"He did. I could see the fright in his eyes as I approached. Well, my General, he died instantly."

"Good. How about his companions?"

"One of them was General Contreras, commander-in-chief of the army under Moncada; and the other was Vallejo, the secretary of the treasury. Contreras is a pilot. He flew the party over to La Libertad. Well, as I stated, my General, both these villains were present, and the shooting became general. However, thanks doubtless to the virtuous life I have always led, the good God saw fit to spare me."

"In the name of a grateful republic, I thank you, Colonel. You have dwelt too

long in this dull La Libertad; so if you will indicate to me tomorrow the garrison you would like to command, I shall see that your wish is granted. My mule is tethered in the bananas at the top of the Calle Real. Be so good, my dear Colonel, as to send a soldier up to rescue the poor animal, and water and feed him and give him a deep soft bed. He is a noble little fellow."

THE Colonel saluted and departed, and John R. Harkness came bounding in. "There's hell to pay and no pitch hot!" he declared. "The local commandant came aboard a few minutes ago, and shot and killed the three Sobrantean gentlemen who flew over here this afternoon and booked passage to New York."

"As provisional president of Sobrante, I ordered the commandant to place them in arrest, Mr. Harkness. They were killed resisting arrest, which saves the provisional government the trouble of putting them before firing-squads."

"How do you know you're the provisional president of Sobrante?" Harkness demanded.

"I feel it in my bones, Mr. Harkness. I'm the logical candidate. I've suffered for the cause. I had the Government forces licked when I was taken ill with jungle fever, and my second in command, a Sobrantean, got brave and tackled a force twice our size. He would have won if he had started to the assault and kept on going, but being a spig, he lay out all day on a hillside and swapped shots with the enemy until his ammunition was exhausted; then a force appeared in his rear, and he and his men stood up and yelled, '*Viva,* Moncada!' and the war was over. Two of my faithful Fidoes hid me and got a doctor for me; and when I was well enough to sit a mule, I sat one—and here I am."

"Have you any idea why the Government forces revolted last night?"

"I think," said the General, with a smug little smile, "they were pretty sore at Moncada because they took a number of horrible lickings before they won one victory. And I imagine he didn't pay them when the job was done. His régime always showed a deficit. He was such a thoughtful man. He kept raising his own salary and sending it to the United States, against a rainy day."

"Do you think the army will now acclaim you as provisional president, and that later the people will, by popular vote, elect you?"

"I do. My old gang will rise again if I say the word, and I'll be the national hero for having fixed Moncada's clock. When I come riding into the capital on my mule, all ragged and filthy as you see me, and with my old Tommy gun across the saddle—why, damn it, man, I know these people, and I can stage a show they'll like."

"For instance?"

"I'll resolutely decline to be a candidate for the presidency. As a matter of fact, I do not want the job, but I'll have to take it if I do not seek it. I'll hold office two years and get back my father's estates, which Moncada expropriated; and then I'll beat it to the U. S. A. before some crook with political ambitions tosses a pineapple into the presidential automobile."

"How did you discover Moncada had abdicated?"

"I guessed he had, but I didn't discover it until I sent the commandant to arrest him."

"But how did you know he was aboard?"

"I didn't know. I merely suspected. Three men arrived in a Government plane, with just enough gas to get them here; one motor conked before they landed and the other before they got quite ashore, which proves they left for their journey in a deal of a hurry. In fact, one might logically suspect that somebody was pursuing them.

"UPON arrival here, they abandoned the plane. I reasoned they must be governmental brass hats, to ride that plane; and I figured they had stolen it and in such a hurry they had to take a chance it contained sufficient gas to get them to La Libertad, where they must have known your steamer was loading bananas. Well, when Government officials abandon a two-hundred-thousand-dollar flying-boat, it's because the boat is hot and so are they. It occurred to me, furthermore, that if I were running for my life, I'd take the precaution to insure that nobody could wire ahead and have me stopped. So I pretended to your clerk here I wanted to send a radiogram to the capital—and lo, he informed me your operator had been trying all day, in vain, to raise San Buenaventura. Consequently I figured some thoughtful person had exploded a few sticks of dynamite in the radio receiving-station at the capital—and that made it look more and more like a hot presidential trail. So I

took a chance. I bet my life I was right —and I was!"

"Son," said John R. Harkness, "you have everything. When you've cleaned up down here, come to New York and see me. I'll have a top-hole job for you with Central American Fruit—vice-president in charge of foreign relations. You could do us a lot of good."

APPRAISINGLY, the General looked at Dorothy Harkness. "Well," he said to her, "we had a few high moments together, didn't we?"

The girl nodded, and the General continued: "I think I'd like to have some more high moments with you, my dear— I think we might continue to throw off sparks to light each other's lives while we grow old together. . . . Got a radiophone aboard your steamer, Mr. Harkness?"

Harkness nodded. "With your permission, sir, I'll use it to telephone an important personage in San Buenaventura and give him the data for three funeral notices."

He blew a succession of smoke-rings from John R. Harkness' cigar. "I feel a little bit weak, now that it's all over," he admitted. "I was cornered for fair. There's a trail that runs north a hundred miles to the border, but escape that way was out of the question. My poor mule, like his master, was sadly in need of new shoes, and also like his master, was suffering from malnutrition. . . . We were a month in the jungle, and we were both done in."

"I have, for the first time," said Dorothy Harkness to her father, "met a very gallant gentleman. I had thought there were no more of his kind bred—that the world was quite filled with egotistic half-baked cubs—when up pops the General."

"You do not obey orders," the General complained. "I told you to scram, and you wouldn't. Suppose the shooting had started while you still were sticking around?"

"I'd have stuck, my General—and asked them for your body when it was over." Her eyes flooded. "The ship's doctor would have—well, I'd have taken you home to your mother in New York. I read in that magazine article that she lives there."

The General's bold blue eyes went moist now. "You're wonderful, my dear. I had thought your type had been washed out. . . . Listen, girl. I can get what I want out of the new government without being president. Do you want me to tell that important personage in San Buenaventura that I'll give him a leg-up for the presidency by leaving Sobrante, provided he has Moncada's expropriation order rescinded? That will put me back on Easy Street again. And I know he'll make the local commandant a colonel when I tell him I promised the resolute fellow two raises in rank."

"I think," said Dorothy Harkness, "that instead of my bringing you home to your mother, you might bring me home to her. I can be pretty nice when I try hard, and I'm not always disobedient."

"Do you mean," cried John R. Harkness, "that you'll be our vice-president in charge of foreign relations—now?"

"Yes, now. I don't know what the stipend is, and I do not greatly care, but what I want to know is: Am I on the payroll now, and does the job carry authority?"

"You are, and it does. You're high, low and jack-in-the-game south of Vera Cruz."

"Young-feller-m'lad," said the vice-president in charge of foreign relations to the clerk, "send a radiogram to the New York office with instructions to send two new clerks to La Libertad on the next steamer. One's fired, and you're promoted to executive assistant to the vice-president in charge of foreign relations. I like men who are kind and who do not care for blood-money; I always remember such when I come into my kingdom."

HE took Dorothy Harkness by the hand and led her out into the afternoon sunshine. "Gosh!" said John R. Harkness, "you're fast on your feet, General. You're making love to my daughter right under my nose."

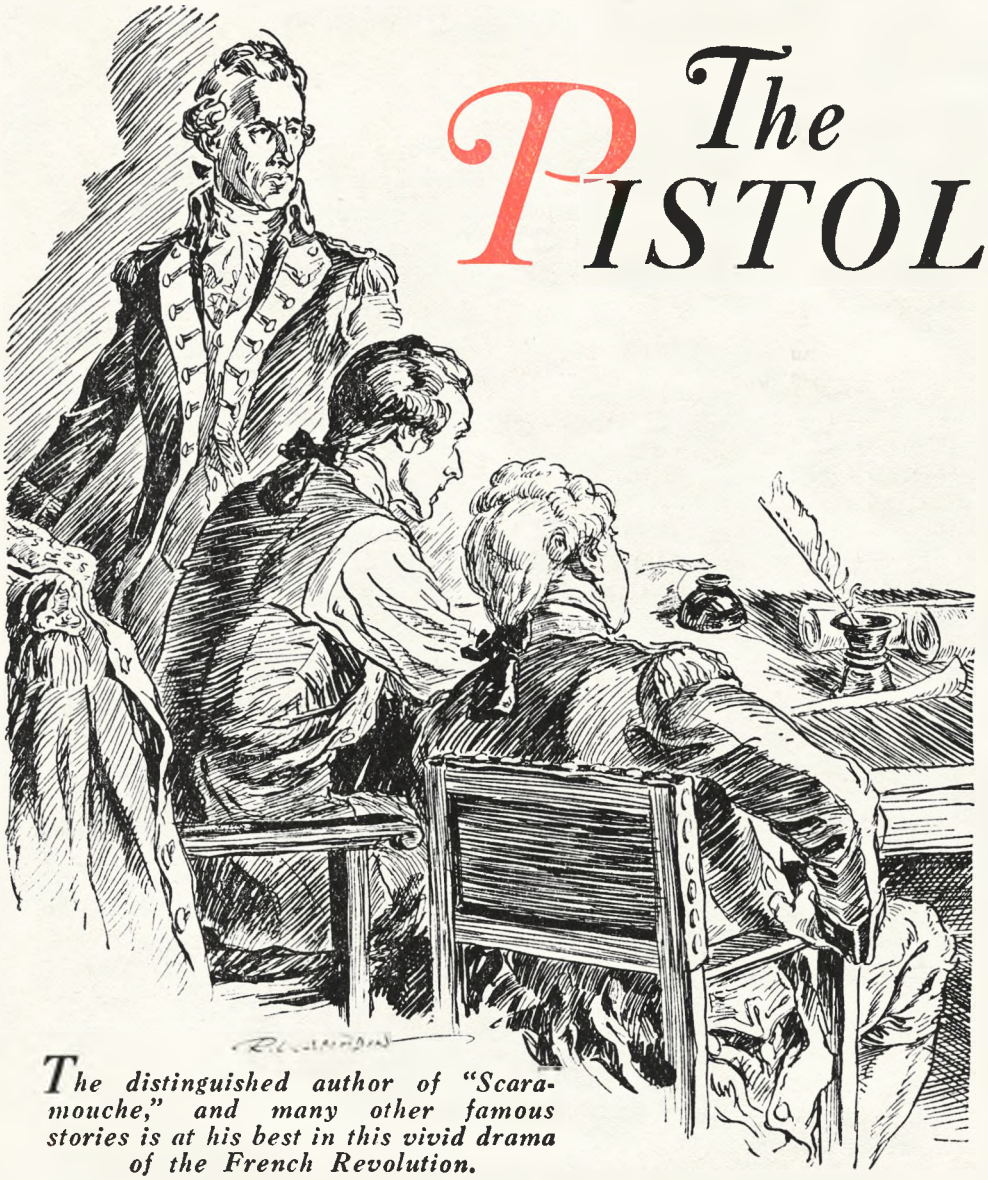
"Sometimes," the General replied, "love happens—just like that. I'm too tired to present my credentials now, but I have them." He lifted the girl's hand to his lips and kissed it reverently. "Isn't life wonderful, darling?" he whispered.

Darling gulped, got a grip on herself and said: "You do need somebody to look after you. . . . I—I—think Mr. Nordstrom, the second mate might—have some clothes and shoes to fit you. He's —a big devil—like you and—and—"

"Didn't I tell you," said the General severely, "never to cry unless you have to?"

" You great booby," the girl answered, "can't you see I have to?"

The PISTOL



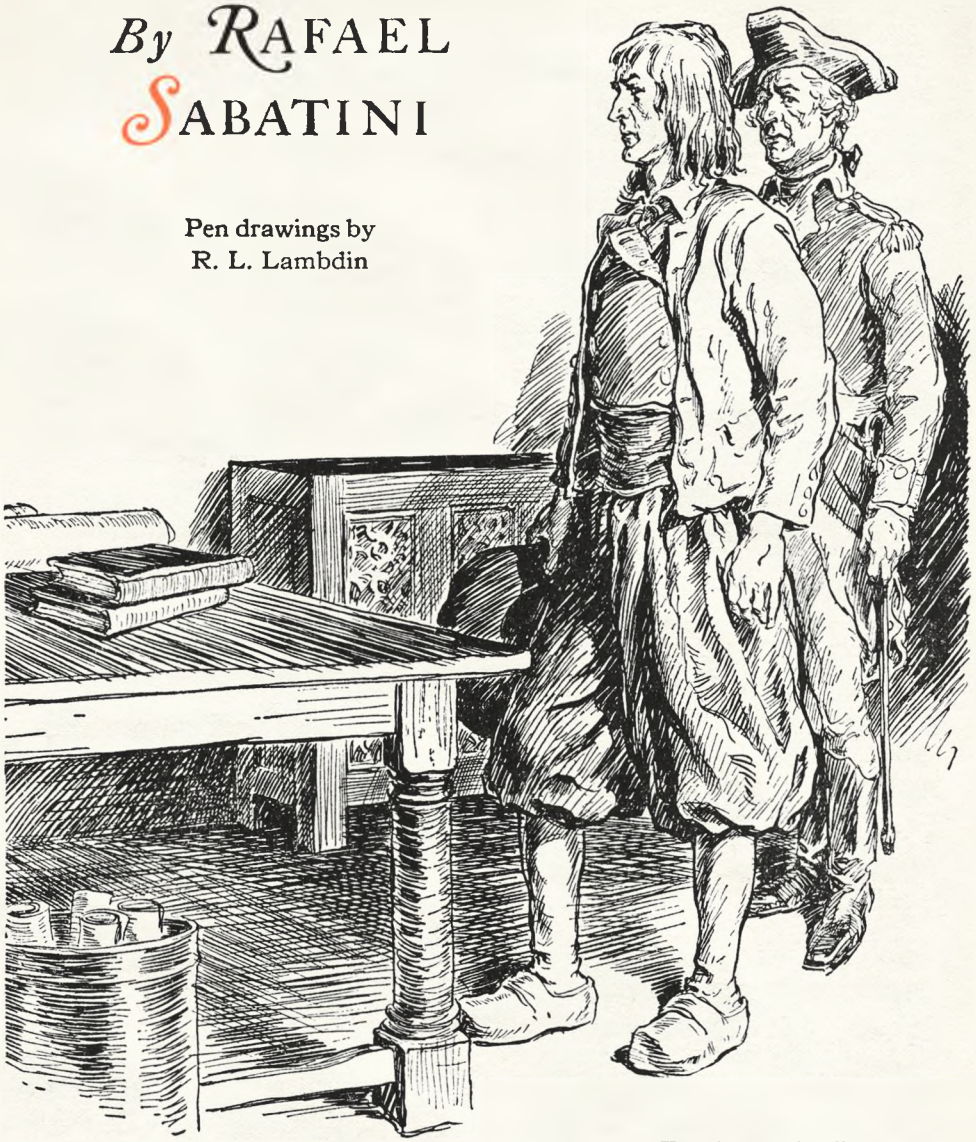
The distinguished author of "Scaramouche," and many other famous stories is at his best in this vivid drama of the French Revolution.

GENERAL HOCHE wrote from Vannes to the Convention: "The Anglo-Emigré-Chouan forces are shut up in Quiberon like rats in a trap." And no man realized the truth of it more bitterly than the Marquis de Puisaye, upon whom weighed the responsibility for an expedition which British help had made possible. For if on the one hand, by putting Fort Penthièvre—at the head of the causeway that links the Peninsula of Quiberon with the mainland—into a state of defence, and by opening strong entrenchments ahead of it, manned by his Chouans, Monsieur de Puisaye held General Hoche in check, on the other hand he was himself held in check by the fortifications which General Hoche had set up on the heights of Sainte Barbe opposite.

A gallant attempt to break through had resulted in no more than a futile gain of some six-score prisoners brought off by the Royalists when they were flung back. Matters became desperate. Unless Monsieur de Puisaye could break through without delay, to raise the royal standard in the Vendée, the ruin of this last hope of the Monarchists was certain. Realizing it, he bent his troubled but undaunted mind to the conception of a plan that promised well. And it was to assist him in considering details, that he summoned to his whitewashed, severe quarters in Fort Penthièvre, Colonel Antoine de Lamet and the Vicomte de Beaumelle, two officers whose military

By RAFAEL SABATINI

Pen drawings by
R. L. Lambdin



"Very interesting," said the Marquis slowly. "And very reassuring, too—if I could only believe it."

experience he rated above that of any other of the *emigrés* in his following.

The Marquis sat in his shirt-sleeves, a man of a handsome, patrician type, youthful and alert, but weary-eyed. His burden of anxieties had been increased this morning by a peculiarly hateful piece of news. It was of a kind to make him doubt whether the measures he was concerting must not prove vain; but of this he made no mention to his present coadjutors. With a map spread before him, he calmly expounded the proposed action to them. Attentive, they leaned upon the table, one on each side of him: Lamet, a tall, spare man of forty, whose narrow, swarthy face, with loose-lipped, sneering mouth and close-set eyes flanking a predatory nose, made credible his rather sinister repute. An uncanny facility for reckoning odds rendered him formidable at hazard, whilst a readiness to quarrel, and some four deaths that stood to his credit, made him respected as a swordsman. Beaumelle, plump and rosy, was by contrast an incarnation of benignity. In common they possessed only the gravity in which they listened to their leader's exposition.

In brief, his proposal was to send out some six or seven thousand Chouans, well armed and equipped, under such officers as he could spare. They would leave Quiberon by boat, and land farther down the coast, at Morbihan or Carnac.

Then, in small parties, gathering recruits as they went, and moving only by night, so as not to attract attention, they would come circuitously to place themselves in the rear of Sainte Barbe, ready to strike thence at the moment determined by Puisaye for a sortie in force.

"The only flaw," he ended, his mind upon the intelligence received that morning, "is that such a plan asks time—more time, perhaps, than we shall be vouchsafed. However, you have heard it. Now let me have your views."

There was a spell of silence disturbed only by the rustle of the sea under the windows that stood open to such breeze as might come to temper the sweltering heat of that July day.

THE two officers were still bending studiously over the map, still pondering what they had been told, when an orderly officer entered the room.

"Captain Faviot," he announced, "has just arrived and is asking to see Your Excellency at once."

Beaumelle, absorbed as he was, may not even have heard the announcement. But Lamet slowly straightened himself, cast a sidelong glance at the Marquis, and surprised an odd, startled expression on his lofty countenance.

"Captain Faviot!" It was a moment before he spoke again. "Really? Captain Faviot?" Abruptly he added: "Oh, but bring him in at once." After a thoughtful pause the Marquis turned wearily smiling eyes upon his companions. "This," he told them, "should be very interesting. Perhaps I should have informed you— But no matter. You will hear it now." And upon that, he sank his chin to his ruffles and lapsed, frowning, into thought again.

Faviot came in with a clatter of the *sabots* that were a part of his peasant masquerade. He was alert and debonair, and of a slender elegance that was not to be extinguished by his baggy Bréton breeches and rough coat of brown homespun.

There was drawling languor in Puisaye's greeting.

"Ah, Faviot! Well returned! A pleasant surprise. From your long absence, I began to fear that we might not see you again. —Don't go, Lieutenant," he added sharply, to the orderly officer. Then his glance, returning to Faviot, invited him to speak.

The newcomer met the glance with a wry smile. "There were difficulties, Monsieur le Marquis. Until yesterday I lacked a pretext on which to get away from the Republican headquarters at Vannes without exciting suspicion."

"Let us give thanks that in the end you succeeded. Excellent! You conceive that I am impatient for your news."

Faviot became glib. He was able, he asserted, positively to announce that no movement against Quiberon would be possible for at least a fortnight. Not only was Hoche not in sufficient force for any such undertaking, but even the force at his disposal was immobilized by lack of supplies. His men were almost in rags, without boots, and inadequately armed. He was pressing not only for supplies, but also for reinforcements; and Faviot had gathered from the Representative Tallien, who was at Vannes with the General, that the Convention could spare him neither the one nor the other, unless the Army of Cherbourg were to be depleted, which was unlikely. Therefore the Royalist army in Quiberon could at least be sure of a breathing space.

Puisaye heard him out without interruption, his dark, tired eyes solemnly observing him the while. When the tale was told, he looked, with the same gravity of countenance, from one to the other of his coadjutors.

"Very good, is it not?"

The Vicomte de Beaumelle grinned broadly. "It could not be better."

Lamet offered no comment, but his sneering mouth settled into lines of satisfaction.

"Very interesting," said the Marquis slowly. "And it would be very reassuring too, if—if I could only believe it."

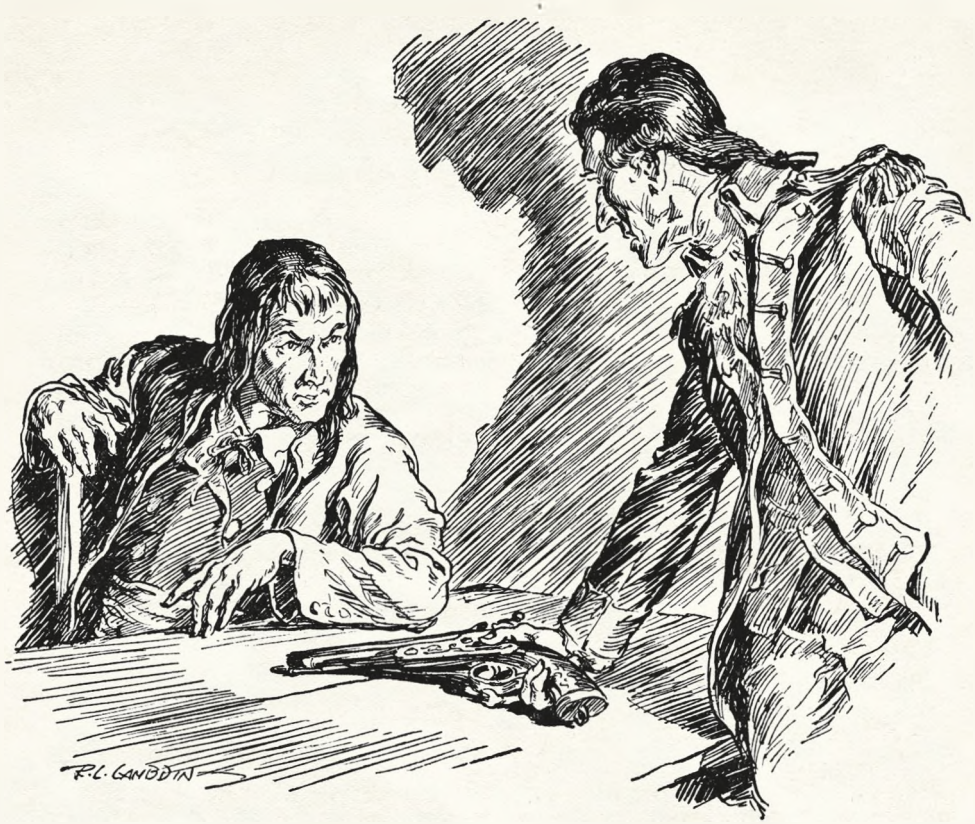
Faviot laughed away the doubt.

"I can assure you, sir, that I am not mistaken."

"I wonder. For it happens, Captain Faviot, that you are not the only agent of mine who has been in Vannes in the last week."

HE paused there, as if to observe the effect of his announcement. But while it brought a startled look into the countenances of Lamet and Beaumelle, who may have caught the ominous note in Puisaye's dry tones, Faviot's only response was the half-smile of one who waits in courteous attention for an explanation.

"Because I despaired of your return," the Marquis resumed, "persuaded that you must have been overtaken by one



"Your only thought is to trick me, Faviot." Lamet pointed to the pistol. "That is all I can do for you."

of those mischances to which men of your activities are sometimes subject, and because it was important that I should have news, I found another gallant fellow to venture into Vannes for me some days ago. He returned this morning; and the odd thing is that in no particular does his report agree with yours. He places General Hoche's force at more than twice the strength of your estimate. He tells me that the Republican troops are fully, and even excellently, equipped; and he assures me that an attack may be expected at any moment."

Faviot's calm was unperturbed by more than a faint scorn. "If he was so grossly deceived, it is clear that he cannot have had my opportunities for correctly informing himself."

"But that is not yet the end of his communication. He discovered that the Republicans are counting confidently upon treachery to place them shortly in possession of Penthièvre—and, so, of Quiberon. He warned me that a double-dealing spy would come to lull me into a false sense of security by exactly the report which you have brought. From this you will gather, Captain Faviot, that his opportunities for informing himself were quite exceptional."

Faviot was stirred at last. He displayed excitement. "But this is fantastic, Monsieur le Marquis! This man is something more than merely mistaken."

Puisaye answered with his weary gentleness: "Do not lose sight of the circumstance that your arrival confirms his report. Also pay particular attention to the fact that the information he brings can be of no service to the enemy, while what you tell me might, but for that forewarning, help General Hoche very considerably."

He looked beyond Faviot at the round-eyed lieutenant. "Be good enough," he requested without change of tone, "to call the guard."

Faviot stared hard at the Marquis. Then, with a toss of the head and a shrug of his shoulders, his voice suddenly bitter, "Bah!" he said. "This is the reward for risking life in your service."

"Will you protract the comedy, sir? The service in which your life was risked, and is now forfeit, was not mine."

"I am to be shot, then, merely because my report does not agree with another's. Shot on a presumption!" His anger flamed forth. It had turned him pale. "So as to round things off, you had better shoot your other agent at the same time. Then you will be sure of having disposed of the false one."

"You forget the evidence I have shown you."

"You call that evidence?"

"We may be able to find more." A corporal clanked in, followed by two troopers, and the Marquis ordered them to search the Captain.

With a twisted smile and another of his shrugs, Faviot submitted himself to the corporal's hands. The contents of his pockets were turned out: a bundle of *assignats,* a silver snuffbox, a silver watch, a handkerchief, a small powder-flask, some loose bullets and a long, handsome pistol with a damascened barrel and a silver-mounted stock. But apart from the *assignats,* which the Marquis examined one by one, not so much as a fragment of paper was discovered. The corporal, however, knew his business, and the search did not end there. Before it was done, Faviot stood naked, the lining had been ripped away from his coat and waistcoat, and even the wooden soles of his clogs had been scrutinized to make sure that they were in one piece. All was vain, and at last he was permitted to resume the wreckage of his wear.

"Take him away, Lieutenant," the Marquis ordered. "Place him under close guard."

The officer tapped Faviot's shoulder. "Come, sir."

FAVIOT did not move. He stood quietly buttoning his coat, squarely facing Puisaye. Beads of sweat glistened on his brow below the black fringe of hair, and he was very pale. But his manner remained quietly composed. He looked at the objects on the table. "Is there any reason why my effects should not be restored to me?"

The Marquis raised his brows. Then he leaned forward, and set aside the pistol and the knife. "You may have the rest," he said.

Faviot smiled. "Add the pistol, monsieur, and a few grains of powder for the priming, and I will save you all further trouble."

"Ah, that—" Puisaye began; then suddenly he checked. "Take him away."

It was some time after he had gone, before the Marquis stirred from his brooding.

"The pity of it!" he said. "For that is a brave man."

"A spy," said Beaumelle in disgust.

"A spy, of course. And it is one of our conventions to hold spies in contempt. Have you ever thought what courage is required to be a spy? Reserve your contempt, my friend, for the traitor here who is prepared to sell us to the enemy. For him, be sure that I shall have no spark of pity."

LAMET'S dark face was gloomy with thought. "I suppose," he grumbled, "that you can depend upon your informer—that there is no possibility of an error about this traitor in our ranks."

"There is no error. And this man must be found. God knows, our situation is difficult enough, without treachery to entangle us further."

"That, of course. But how to find the man unless Faviot can be induced to talk? And Faviot—" Colonel de Lamet shrugged, and began to pace the room. "You've seen the stuff he's made of."

"Yes. I've seen that. But I've known tougher fibers broken. My Chouans have ways of their own to make men talk."

Lamet halted in his pacing, and turned a blank stare of horror upon the Marquis. "My God! Are you thinking of torture?"

The livid reproach and anger in that narrow face annoyed Puisaye. "What then? I have a responsibility to the men of this expedition, to the cause in which I fight. Shall I be squeamish where so much is at stake?" More gently he added: "You must realize that, my dear Lamet."

"Squeamish!" said Lamet. *"Pardieu!* I never yet was accounted that. I'm a rough man of camps, inured to rough ways and even to bloodshed. But this, sir! It belongs to the Dark Ages. It fills me with horror." Peremptorily he ended: "Hang the man, and have done with him."

The gentle-faced Beaumelle softly asked a question: "And let his secret perish with him? Leave our cause and ourselves in jeopardy? Unthinkable!"

"What is unthinkable is that we should dishonor ourselves."

"Lamet!" Puisaye's voice was sharp. "You will leave my honor out of this discussion."

Instantly Lamet displayed contrition. "Forgive me, Excellency. Assign my heat to the repugnance this arouses in me."

"Do you suppose that my own repugnance is less than yours? Don't you perceive that duty leaves me no choice? As it is, even this may fail."

"It surely will, if I know Faviot. Perhaps—" The Colonel broke off, fingering his lip, his brow creased in thought. "I wonder, now. I wonder if we might not succeed without going quite so far." He was suddenly eager. "Will you let me try?"

"Gladly, my dear Lamet. I'll gladly have you try anything that promises success."

The Colonel came briskly to the table. "Then let me have his pistol, Excellency."

"His pistol? What is in your mind?"

"The request he made. I have been on good terms with Faviot, and I can go to him as a friend, to warn him and to reason with him. I shall remind him that there is no firing-party for spies; that hanging is what awaits him; and that even this is not the worst that he has to fear—that, in short, he will be tortured if he refuses to speak. The prospect may suffice to weaken his spirit; then will be the time to offer him his pistol, so that he may escape the pain and ignominy of the rope: the pistol in exchange for the traitor's name. It may act."

"Why should it? It is hardly a tempting offer."

"But it is always something; and backed by the threat of torture, it may seem much."

"A waste of time," was the uncompromising opinion of the cherubic Beaumelle.

"But it costs us nothing to try," Lamet insisted. "If I fail, we shall have lost nothing."

"True," the Marquis agreed, but without fervor. He considered a moment; then shrugged. "Very well, Lamet. Do your best."

The Colonel waited for no more. "Trust me," he said, and pocketing the pistol, he went off on his errand.

THE lieutenant conducted him to the room, a little way down the corridor, in which Faviot had been confined. Lamet went in alone, and closed the door.

The prisoner, seated cross-legged beside a square deal table on which his elbow rested, looked up when the Colonel stood before him; but he made no shift to rise, and there was a dryness in his greeting.

"Ah, my Colonel. I thought that you would come."

Lamet stepped to the opposite side of the table, his face dark. He spoke quietly across it. "You are in bad case, my friend."

"Faith, one might suspect it."

"Since you return empty-handed, I do not understand why you should have returned at all."

There was a faint, humorous insolence in Faviot's reply. "Which means, I suppose, that you will be hoping that I may be not quite empty-handed, after all. Is it not?"

"I will not pretend," said Lamet, "that our relations are of a sentimental nature."

AFTER that there was a silent pause, each waiting for the other.

"Well?" snapped the Colonel at last. "You failed at Vannes, did you not?"

"The clear understanding was that if I failed, I should not return. Yet I am here."

The light of excitement kindled in Lamet's dark eyes. "But then—"

"It's this way: the Representatives agree to the amount, but not your conditions. Tallien will not trust you to the extent of paying in advance."

"When I offered to pledge my honor?"

"Your honor!" Faviot's quiet smile brought the blood into the Colonel's sallow cheeks. "My friend, I have come back to offer a compromise. The half-million livres in gold has been sent to Switzerland, and lodged for you at Katzenstein's Bank in Bâle. An order on Katzenstein will be delivered to you, together with a passport, the moment this job is done, which should be some three days hence: on the night of the twentieth, unless you perceive an inconvenience in the date."

The Colonel paced away to the door and back. His face was dark, and he breathed quickly. When he had halted again, keeping his voice to the low mutter which they had used, "I told you," he said through his teeth, "that I would work only cash in hand. Do you suppose I'll risk my neck on the word of any filthy *sans-culotte?* You should have believed me, and kept away, instead of running your neck into a noose. For they won't even shoot you, Faviot. They'll hang you. And I can do noth-

ing for you—nothing but this." And he lugged from his pocket Faviot's silver-mounted pistol, and flung it on the table. From a small powder-flask he poured beside it a little heap of black powder for the priming.

"Ah!" Faviot uncrossed his legs. In silence, his face set, he watched the Colonel take up the pistol again, raise the lid of the pan and convey to it a couple of pinches of the powder.

When he had set the weapon back upon the board at the Captain's elbow, Faviot spoke.

"Much obliged. It was clever and humane of you to persuade the Marquis to grant me this means of comparatively easy exit. Very clever. And thoughtful. But it is neither clever nor thoughtful to refuse a little risk where half a million is to be made. And made so easily."

IT was no overstatement. The plan, for which the collaboration of a person in Lamet's position of authority at Penthièvre was an absolute essential, was of an utter simplicity:

Since a frontal attack upon Penthièvre was likely to prove too costly even if successful, Hoche had determined upon an assault from the sea. He would approach in force by night, not from the great bay, which was kept by the British fleet, but from the open western side, landing his troops on the rocks from which the fortress sprang. Lamet's part, to be played at dead of night on the appointed date, was to deliver the six-score Republican prisoners from their captivity in the fort, quietly arm them from the arsenal, proceed with them as quietly, to overpower the sentries, and then, in possession of the ramparts, to await there the troops that would scale the walls.

The rest of the plan was simpler still. These invaders would overpower the sleeping garrison, throw down the bridge and sally forth to fall upon the rear of the advanced entrenchments, while another Republican division charged them simultaneously in front. Failure was hardly possible; and before daybreak Penthièvre, and consequently all Quiberon, should be in the hands of Hoche, and the Royalist adventure would be definitely at an end.

The real risk, in Colonel de Lamet's mind, was not the risk of playing his prescribed part in this, but the risk of being cheated by the Republicans when it was played. He said so plainly.

Faviot sighed. "You do the Convention a gross injustice. You may depend that the order on Katzenstein, and the passport, will be promptly delivered to you, once Penthièvre is captured. I give you my word that provision has been made. The Convention does not break faith. Half a million! Almost as much as was paid the Duke of Brunswick to lose the battle of Valmy."

His firm assurances were not without effect. With hands clasped behind him, the Colonel paced away again, hesitation obviously battling with his greed.

"Of course, as things have fallen out," Faviot quietly added, and so, perhaps, disclosed the confidence upon which he based his composure, "you will have to contrive to get me out of this, so that I may carry word of the date agreed. To a man in your position of authority, that should be easy enough."

Lamet spun round on his heel to face him. "Ah! Have you been trusting to that? That's the trick, is it? I see. But these papers? This order and this passport? Where are they?"

"I have said that provision has been made. They will be delivered to you without fail when you've done your part."

"You are lying, Faviot. Your only thought is to trick me into saving your dirty skin. Well, my friend, you've miscalculated." He pointed to the pistol. "That is all that I can do for you."

Faviot's nonchalant assurance was at last swept away. He grew deathly pale; his eyes narrowed. He was bitter. "The worst of dealing with a betrayer is that he sees a betrayer in every other man. Wait!" He sprang suddenly to his feet. Lamet was already at the door. "Wait, or you may regret it before you are an hour older."

THE Colonel turned, his hand upon the latch. "What's that?"

"Come back, and listen." Faviot sat down again, and again leaned his elbow on the table. His voice resumed its earlier smoothness. "It's a delicate concern of yours to wish to save me the unpleasantness of hanging."

"It's not only from hanging that I save you, my friend, but from Chouan torture," Lamet answered—too quickly, as he realized when he heard Faviot's soft, bitter laugh.

"So, so! The murder's out. Your concern for me becomes understandable. You fear that under torture I may say too much. Faith, now, that gives me to

think, my Colonel. I wonder, could I make a bargain with Monsieur de Puisaye?"

"A bargain?" Lamet turned cold from head to foot.

"It should be worth more to him to learn the name of his betrayer than just to hang a wretched spy. If I were to offer him that information in return for my life— Who knows?"

"Name of God!" The Colonel leaned heavily upon the table, his eyes ablaze in a face turned leaden. "Miserable cur! Would you buy your life at the price of betraying the side that pays you?"

"An overstatement, my Colonel. Only at the price of betraying you, by which my side would lose nothing, since you refuse to serve us. Come, now: it is not too late to change your mind. Be sensible, in your own interest. The Republic is not to be cheated; neither am I. You'll save your skin only by fixing the date for the enterprise, and getting me out of this, so that I may carry word of it to Hoche. There's more than half a million in it for you now. There's your life as well. You may be risking it if you act as I demand. You will certainly forfeit it if you don't."

LAMET trembled so with rage and fear that the table upon which he leaned shook under his weight. His voice came in a hoarse rasp.

"You wretched fool! Do you think your bare word—the word of a damned spy—will be believed against mine?"

"Perhaps not. But my proofs will be."

"Proofs? What proofs?"

"You'll find out, if you persist in obstinacy. Meanwhile, take my word for it. For that and the rest. It's your only hope of salvation—to say nothing of fortune."

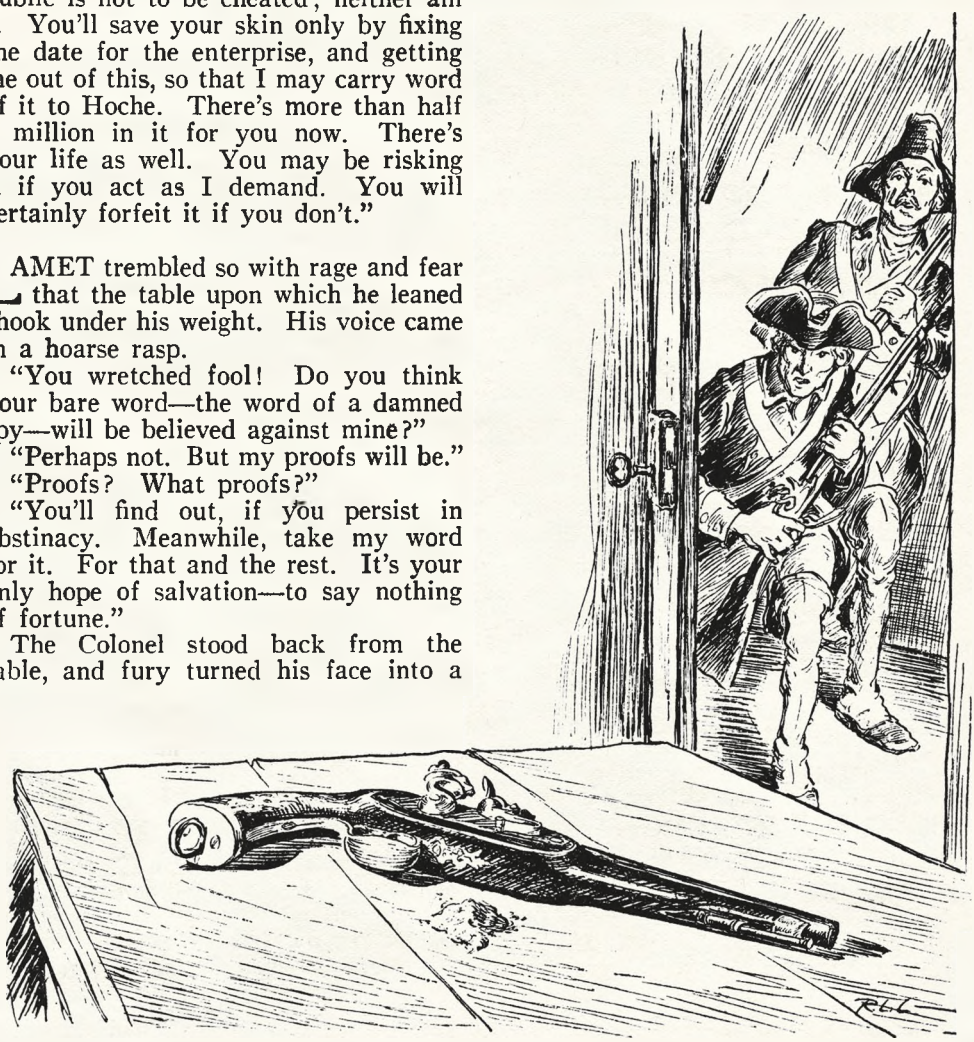
The Colonel stood back from the table, and fury turned his face into a mask of evil. Standing there, he seemed to strike an attitude, his left hand behind him, his right thrust into the breast of his gold-laced coat.

Faviot, seated at his ease, met that lowering glance of baffled rage with a sly smile of triumph.

"Well, my Colonel?" he asked at last. "What is your answer?"

It came on the instant. *"This!"* The hand leaped from Lamet's breast, bringing a pistol with it. There was a flash and a report, and Faviot went over backward with his chair, shot through the head. Momentarily insane from passion, the slayer leaned over the table. "Talk now, you son of a dog!" he snarled.

A clatter of steps in the corridor brought him instantly to a full sense of the situation, and instantly his tale was ready. To the two guards who ran in,



"He attacks you with bare hands. Why did he not use the pistol?"

and to the corporal and the lieutenant who presently followed, Lamet, having coughed the smoke from his lungs, explained shortly.

"I had to shoot him in self-defence. It's deplorable. The dog should have hanged."

THEY looked at him in blank astonishment, then shuffled across the room, and stood about the fallen man, staring at his shattered head, while with every heart-beat Lamet was recovering his self-control, now that he knew himself secure.

He was mopping his brow with a handkerchief, when suddenly the Marquis of Puisaye appeared in the open doorway.

"What has happened? I heard a shot, and—" His keen glance raked the room. "Faviot!" he exclaimed, and asked at once: "Is he dead?"

"Unfortunately," said Lamet, and repeated: "I was constrained to shoot him in self-defence."

"Ah!" Puisaye's questing eyes observed the pistol on the table, and the significant grains of powder beside it, and from their presence there he drew a swift conclusion. "He spoke, then?"

Lamet, perceiving the evidence that had guided Puisaye, was momentarily taken aback. It left him only one possible answer. "Yes. He spoke." There was a slight pause before he added the first name that occurred to him. "He accused Sombreuil."

The Marquis gave him a blank stare. In all the *émigré* ranks, there was no nobler or more honored name. Perhaps it was on this very account that Lamet had chosen it, so that the Marquis should conclude, as he did: "He lied, then." He spoke with angry emphasis. "As well might he have named me or you. And you believed him! You must have believed him, since you gave him the pistol. Where were your wits, man? Name of God, where were your wits? And now the rascal's gone, taking his secret with him, leaving us perhaps at the mercy of this unknown traitor! What have you done, Lamet? What have you done?"

Lamet displayed distress. "He seemed so sincere," he excused himself. He swore it. He took a solemn oath that it was Sombreuil. After all, there's no more difficulty in believing it of him than of another, where all are men of honor, and—"

His voice trailed into silence. Puisaye was at the table. He had picked up the pistol, raised the lid of the pan, and having set it down again, with the single word, "Primed," he was now facing Lamet once more, a frown between his brows. "But you said that you shot him in self-defence."

"Why, so I did, and only just in time. He sprang at me like a raging madman as I was turning to leave."

"To attack you with his bare hands?"

"Why, yes—with his bare hands."

"And you see nothing odd in that?"

"Odd? The instinctive action of a man blinded by rage and despair."

"He had a pistol at his elbow. You are armed. And yet he lets the pistol lie, and attacks you with bare hands. What instincts did he obey? Why did he not use the pistol? It was ready primed. Why did he not use it? What reason could have—" He broke off sharply, his eyes dilating with sudden amazed vision. "God of God!" He swung aside, drew up a chair, sat down and took up the weapon. He drew the ramrod, and probed the barrel, to find it loaded. For an instant this seemed to leave him at a loss. Then, under the wondering eyes of all, he drew the charge. Bullet, wad and powder lay presently on the table. He probed again, and again seemed at fault. He took up almost casually the crumpled wad and opened it out—and then with suddenly quickened interest smoothed the two thin sheets of folded and rolled paper that he found composing it. As he scanned them, anger, scorn, and lastly horror, overspread his handsome face.

IT was a long moment before he slowly raised his eyes to meet the watchful and uneasy stare of Colonel de Lamet. Puisaye's expression was now of a deadly weariness, and weary was the voice in which he addressed the Colonel.

"I have here," he said, "an order on Katzenstein's Bank in Bâle for a half million livres in gold, payable to you, Colonel de Lamet, and a passport also in your name. Both are signed by the Representatives Tallien and Bled. I will not trouble you to explain. It is unnecessary. I now perfectly understand why you should have thought it necessary to shoot Faviot. But it has not pleased God that even thus you should prevent him from supplying me with the name of our betrayer and the proof of his treason."

Hanging Johnny

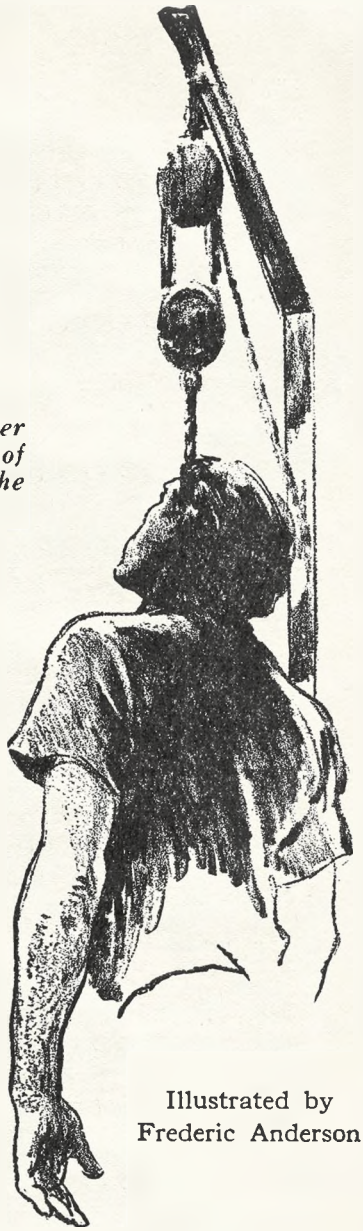
A whaling voyage and a murdered skipper leads in dramatic fashion to the invention of davits for the launching of small-boats: the twenty-sixth story in this great series.

By

H. BEDFORD-JONES

and

CAPTAIN L. B. WILLIAMS



Illustrated by Frederic Anderson

THE Inner Harbor yacht anchorage is the place for curiosity-seekers who know a thing or two about sailing-ship rigs, old and new. There, rubbing strakes with the more modern craft, may be seen Chesapeake Bay bugeyes, Bahama spongers, Grand Bank codfishers, Down East fore-and-afters, and even South Sea outrigger war-canoes. For the movies and those who make them gather rigs from all the world over.

Some of the older wind-ships sail only for the movies. Some are still owned by die-hard masters, and still make a living for their owners. A crowd of us were watching one day when a tall-sparred skysail-yarder stood up for the anchorage behind a tug. Her patched canvas was harbor-furled. She was weathered and salt-crusted as if from a stormy voyage. When she swung, we saw between her crude quarter-davits the legend: *Sharon, New Bedford.*

"An old-time whaler!" exclaimed somebody.

"Whaler, nothing!" snorted old Cap'n Tucker, master-rigger in the shipyards. "It's Cap'n Charley Guntert's schooner *Lottie Carson* with a new dress. I set up them topmasts myself and rigged her square for the movies. And rigged her wrong, for whalers of her day."

"Another fake," said one of the yacht-club boatkeepers. "Well, she looks like a whaler, anyhow."

"She don't, neither," growled Cap'n Tucker. "I just told you I rigged her wrong. Them davits swung overside—whalers of the early period didn't have boat-davits."

Boat-davits! I had searched a hundred books on the sea without success, for certain information covering those two words; luckily, I kept silent. For Captain Tucker was a crusty soul, and only diplomacy would make him talk.

The others, too, eyed him warily. Cap'n Tucker was famous for his love of

The mate, Johnny Carver—a devil if there ever was one.

fiery Barbados rum, his crotchety temper and his tales of the sea.

"The movie people," I ventured, just to guide the matter aright, "must have known what they were about when they ordered those davits rigged. These days they're careful about ships and rigs in the pictures."

Cap'n Tucker snorted, thereby disposing of moving-picture research. One of the others, with a wink at me, put in a barb and prodded it.

"I suppose New Bedford whalers, like every other rag-wagon that ever sailed the ocean, are just nuts for you. Of course you know all about 'em."

The old skipper rose to the bait of sarcasm.

"I do!" he asserted, bridling. "If you Johnny-come-lately seamen knew as much about the gingerbread gas-barges you shine bright-work on, it'd be better for your owners."

"Sure, sure," agreed the heckler. "But that fake you rigged there—where'd you get the notion of a whaler with skysails? Was it from some ship named *Sharon* you shipped aboard when you were a lad, maybe?"

"Mebbe it was," snapped Cap'n Tucker. He fished out a blackened clay pipe and stuffed it with whittled navy plug, as though he had said his say.

I struck in promptly:

"Was there ever a New Bedford whaler of that name, I wonder?"

"There was," blurted the skipper. "And with a woman skipper. I got the log she kept; it's a hundred and seventeen year' old."

"Then she didn't have boat-davits on her ship," I said with an air of finality.

"She had the first there ever was!" snapped Cap'n Tucker, with a glare at me. And then he was off, full steam. He began to talk as he puffed his clay pipe alight, and he kept right on talking; while we gazed out as the fake whaler came to anchor, he broke out the coil and unwound his yarn fathom by fathom.

NOT that the *Sharon* left New Bedford with a woman skipper; not likely! As though we stood on her swaying poop, we could see Cap'n David Davids in the dawn, asleep in his canvas-backed chair cleated to the deck in the lee of the wheelhouse. The skipper always kept the deck, first night out, so the mates, who had set all the canvas and worked out the ship, could get some rest. Utility, not kindness; there was no kindness in Cap'n David Davids. Despite the potted flowers below, and the window-curtains, and the wife who sailed with him, he was the best-hated skipper, and the *Sharon* the worst hellship, afloat.

A frowsy seaman, one bleary eye cocked at the shivering main-topsail leach, held the *Sharon* before a stiff nor'wester. He cursed the ship and the skipper impartially, but his weary spirits lifted as a dark form padded forward on silent feet. It was the mate going to break out the drunks. Soon he would be relieved. The mate, aye, and a bucko! Johnny Carver, and a devil if there ever was one.

The whaler made dogged headway under bellying courses, huge single topsails, topgallants and royals. The dark eastern horizon began to light up faintly as Johnny Carver paused by the main fife-rail, then went on forward. A lean man, with eyes like the following sharks when the try-works were sooting up the heavens. If David Davids was the most cruel and rapacious of all skippers who sailed after oil, Johnny Carver was the best brutal driver in the fleet. A good pair, said sullen-eyed men.

With boot and a hardwood heaver used for beating down ice-stiffened sails, Johnny hazed the drunken crew up the orlop companion, just as the first reflections of the sun touched the royals with a rosy glow. They rubbed bleary eyes and stared dazedly, as he produced a greasy piece of paper.

"Line up there by the main hatch," he growled. "Answer to your names as you've marked 'em on the articles. . . . John Kane, A.B.!"

"Here, sir! But I didn't sign on—"

"Pipe down! You all signed for a three-year voyage after sperm. Robert Stone—Tom Avery—Philo Ramsgate—"

No answer to this last. Johnny Carver swept the motley file with challenging eyes, then looked to where a big-boned blond man sat in the lee of the forward house, cynically watching proceedings. A dirty, disheveled man in white shirt and trousers and silk stockings, obviously a gentleman in distress.

"You, Philo Ramsgate! On your pins! Aft here for muster."

The other never budged, and Johnny Carver started for him.

Lieutenant Philip Rand of the U. S. S. *Ranger* surveyed the mate with his cynical gaze, and laughed harshly as Johnny Carver halted before him.

"Now I know why I'm aboard Cap'n David's old fish-barge!" he observed. "I met you somewhere last night and stood you a drink, eh? That's all I remember. Shanghaied me, did you? Stripped me and shanghaied me! That's a joke, all right; but it's on you."

JOHNNY CARVER glowered, and hefted the hardwood heaver.

"None of your fine airs with me, you thick-headed swab! I never clapped eyes on you before. The runner delivered you with the others, and all drunk."

"You lie," said Rand flatly.

"What? Look here, blast you! Signed on as Philo Ramsgate, you are—"

"Have it your own way," broke in Rand, with a shrug. "Cap'n Davids happens to be a friend of mine, my fine bucko."

"Oh!" said Johnny Carver with a sneer. "And I suppose the Missus is baking cakes for you right now, huh?"

"If you refer to Mrs. Davids, I don't know her, but I've heard a lot of her," Rand rejoined, with an air of casual chatting; but his eye was alert, for he guessed what was coming.

Swift as a striking snake, Johnny Carver lashed out with no warning at all. To his intense disgust, Rand not only dodged the heaver, but was up and on his feet, his own arm lashing out in return. The crack of the blow was sweet and clean, and the force of it sent Johnny Carver staggering back.

"Assault a United States officer, will you?" rasped Rand. "Try again if you want more of the same, my bucko."

Carver, his thin features contorted by a blaze of fury, clapped hand to pocket; a cry of warning came from the other men as he whipped out a little brass pistol. He had been struck and shamed before the men, and there was but one answer.

"Officer be damned!" said he, as he cocked the pistol. "There's no officers aboard this ship but me—"

Then came a paralyzing sound that halted everything, that unnerved both men and all who heard; the sound that brought every man aboard plunging to the the windswept deck pellmell. A woman's scream of mortal anguish, so blood-chilling, lifting so eerily on the wings of the wind from aft, that it went through Rand like a knife.

Johnny Carver turned a pallid face, swung around, went aft at a run. Rand joined him. The other men trailed after. They halted beside the booby hatch at the break of the poop, staring up at the woman there. She was in seaman's trousers and boots, watch-cap and faded pilot jacket, her hair flying, and a look in her face of such frozen horror that it hit them like a blow.

"The Cap'n's dead," she said jerkily. "Dead. Stabbed while he slept in his chair. A knife in him. Lay up here, Mister. The rest of you scum, stay for'ard. Break out the mates and boatsteerers. Mister, do you know an order when you hear one?"

Johnny Carver wakened, and moved to the ladder obediently. The woman stood there, staring down at the rest of them.

Rand knew that she was the Captain's wife. He had heard of her. Davids had spoken of her only yesterday; she sailed with him, and her flower-pots and curtains made the *Sharon* a ship to talk about. She had a hard, bony face, a glitter in her eyes, a grim mouth.

IT was not a good moment to choose, but Rand chose it. He saluted her and spoke.

"Lieutenant Rand of the Navy, ma'am. I was talking with your husband yesterday; I've known him on and off for some time. I was shanghaied aboard here—"

"Lay for'ard and clap a stopper on your jaw," she broke in. "I don't know you and never heard of you. Stow it."

She swung around, ignoring him, a woman of cold indomitable fury. The body of Cap'n Davids was stiffening in his chair; she ignored that, too, and fastened her eyes on the mustering afterguard. She listened as Johnny Carver questioned the frowsy helmsman.

"I dunno, sir," came the response. "I seen you go for'ard; it was too dark to see anything. I aint even sure it was you. I hadn't no time to stare about the deck."

Mrs. Davids eyed them with that frozen glitter: Johnny Carver and the other two mates—the Dubois twins, Cain and Abel, Maine Indian halfbreeds, infamous rogues but peerless whalers and harpooners; alike and ugly as two cutting spades, their beady eyes were the only signs of life in their wooden brown faces. A little apart stood the three Portuguese boat-steerers from Santiago, rolling yellowish eyeballs.

"Since I'm in command now," spoke up Johnny Carver, "I'll call all hands and get to investigating—"

"You're not in command," spoke up Mrs. Davids. "The Cap'n is dead, but that doesn't make you master. You'll stay in your place, Mister. As owner, I appoint myself master for the rest o' this cruise."

Johnny Carver's lean jaw dropped. The two Indian brethren regarded her impassively. She dismissed the boat-steerers from suspicion; they were not the men to have knifed David Davids. She eyed the three mates with bitter gaze.

"Rogues for'ard and rogues aft, as usual," she rasped uncompromisingly. "You've all sailed with us before. You all hated him— Shut up! None of your back-talk," she broke out, as the three mates stirred angrily. "Any man for'ard might ha' done it, or you."

Johnny Carver cleared his throat. "Ma'am, if I was you, I'd go back to port and let proper authority handle this."

"If I were you, I would," she said scathingly, regarding him with cold fury. "But thank God, I'm not you! You three mates have made us plenty of trouble; he's held you in your place, and you've hated him for it. Now I'm holding you in your place, and I can do it. I'll have none of your bewigged shysters and drooling juries covering up this crime. It'll come out who did it. Murder always comes out."

ONE of the Portuguese boat-steerers, stealing a glance at the corpse, looked back to her and bobbed his head, the gold rings in his ears shaking in the sunrise light.

"Missee, how you find out?" he asked, like a child.

"The black-hearted Judas who did this can't escape," she said. "I don't know who did it; but he knows, and God knows. I don't believe in taking justice into my own hands when the course aint clear. I'm leaving it to a higher power, and we're cruising after sperm till our bar'ls get filled. Mr. Carver, you and the mates take Cap'n Davids below. José Santos, go fetch Sails with his ditty-bag and a new bolt of canvas. We bury the Cap'n at meridian, this date."

A practical woman, Mrs. Davids.

AS day drew into day, and days into weeks, the smirks and grins forward died out. From officers to cook, the crew stood in a deadly fear of the woman skipper which was hard to understand. Rand, who never ventured again to intrude himself upon her, and who found Johnny Carver avoiding him somewhat gingerly, accepted his situation with the best possible grace; there was no help for it, and he was not the man to make a fool of himself.

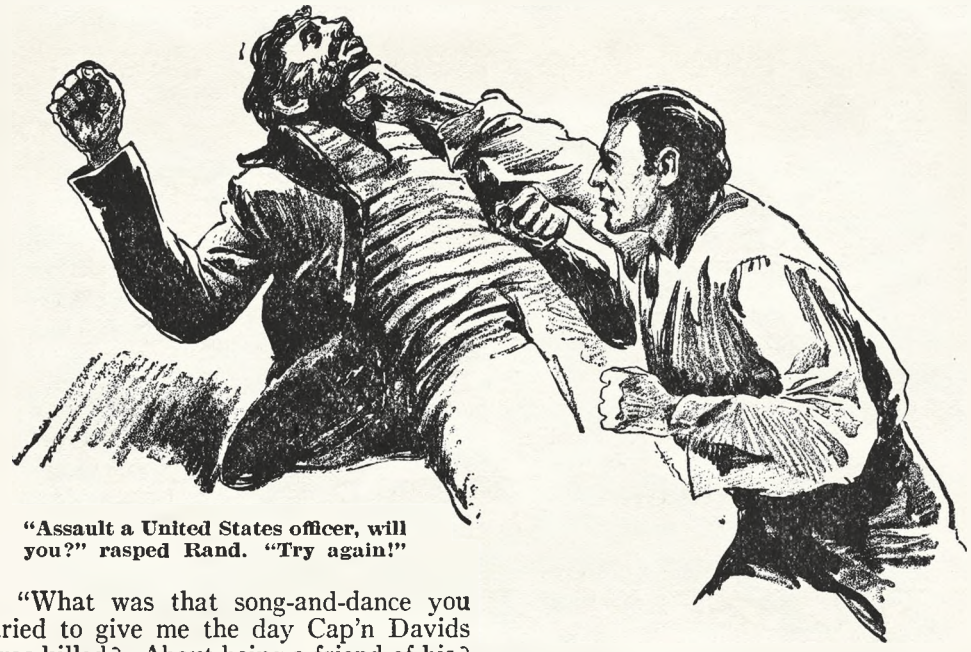
He could understand this cold, grim woman who shared her bitter hatred among all hands as she waited to learn who had murdered her husband. He could understand the stark and uncompromising personality of her. The men would have cursed and feared Davids, for his harsh fist and flailing boots; but they feared her tongue tenfold more, and the hard spirit of her. A woman skipper was new and incredible to them.

Ever stony of face as a granite image, she did the master's work, but she kept her distance and also kept to herself. She played no favorites and asked no favors; that she actually hated every man aboard, was plain enough. She made it plain the day the whaleboats were overhauled. Those gimlet eyes of hers missed nothing, and she let out burning words at Johnny Carver.

"You're slack, Mister," she said caustically. "You let the hands shirk, and you shirk as well. Smarten up, if you ever expect to fill those bar'ls below. Get the try-works cleaned up, and put the cooper to work on his job. And send up a hand to cut adrift that Irish pennant on the fore royal lift. Next time I see one, you'll lay aloft."

"I'm an officer, remember," growled Johnny Carver.

"And I'm master." She turned her back and paced up and down, and finally came to a halt beside the helmsman.



"Assault a United States officer, will you?" rasped Rand. "Try again!"

"What was that song-and-dance you tried to give me the day Cap'n Davids was killed? About being a friend of his? A Navy officer?"

Rand gave her a glance, with a sense of shock at her words, at the fact that she remembered what he had said that day.

"It was so," he rejoined calmly. "I had met your husband several times. I'm an officer, yes. I had a few drinks the night you sailed, and was shanghaied."

She eyed him coldly. "You don't seem het up about it."

"I've got over that," said Rand. "Wouldn't do any good to rant and rave. Besides, there'll come a reckoning later, if I want it; and I'm not sure that I shall. I'm rather enjoying myself, Cap'n. That is, except for your abominable food."

She grunted. "The food's all right. You're the one man aboard who knows his job. Can you navigate?"

"Naturally."

With this, she turned away and did not speak to him again.

She hazed Johnny Carver, however, with the natural result; Johnny Carver took it out on the others. The food got bad and the water worse; no sperm were raised, and they lacked the relief of violent action to work off spleen.

THERE was no further word of Captain Davids' murder; not a word, except among the men forward. Rand had been keeping his ears open, and learned nothing at all. Gamming in the fo'c'stle gave him no information. He could well believe that any one of a dozen men aboard had given that deathly thrust, but he could suspect no particular man.

The skipper saw everything, yet she seemed to notice nothing. She paced the deck endlessly, her stony features masking unshared thoughts. She had grown gaunt and hollow of cheek, and had become a sexless creature devoid of femininity. Her hair was shorn close; in her rough garb, she could have passed easily for a man. . . .

Abruptly, they sighted a school of blackfish one morning, and the boats were put out for harpoon drill. Rand, to his surprise, was ordered to take part as boat-steerer. When the day was over, he stood out as the only promising harpooner among the hands forward. That evening, at change of watches, Johnny Carver curtly addressed him.

"Stow your dunnage in the for'ard cabin, Ramsgate. Skipper's promoted you to boat-steerer. You can mug up with the Portygees and learn your business. Officer, you are."

Rand met his surly, biting gaze and managed a smile.

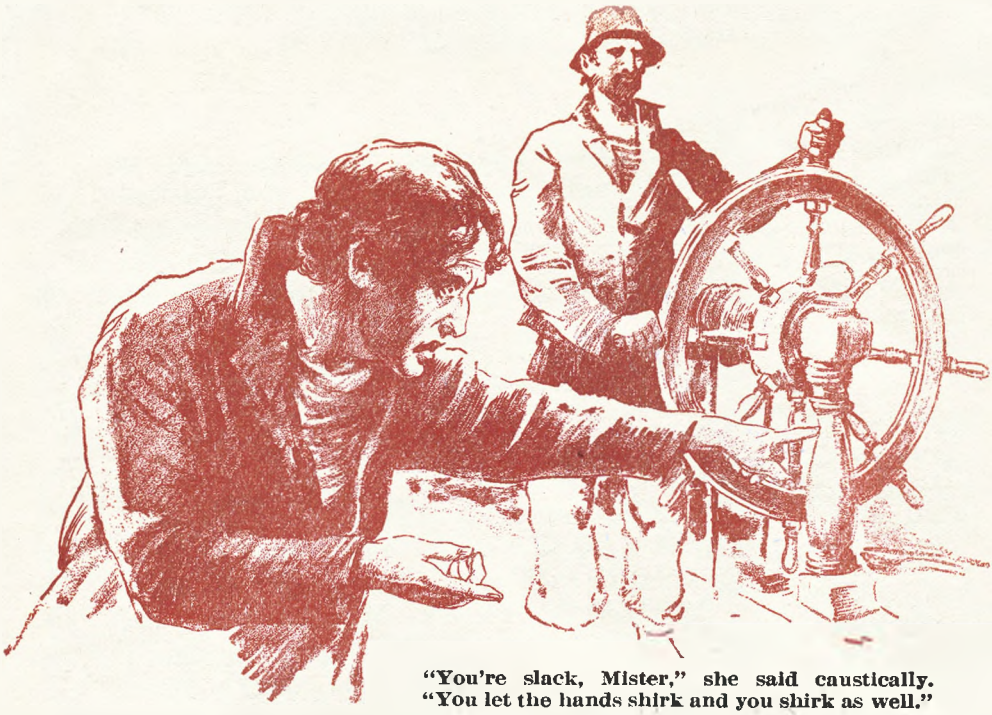
"No thanks to you. Who shanghaied me aboard here?"

"Blast you!" snarled Johnny Carver. "Damned fine gentleman still, huh?"

The voice of Mrs. Davids suddenly lashed out; she had approached them unobserved.

"Belay it! I'll have no bickering aft. Instead of quarreling and cursing, you two might find some means of launching the boats faster. This morning you looked like bumboats going after garbage."

She turned away and was gone, with no more words.



"You're slack, Mister," she said caustically. "You let the hands shirk and you shirk as well."

There was dark talk forward; the gloomy Finn carpenter started it, when some one mentioned the sooty gull hovering overhead when Cap'n Davids was buried. Meantime, the *Sharon* sailed south and ever south, bootlessly, raising Tristan d'Acunha in Latitude 37 and passing under a t'gallant breeze in her way to Mozambique.

A legendary bird, said the Finn, an omen of ill-fortune. Into that sooty flying bird had gone the spirit of Cap'n Davids, and one day he would return to perch on the main truck. When that happened, death would again come to the ship.

An ominous cloud that no amount of brilliant sunshine could dispel, settled upon the men forward. Instead of occupying their spare time with model-making and scrimshaw work, they sat around grumbling, cursing. With the passing of Cap'n Davids, they said, luck had deserted the ship. And so it seemed, for never a whale was raised. . . .

One evening in the doldrums, an insufferably hot evening, Rand had the deck watch. Mrs. Davids—now "Cap'n" to all hands—was below as usual when not on duty. The three Portuguese boat-steerers sat on the booby-hatch whispering mysteriously in the darkness. Johnny Carver and the half-Indian Dubois twins sat playing cards in the forward cabin, where the reeking oil lamp, slung in gimbals, lent odor to the discomfort.

Rand went down to the cabin in search of his tobacco pouch. No thought of eavesdropping occurred to him, nor did he attempt to silence his approach; but outside the half-open door, the voice of Johnny Carver checked him abruptly.

"A fine cruise this is!" The mate flung down his cards with an obscene oath. "No sign o' fish, not a barrel coopered yet. The damned tub's jinxed, like that horse-faced Finn says."

"Your fault," said Abel Dubois.

Rand peered in. Johnny Carver was staring up at a calendar on the bulkhead. Along with a ship under sail and the usual chandler's advertising, was the hurricane verse:

June, too soon.
July, stand by!
August, look out you must;
September, remember!
October—all over.

As the dour halfbreed spoke, Johnny Carver jerked his head around. The two dark men sat watching him like a pair of lynxes, unblinking, impassive.

"What d'ye mean by that?" he snapped with a growl of challenge, his shark's eyes alert and dangerous.

"Stow it," said Cain Dubois laconically. "I saw you. That morning."

The lean face of Johnny Carver tautened into gray flint.

"What d'ye mean?" he repeated.

"Nothing." Abel Dubois reached for the cards. "Aint our business. Forget it. My deal, aint it?"

The game went on. Rand waited, but caught nothing further than growling

oaths, and went back on deck—quietly, this time.

So there the truth had come out; Johnny Carver had done the trick. And what of it? Rand knew those two half-breeds would never talk; they had hated Cap'n Davids virulently, as most others had hated him. Still thinking of the secret he had thus surprised, but which occasioned him no surprise, he was aware of the skipper's gaunt shape, and her voice.

"Come down to the cabin at eight bells, Ramsgate."

He assented mechanically. He had accepted the name with the situation; Ramsgate or Rand, it was all one.

When he went into the cabin, Mrs. Davids was sitting over the log-book. She looked up at him, her face stony.

"Gallows," she said abruptly. "What does that make you think of?"

Rand barked out a laugh of exasperation at her cryptic, inhuman manner. He felt the force of her, as everyone felt it: a hard, driving force of character that was beyond a woman's nature.

"Makes me think of your mate, for one thing," he snapped.

Instantly she came alive. Her eyes flashed. Her face changed; a spot of color rushed into her weathered cheeks.

"Out with it!" she said in a low, tense voice. "Out with it!"

"Nothing to prove it," he answered. "I heard a bit o' talk; enough to make me think who killed your husband. Those that know, won't talk."

For a moment she regarded him steadily, searchingly, and then nodded.

"Aye; Johnny Carver did it. I've thought as much all the time. Others won't talk, eh? They'll be punished for that. Wait and see. I've nothing to do but sail the ship until God takes action. Never fear, it'll come! And I stay at sea till it does come, if the stores turn to solid weevils and the water to sour vinegar; we put into no port till the punishment has come from above."

MENTALLY, Rand recoiled from her; she was mad, insane upon her fixed idea, he thought.

"Was that what you called me down here for?" he demanded.

"I called you down on ship's business," she rapped out in her coldly hostile way. Shoving back her chair, she rose. "Come here."

Rand turned with her to the stern port with its curtains and potted flowers. On a shelf stood a model of the *Sharon,* a neat bit of work. From the model's deck she picked up two tiny L-shaped bits of wood. She inserted each one upside down in holes just abaft the miniature lazaret hatch, so that the arms protruded over the rail.

"This is the gallows I had in mind," she said.

Rand was positive now that she was daft. A moment later he revised his opinion.

THROUGH holes drilled at the end of each protruding arm, she inserted lengths of twine, which were made fast to a miniature whaleboat. With these, she hoisted the little boat until it hung beneath the counter of the model ship. A sharp exclamation broke from Rand.

"Hello! Upon my word, Mrs. Davids —a hoist for boats!"

"Appears to surprise you that a woman could use her brains," she rejoined acidly. "I worked this out last year, and Cap'n Davids laughed at me. Yes, it's a hoist, to lower away fast and hoist fast. And I got the idea," she added grimly, "by thinking about how Johnny Carver would look when he trips the gallows. You've got more brains than anyone else aboard. Get to work with the Finn; he's a right good smith. Set a fire in the try-works and have him beat out a metal gallows like this, a pair of 'em."

"You compliment me," Rand said ironically; then his enthusiasm broke down the bars. "Why, Cap'n, this is a great notion, positively great! Do you know what it'll mean to ships, if it works —to all ships alike? Not alone speed in hoisting boats out and in, but safety and convenience—"

"If it works?" broke in Mrs. Davids with caustic energy. "You fool, there's nothing to make it work except a block rove at the end of each gallows! Nothing else to keep it from working, if a body has common sense. A man on each lift to haul away, and what more d'ye want?"

"We'd better put in at Ascension Island for fresh water," blurted Rand.

"I've told you once, and you can pass on the word to the scum for'ard, we'll put in nowhere till the murderer of Cap'n Davids has received punishment!"

From that wildly glaring eye and harsh voice, Rand fled.

He took with him, however, the idea of the gallows; a very simple thing. And

A hit! Rand sprang aft. As he did so, Johnny Carver's harpoon flashed.

with next morning, he was at work upon it with the Finn. He told no one at all what the thing was, except that it was a contraption of the skipper's implying that he himself did not know; and for the next three or four days he was hard at work.

Meantime, all hands muttered blackly, realizing that the ship was not putting in at Ascension. There was talk of lofty Green Mountain, and the eleven-fathom anchorage off Plymouth Point, and the wonders that a run ashore might do for everyone; hatred and a vicious spirit grew both forward and aft.

Never in all these weeks had Rand run foul again of Johnny Carver. A dark, quick look like a stab, a curl of the thin lip, a rasp of the voice—nothing more. But now Rand discovered a change in the man, a more open hostility, a meaningless but challenging oath when they met. Rand refused the challenge. Queerly enough, the secret knowledge that this man was the murderer of Cap'n Davids steadied him. He remained cool, alert, wary, and thereby irritated Johnny Carver the more.

AT sunset, the day the job was finished, Carver stood by the rail, watching with a sneer as Rand completed the rigging. He had improved upon the skipper's crude idea by reeving an upper and lower block; and in each lower block was securely fastened an enormous iron hook, to make fast to a boat.

"Fine job you're doing," said Johnny Carver. "Aiming to hoist blubber on deck so's you won't get your fine gentleman's skin oily?"

"No." And Rand gave him a look. "One of these is a gallows to hang Cap'n Davids' murderer on. The other's for the man who knows and won't tell."

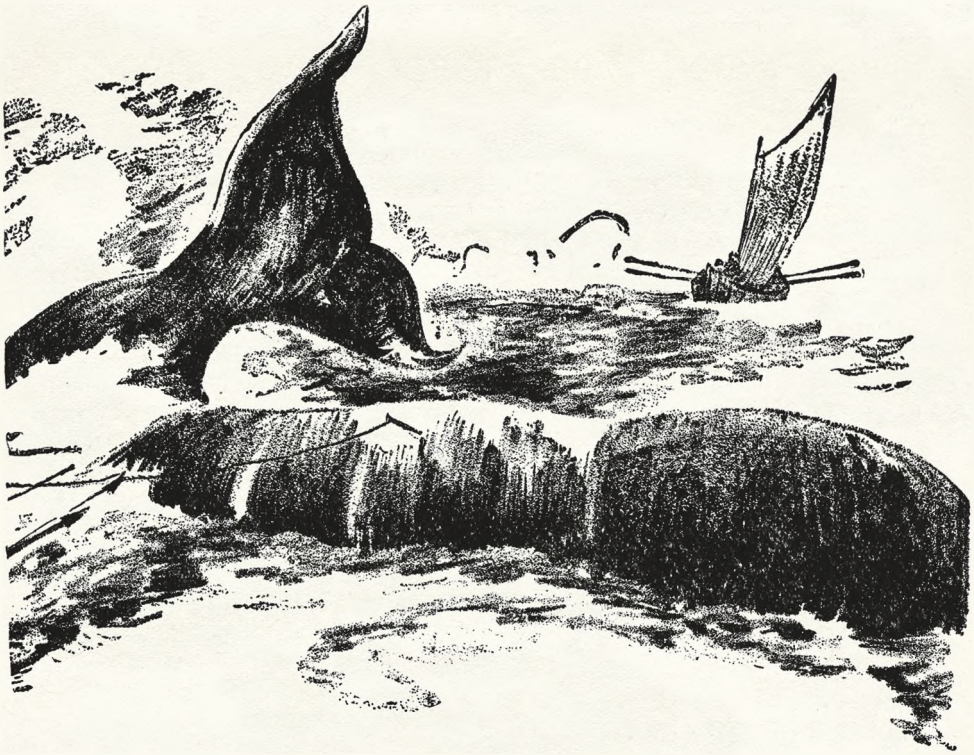
The gloomy Finn, working on the iron standard, cackled out a laugh. But Johnny Carver went livid. His shark's eyes gave Rand one frightful, murderous look; then he turned and walked away; but that expression in his face had spoken for him.

The last bit of the job finished, the lines running freely, Rand went down to the after cabin. The sun was just dipping under the horizon.

"If you want to bend on a whaleboat and try the contraption out," he said, after telling the skipper the work was done, "we can do it now."

"Wait till morning," she rejoined. "Getting dark now. Have them lookouts aloft and spry with dawn; I smell whale tonight."

Rand departed, laughing softly to himself. Smell whale, indeed! But—



"She blows, she blows!" came the yell whipping down in the sunrise. The magic words brought all hands tumbling on deck like mad. "She blows! Thar she blows ag'in! Four p'ints off the sta'board bow—and a blow ag'in! And a blow!"

There was a rush for the boats, nested snugly forward. A joyous yell and a wild cheer went up; not one whale, but half a dozen, a whole school of them! Now Mrs. Davids came charging down the deck, long spyglass under arm.

"How many boats you aimin' to take out, Mister?" she snapped.

"Three, ma'am," said Johnny Carver.

"Three!" The word fairly blazed out of her. "I s'pose you'd be plumb satisfied to lay one fish alongside and get a bare smell of ile, huh? And a fair day, no sea to speak of, and the breeze falling. All boats, all hands—every man jack of you! That's sperm over yonder, not blackfish. All hands away! I'll tend ship. Play loose boats!"

Her scorn and derision sent the lean face of the mate red and redder still. He was off in his own boat a moment later; after all, Johnny Carver was a peerless harpooner.

The Dubois twins, dark Indian features all aglow, took a boat together. The Portuguese were off. Rand was off—all hands, cooper and cook, tugging at the oars.

Canvas was got up; the oars came in temporarily; and fanlike, the boats headed for the spurts of white froth that broke the horizon.

With an old New Bedford veteran steering, Rand stood in the bow, harpoon ready, lances ready, tubs and line all clear, his knee braced against the lubber's chock.

The Dubois boat was fairly close; they were holding almost together, while the others had separated.

Close and closer came the jetting froth. The huge black bulks broke the surface, blew, forged under again in majestic slow procession. Abel Dubois, poised in the bow of his boat, took in sail, and Rand followed suit. Oars out now, the boats drove in silently to bisect the course of the leviathans.

Suddenly the Dubois boat swung, as the steering sweep tugged it around at right angles. The cunning Indians had guessed aright—a black hulk was coming up almost alongside. Rand saw Abel hurl the iron; there was a wild flurry of flukes.

"Starn all!" yelled Abel. "Haul the warp—he's not sounding!"

HE and his brother both had lances out of their beckets and on the rests, as the boat backed. Rand heard one of his own men vent an awesome oath, heard another cry out, saw the black shape rising beneath the other boat—saw the broad black tail whip into air, come down with a slapping crash, and sweep the water into a smother of foam. From

that welter of spume came the faint anguished cries of dying men.

"Hit her square, by God!" yelled the bow oar, next to Rand. "Hey, *look!* There's the mate's boat!"

"Give way, all!" rasped out Rand. "Pull, you bullies, pull! Bring her in close, steersman. Two of you look after those men in the water—"

Suddenly, between water and vast sky, there was a fury of haste. Johnny Carver's boat had appeared, unobserved; now it was heading slap for the whale. The boat of the twin brethren had disappeared. Abel was gone, his brother was gone. That huge black tail was still lashing, slapping to and fro in frantic fury. Two men from the wrecked boat swam among the floating tubs and oars, no others.

RAND'S boat cut in between Johnny Carver's boat and the threshing animal, and then swung, so close to the frenzied tail that Rand caught his breath. His men were pulling in the two survivors of the other boat. He had one flashing glimpse of Johnny Carver himself, poised, harpoon in palm, as the mate's boat rose on a wave.

Then his own shaft drove home, and drove deep. A hit! Rand sprang aft, and snatched the steering-sweep from the veteran. As he did so, Johnny Carver's harpoon flashed above him.

The mate was an old hand at "pitchpoling," the trick of heaving a harpoon high above a rival boat, to strike the whale first and give his ship prior claim to the booty. This time, Rand had beaten him, but his harpoon went home. Instantly the whale turned tail up and sounded, down and down until the line had to be wetted as it ran sizzling from the tubs.

A frightful cry went up from the men; they fell over one another in confusion. Rand saw the cause, and a wild yell of wrath burst from him. The boat was being held down, was being dragged under. Johnny Carver had belayed his warp. Another instant, and the taut line, going down with the sounding whale, would have sent Rand's boat under—but Rand had already acted. His knife was out, was whipping at the other warp. One of the men had caught up a hatchet, ready for such use, and was cutting at it. The line parted.

The two boats were close. Johnny Carver's lean and fury-filled face showed, high above as a wave lifted his boat.

"You damned Judas!" shouted Rand. "Murderer! Wait till we get back—"

The words were swept away, but Carver had heard. Now everything was swept away, with a rising wall of spray and water on either side the bows, as the boat leaped off and was gone. The bow oar had belayed the warp on the bitts; the run of line was stopped, and the boat was off at terrific speed in tow of the wounded whale.

The other boat, the wreckage, were gone in an instant.

"He done it deliberate!" An oarsman shook his fist back at Carver; other men sent up a chorus of oaths and curses. "Tried to drag us under, he did!"

"Steady, men." Rand, white with anger and peril, got himself in hand. "Our job's to kill this fish. I'll settle later with Johnny Carver, blast him! We may have an all-day run ahead of us—"

He broke off to check on the position of the *Sharon.* A yell went up from the men. An all-day run? No chance of that. The whale was sounding again. The boat eased down in speed. The smoking line ran out and out, then ceased. The men brought it in and flaked it down hurriedly, staring at the water, fearful and tense; suspense shook them all. The whale might repeat, might come up beneath them as it had done with the Dubois boat.

WHEN the whale broke water a hundred yards away, there was a general sigh of quick relief. The oars went out; the boat started forward. Rand had had a couple of old hands aboard to set him aright if he went wrong.

Lances ready, they crept up on the wounded beast. Close and closer, almost upon that black mass. The first lance went in; the second followed. Up tail, and the whale was gone again, but this time with blood streaking the water; and not gone for long.

A kill! Cheers broke out; the boat was baled clear; the canvas was hoisted, and she leaned over to the breeze. Chancy work, this handling a whaleboat under canvas, but that was Rand's business, and he carried it out in true Navy style. . . .

It was mid-afternoon when they came alongside the *Sharon,* which was slowly forging toward the kill, and took a line. A few men were aboard; Johnny Carver's boat had come back to the ship empty-handed.

"You men keep your mouths shut," he ordered. "I'll handle this thing with Carver."

He was up and over the 'midships rail, inwardly seething with fury. His eagerness was checked abruptly; he found himself face to face with Mrs. Davids, and something in that grim, stony expression of hers chilled his blood. Bony, gaunt, terrible, she stood impassive.

"Congratulations," she said. "Your first fish."

"Never mind." Rand was glancing about. He saw a couple of men from Carver's boat, slinking, furtive, white-faced. "Where's Johnny Carver? I want a word with him."

"Do you?" said she, in a tone of hideous mockery. "You come too late. Didn't I tell you things would happen when a Higher Power got ready? I seen what took the two Dubois brothers. I said punishment would come. Mister, where you heading for?"

Rand did not notice the title. He wanted to get away from her insane voice.

"Get out of the way," he rasped. "I want to find Carver. Where is he?"

"Aft," she said, and stood aside.

Rand strode aft, and she followed him. The man at the wheel, white of face and wild of eye, shrank and cowered away. Rand came to a halt, staring at the thing dangling on the standard he had rigged—the starboard standard.

Johnny Carver was dangling there, and one look was enough to tell he was dead. Rand swung around and met the stony eyes of the woman. Suddenly he knew that she was sane, dreadfully sane. She had been alone here when Carver came back aboard, too.

"How did this happen?" he demanded.

"It's already wrote down in the log," she said impassively. "He jumped at that rope, Mister, and the lower block overhauled. His weight took him down. The block came up, and the hook catched him under the chin."

HE looked at her, steadily, and she met his gaze without flinching. Rand knew perfectly well that the mate had not jumped; he read in her eyes that something else had happened here—something he did not know about, did not want to know about.

"Accident, was it?" he said.

"No," she rejoined. "No accident, Mister. I told you how I got the idea for that there gallows, didn't I? Punishment, that's what it was. Now, Mister, you'd better take charge of the ship and look alive. We got three fish to get alongside, and there's no time to lose if we're going to get to work cutting in."

Rand swallowed hard. Mister? That meant he was mate. And there was work to do. He glanced up suddenly, at a singsong, bawling voice. The men were tailing on the lines; one of them, a chantey-man, was lifting his ringing, doggerel words to an old tune:

Oh, they call me hanging Johnny,
Hurray, hurray!
Because I hang for money—
So hang, boys, hang!
Oh, first I hung my mother,
And then I hung my brother;
Oh, hang and haul together,
Oh, hang for better weather—
So hang, boys, hang!

With a shiver coursing up his spine, Rand looked at the woman's stony face, then turned and went to work.

THE story was ended, and upon a somewhat ghastly note. Old Cap'n Tucker knocked the dottle out of his clay pipe. He filled it up again and scratched a match. As he puffed, he darted a glance at me beneath his shaggy gray brows.

"What was you wanting to know about boat-davits?" he asked. "How they started? Well, you know now."

Somebody else, quicker of wit than I, caught at the name and let out a whoop.

"Davits! Boat-davits! Say, is that how they came by the name? *Cap'n Davids—Mrs. Davids—davits!* Is that it, Cap'n Tucker?"

"Sure; aint it plain enough?" affirmed the old skipper. "Why not? A knot was named after Matthew Walker, and a bend after Carrick."

"And a sail after Bentincks," I put in. "And a boat after Berthon and Hampton."

"And, if I'm not mistaken, a locker after Davy Jones!" said somebody else, with a laugh. "Cap'n, I'd be the last man in the world to contradict you. It was a swell yarn. It almost sounded as if it had really happened."

Cap'n Tucker eyed the speaker for a moment, then emitted a loud, unholy snort of scorn that included all of us in its scope, and went stalking away.

"Black Ivory," another picturesque story in this much-discussed series, will appear in our forthcoming March issue.

TRUE STEEL

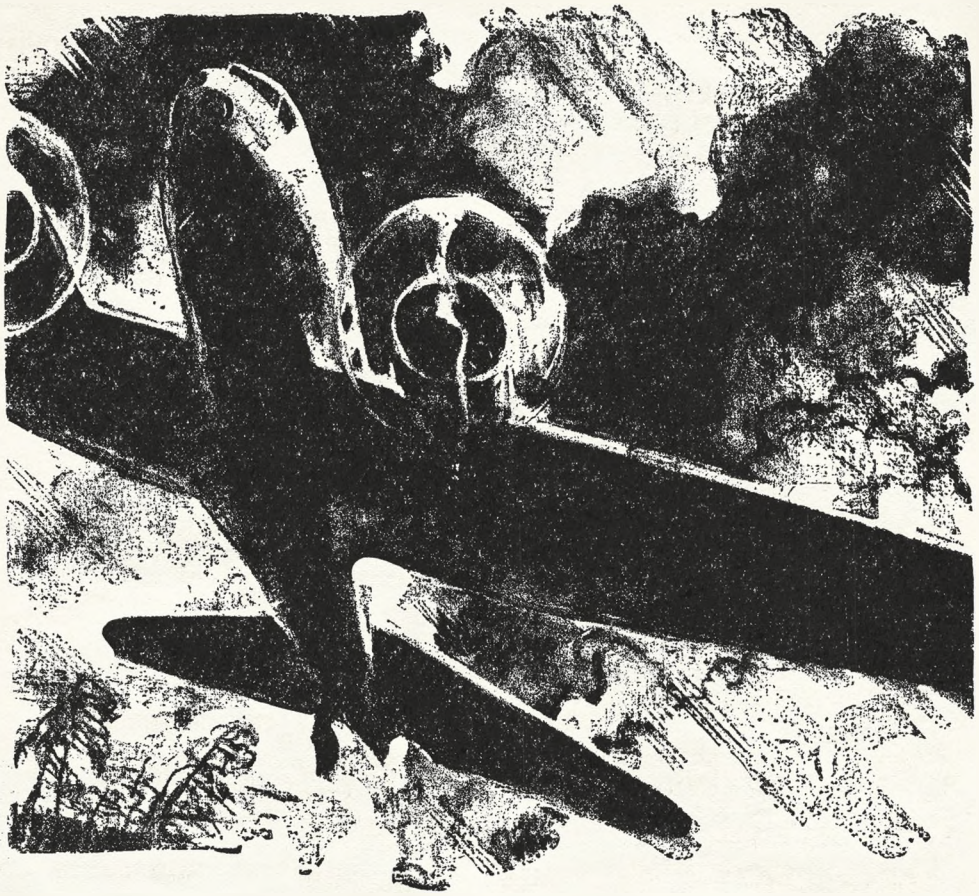
A murder mystery, and an airplane adventure, by the famous author of "Last Flight" and "The Flaming Finish."

NOW that she was riding almost literally through heaven, and with the greater part of her future visible across the aisle from her, Katherine Lawrence wondered why she was not more happy. When she turned her head to the left and looked through the window of the plane, there was no fault to find in the sky. It was all that any girl could wish when she was flying toward her wedding day, for the blue-black of the midnight sky was blooming with clouds like a spring field with flowers, an immense field of enormous blossoms which drank up all the brilliance of the moonshine and left the sky to darkness and the stars.

Now and then, when the plane swayed a little, she could see the mountains beneath them, mere heaps and ridges of shadow, casual furrows plowed across the face of the earth. So all the earlier events of her life ought to be diminished by this great moment, she felt, and she tried hard to lift her spirit to the important occasion by casting her mind forward into the events to come, seeing the church in New York, flower-decked, hearing the great church organ thunder and mourn in her honor. But the organ note and the organ vibrancy turned always into the roar of the motors and the frightened trembling of the plane as it carried her toward the new life.

A panic of homesickness overwhelmed her. For consolation she looked across the aisle at her fiancé. . . .

She approved of everything about Davison except his name of Roland. He had proved that he was big enough for football, and there was nothing feminine about the beauty of his face. He had a noble bigness of brow with that single dark stroke of determination marked between the eyes. She had endeavored to tie that name to thoughts of the hero of Roncesvalles, that noble legend filled with the old epic sadness; but she could



By MAX BRAND

not help remembering that Roland shortens to Rollie; and suddenly that handsome face was something out of an advertising section, too good to be true. She had to look away hastily to the perfect contrast with wealthy Roland Davison, of Pine Springs, California, and of Long Island.

Contrast was ahead of her in the front seat of the plane: a prisoner who had both hands manacled to the seat—both hands, because he had resisted arrest so desperately and was still dangerous. Since he was on the other side of the aisle, she viewed him at a slight angle and could see the left side of his face. They had bandaged his head, but the cut on his jaw was not worth consideration, apparently. The wound was not exactly bleeding, but it still wept a little, drops of pinkish ichor moving slowly down the face from time to time. Now that he turned his head to look out the opposite window, he showed a blunt profile like a pugilist's. Even without a few days of dark stubble smudged over his face, she felt that she could have picked him for what he was—a murderer.

Half the story of the crime was there in the plane with this James Burke. Pretty Maureen Ervan, for whom he had fired the shot, was now returning to testify in court, after flying West to identify him; and in the seat behind Burke was the detective who had run him down, Michael A. Rylan. Katherine picked up her paper and glanced again through the account of the crime.

IN profile and full face, the grim head of James Burke illustrated the article together with a surrounding cluster of smaller photographs of the dead man, Charles Whitley, of his wealthy father, and of Maureen Ervan looking many degrees more beautiful than the truth. The details of the shooting six months ago then followed.

"Jimmy Burke was crazy about me. Too crazy," Maureen Ervan had stated. "When Charley started paying me a little attention, Jimmy went out of his mind. I took him to see Charley. They were old friends, and I thought everything could be talked out. But all at once Jimmy started yelling. He grabbed a gun out of the desk in Charley's library, and he fired it, twice. I fainted, or something. . . . I don't remember."

Not love. Of course it was not love that had moved Burke, but mere passion. The pure, high emotion of a Roland Davison never could be felt by that animal nature. She made sure by a glance at Roland, but unfortunately caught him yawning. So, with a frown, she returned to the newspaper account of how Jimmy Burke had fled, disappeared from all ken, and how the Whitley family had offered a reward of five and finally of ten thousand dollars for his arrest. This private detective, this Michael A. Rylan, would become a rich man, comparatively, on account of his cleverness on the trail; but can blood-money do good to anyone?

Katherine turned the page of the paper for the first time. Before she read on, she took a sniff at the gardenias which were pinned at her breast. The manhunt was exciting, and there was a strange, frightful reality about the words, since pursued and pursuer were there in the plane together. Of course the newspaper editor could not resist quoting from some of the love-letters which Burke had written, and which Maureen dutifully had turned over to the law. She glanced at fragments here and there: *"When you said good-by the other night, were you just tired, or were you tired of me? You said it as though you meant it; and ever since, I've been going around as though it were the first day of school and all the faces strange to me."*

And again: *"I wish you hadn't come into the house yesterday, because you're everywhere about it, now. . . . If I look over my shoulder now, suddenly, shall I see a ghost of you disappearing in the mirror?"*

Katherine stared at the words. They did not fit the murderer's picture that

One cuff sprang open: she unlocked the second.

had filled her mind. Then she read on: *"I'm half batty. I look down at my hand, and that was the hand which reached out and touched you and found you were actually there. . . . I love you. . . . You know how it makes me feel to write that? I haven't fooled around with girls much. I've never written or said it before. . . . I love you. . . . It makes me ashamed to write it, as though I'd said quit in the middle of a fight. . . . Goodnight again. I keep trying to stop writing, but the thought of finishing is like saying good-by to you."*

Then came something that made her face hot. She closed the paper suddenly, ashamed, and looked hastily across the aisle toward Roland Davison, and felt vaguely comforted and vaguely disturbed. She took note of the other people in the plane. There were, outside of Maureen Ervan, the detective, and the prisoner, a married couple with an intimate friend who sat slewed around with an arm over the back of the seat so that he could talk to them. He was in his early thirties, but the youth was hammered out of his face and left it lean, hard about the mouth and meager about the chin. He wore the long hair of an artist; he even carried the old-fashioned badge of a flowing Windsor tie. He was a painter or sculptor, not a musician, because now and then his gesture drew some outline in the air.

The married friend looked like a boy stretched to a man's inches. That is to say, he had a large round face and a scrawny length of neck and narrow shoulders. But he was close to forty, while his wife was nearly or quite ten years younger. She was soft and plump and pretty, and wore a rather foolish hat which flared up at one side. To the talk of the artist, she listened with eyes wide enough to drink in every word.

Katherine looked out the window again, and saw that the wind was rising. The clouds, no longer full and compact like huge summer flowers, streaked out into thin wisps like the lines with which a cartoonist gives the speed effects to moving objects. Because they were thinner, there seemed to be less moonlight; in the background the stars still trembled with the tremor of the hurrying plane.

Detective Rylan now asked for food and drink. The stewardess brought him a cocktail, then ham and chicken sandwiches with beer, and the detective wolfed them down. Through a haze of fascinated disgust, Katherine watched. There was something about mere decency of manners, she felt, that distinguished the classes, one from the other. This pride of hers was not a fancy but a strongly controlling force. She was, she thought, set apart from other girls. They smoked, which is unclean for the hands, the lips and the breath; she did not smoke. They drank, which draws a mist over the eyes and across the brain; she did not drink. They enjoyed a petting party; she was untouched. It was not beauty alone that gave Katherine social success, in spite of her haughtiness and her cold manner, she was a good athlete.

The fault of Katherine was the high expectancy which had been instilled in her by her environment and that sense of class which is a fiercer snobbery in democracies than in any other society. She felt that the giving of herself was an event momentous to the world, and therefore she looked even upon rich, handsome, virtuous young Roland Davison with a great doubt. She had to be right, and now she was not sure.

Beyond her window, something was blank that had been legible before, like words blotted out on a page; a certain obscurity was pouring from the northwest, covering the stars even from the lofty altitude of the plane's flight. This troubled her a little. When she turned from the window again, she was surprised to see the stewardess offering a cup of steaming soup to the prisoner. Before he touched it, he stared up at her for an instant, his face savage, his jaw thrusting out a bit; and it seemed to Katherine that the flame-red of his hair bristled above the bandage which girded his head. Then he tasted the drink.

She put down the tray on the opposite seat and let him swallow the soup in two portions.

The creature was not all beast, Katherine observed. The kindness of the stewardess had set him breathing deeply, to judge by the lifting of his chest and the slight flare of his nostrils. He was capable of emotion, as the quotations from his love-letters had indicated before; and as an animal, he possessed a certain magnificence in the bigness of his head and shoulders. The disgust gradually passed from Katherine and left her staring as she might have stared at some lordly specimen of jungle brute behind the bars in a zoo.

The stewardess began to feed the handcuffed man with sandwiches which she had cut into narrow strips—giving him the right amount for each bite he took. Among the lower classes there is a great deal of natural sympathy, Katherine remembered. She could see it in the deftness with which the stewardess from time to time dabbed the lips of Burke, all the while keeping up a smiling conversation which was not too gay to be sympathetic. This stewardess was a small thing, with a saucy, pretty face.

Katherine glanced out of the window again, and was amazed to see that moon and stars together were gone. Outside the glass, a rolling chaos of shadow poured past them; the fish-shaped body of the plane was swimming in a dark sea.

CHAPTER II

KATHERINE grew sleepy, her head nodding till she lost consciousness. She was roused by the hand of Roland Davison on her arm. He had lost his usual calm and altered to an eager alertness. When he played football, he must have

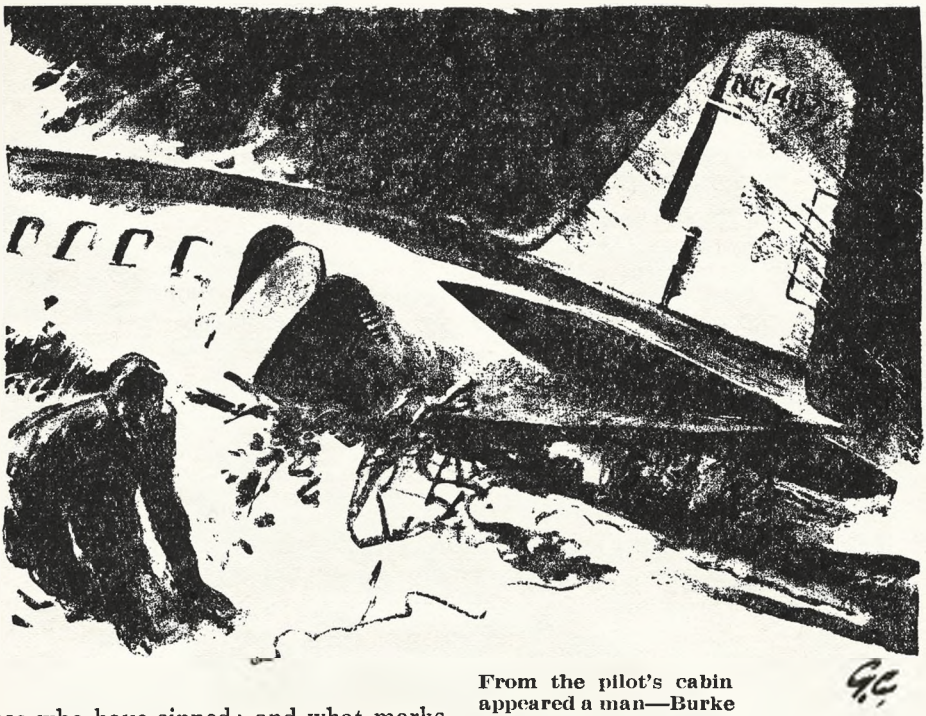
looked like that, half fierce and half afraid, like any fighting man.

"Look!" he was saying. "Look, Kate! Quick!"

She stared out the window. Off to the left and ahead, through the glass she saw a steep form lifting like a high wave towering before a small boat in the open sea. Blowing mist shrouded the face of it so thickly that in an instant it was gone.

"We're still in the mountains!" exclaimed Davison. "We should have been out of them hours ago—a long time ago. . . . Kate, they're having trouble!"

Her brain was still half asleep, but a voice inside her began to say that they could not be having trouble. When a plane has trouble in the air, people are apt to die. There could be no trouble for her and Roland. They were bound for happiness in the bright, narrow oblong of this chamber, as secure as good news sealed into the cartridge that slides down the messenger tube. According to the eternal rule, disaster overtakes only



From the pilot's cabin appeared a man—Burke—carrying a limp body in his arms.

those who have sinned; and what marks were there against her or against Roland?

In that way, dimly, her mind moved through some of the old copybook maxims; then the sleep left her suddenly, and she was wide awake, with the realization that copybook maxims do not control travel in the air and that calm insolence with which man aspires to step across a continent at a single stride.

The stewardess was passing. Davison stopped her with his hand and asked: "Why are we flying so low? Why are we still in the mountains? Is there trouble?"

The plane bucked like an angry mustang and unsteadied the girl, but not her smile as she answered: "We're all right. We have a couple of pilots who know what they're doing."

She went on. Up the aisle the heads which were pressed against the windows turned suddenly toward her. Lips asked soundless questions. She answered cheerfully. Only Burke seemed undisturbed, his head straightforward; but after all, what difference did the nature of the death-cell make to him? An electric current could not kill him with more merciful speed than the crumbling of the ship like chalk against a mountain-side. And to the startled, confused brain of Katherine, it seemed that perhaps the higher justice was striking them all down, blindly, because that one man of evil was among them. She forgot that thought a moment later. Beneath the window a great, ragged maw opened for them with the storm smoking across it. It seemed to be reaching for the ship before she realized that the teeth in it were the mountain peaks above which they were ascending.

The plane climbed so steeply that her back pressed hard against the seat; and every man and woman in the plane seemed to be shrunk smaller by the same pressure; only Burke sat as high-headed as ever, looking straight before him with unalterable calm.

THE cheek of Katherine was iced by the window against which she pressed. Now as she looked up, she saw the storm grow faintly visible in long streamings of shadows among shadows. The light grew. The flying mist turned milk white, with great nodules of crystal brightness shining through it; and then they were launched suddenly into the open sky, as though a door had opened in a white wall and stepped them out into infinite space. The moon, lopsided as it grew toward the full, shone almost in the zenith. Beyond the circle of its own region, the stars shook with the vibration of the ship; and beneath them stretched the shining white level of the storm, all in motion like a gigantic river that filled space from horizon to horizon.

Roland Davison grabbed the corner of the seat and cried at Katherine: "They've got off the beam. They can't find it. They're up here to try to spot a

"Listen, old son," said Burke. "Tell me the straight of it. How are you?" The lips of Hardy parted slowly. "Right as rain," he said.

landmark. But all they can see is the clouds. . . . We'll be getting out of gas. . . . There'll have to be a forced landing."

His cheeks were pinched in and his eyes had grown big and round. He sat down, still talking, making gestures. She did not hear his words, for all her thoughts had run back home to her father's house like a child out of the cold; and all she could remember was the colored pattern of the rug in the living-room, and the fire working cheerfully among the big logs on the hearth.

Moon and stars went out. The plane skimmed through the white dazzle of the upper surface of the clouds, down into the darker milk beneath, and then again into half-visible darkness.

Detective Rylan leaped to his feet, gripped the back of his seat, slowly lowered himself again.

THE stewardess came down the aisle, speaking to each passenger in turn, leaving each with turned head staring after her. When she came to Katherine, she paused a moment and her eyes grew tender before she said: "Be steady—nothing will happen—everything will be all right; but there will be a forced landing—you must fasten the safety-belt."

"Thank you," said Katherine, and smiled at her automatically.

The girl went on. There was no fear in her. Stewardesses are almost professional heroes, are they not?

Maureen Ervan half-risen from her seat, had caught both hands to her face. Ruth Patterson had cried out in terror.

Patterson drew an envelope hastily from his pocket and commenced to write a farewell note, not about family affairs, but about business.

"For Henry P. Thwaite," he scrawled.

What I've been working on while I was away was the rubber for the joints. You know how crazy we've been to find something that would give the toys motion. Springs that wind up are no good. But I mixed some of that white plastic with the rubber. You know the plastic I mean. The stuff I got from the Harlan Laboratories. Mix that with the rubber compound, and you get a material with life to it. I made use of it for the joints of one of the elephants and made the elephant take five or six steps. I made the tiger open his mouth and show his teeth. The stuff works slowly, but it gives the motion, all right. It has a funny smell. Try to kill that.

I guess we're going to crash. So long, old man. ***—Herb.***

And Michael Rylan was scribbling:

Dear Maggie,

They're crashing the ship. They're killing me, Maggie. Just when things looked good. By God, you get the ten thousand out of the Whitley family because I grabbed the man for them. And Bill Lang owes me sixty-five bucks. You make him come through with it. Don't have nothing to do with Sam Wilson, or I'll haunt you.

Your loving husband,
Mike.

The stewardess was fastening Mrs. Patterson into her seat with the safety-belt, while the poor woman sobbed into her hands.

Roland Davison wrote:

Last will and testament. Being in my right mind and about to die, I will and bequeath all my property to Thomas Franklin Davison, my uncle.

(Signed) Roland Davison.

Immediately beneath he wrote:

Dear Uncle Tom,

Sell the Unity bonds. They're no good. Buy Caswell, Jones. Look out for Chippinwell. I think he'll crash soon. And see that an investigation of this line is made, no matter what lobbying it costs you. Incompetent pilot, I think.

Rollie.

Katherine herself was trying to write, but the words would not come, for between her mind and the paper the picture of Burke kept springing up, Burke at the moment of the crash with his two hands pinioned to the seat helpless.

She crumpled the paper she was writing on, and dropped it to the floor. Then she went forward. The ship, heeling sharply as the pilot banked to the right, made her clutch the side of a seat and hold on hard. The upper levels of the storm had broken up and let the moonlight climb down a broken ladder to show the white breast of a mountain just beside them, glistening with ice. She thought they were to crash that instant. Her lips were closed, but a fine electric tingle thrust up through her forehead as though she were screaming.

Then the plane righted.

John Bashfield Rogers, just beside her, had one arm bent around his face to shut out the vision of the mountain which Katherine had seen. Somehow the sight of his weakness gave her strength. She hurried down the aisle to Michael Rylan. He had his eyes tight shut as he crossed himself and prayed with moving lips. Katherine caught him by the shoulder. She had thought that he was a fat man, but the bulging flesh under his coat was all rubbery muscle.

"Give me the key for the handcuffs!" she cried to him. "You can't let Burke crash like this. Give me the key—for the handcuffs—for the handcuffs."

He opened his eyes. The horror of his dream possessed them. She shouted at him again. Fear had turned his brain numb. Finally he said: "Burke? Damn Burke! Except for him, I wouldn't be here! Let him smash and rot—damn him!"

But he pulled a key out of a vest pocket, and had closed his eyes for prayer again before she snatched it away. The plane heeled once more, staggering her, as she leaned over Burke. She had to clutch at him to steady herself. He was like Rylan, covered with rubber-hard muscle, but steadier than Rylan, as though he were better braced against any shock. Fear had neither dimmed his eyes nor put a glare in them. He looked with a mild curiosity into her face, and then down at the hands which fitted the key into the lock. One cuff sprang open; she unlocked the second and left one of his hands free. There were still two more on the right arm to finish her work.

Then the stewardess was at her, exclaiming sharply, angrily: "Get back to your seat, please! If we land while you're still on your feet, you may hurt somebody besides yourself. Go back to your place, Miss Lawrence."

DESPITE that urgency, Katherine was fitting the key into the locks of the other handcuffs. She straightened again, flushed and confused. The deep voice of Burke grunted a meaningless sound. And there was the stewardess smiling at her and frowning at the same time. "I'm glad you thought of that," she said. "But hurry, now! Hurry, *hurry!*"

Katherine dropped the key into the hand of Rylan and went back to her place. Roland Davison, leaning far back in his seat, bracing himself against a shock with feet and hands, gnawed at his lip while he stared out the window, oblivious of her. As she fastened the safety-belt, she saw Burke turned in his seat and looking back with savage contempt at Michael Rylan. No doubt the detective still prayed with closed eyes. There was such vicious cruelty in Burke's face that she half ex-

pected him to throw himself on Rylan with hands and teeth, like a beast.

Then a woman screamed. The sound went up into the brain of Katherine like a white-hot needle and half blinded her.

It was pretty Maureen Ervan who shrieked. The sound seemed to have no ending. It stayed up at high C, stabbing the hearers to the brain-pan. Then Katherine saw a mountain-side bearded with a pine forest. It seemed to lean out toward them, showing above timberline a dim streak of white, clouded over instantly by the dark sweep of the storm. Then they struck.

CHAPTER III

IN that black welter of wind and flying mist, Katherine had known there was only the thousandth chance of making a safe landing. She was prepared for a great shock, a sound of rending and crashing, and all things in a topsy-turvy confusion. Instead, they merely were at a stop, and hands were pressing the breath out of her with a slow constriction, an irresistible force. That was the safety-belt at work like a python, flattened by its own effort.

She could not breathe, and whatever breath she drew was of darkness. She had not prepared herself for the darkness. If she only had set her mind for that, it would have been easier to endure, and not like a filthy dust choking her lungs.

There was darkness, but not silence. The hoarse, gasping screams of Maureen Ervan persisted. Another sound, full of secure power, was gone from them: the roaring of the motors. In its place was the whistling of the storm; instead of the tremor from the vibrating engines, the plane was cuffed and shaken by the hand-strokes of the wind.

She fumbled at the fastening of the safety-belt. There was a sense that the plane was skidding before the wind and might be blown from the lip of some high precipice at any instant. She hurried, hurting her fingers with her efforts; but she had to readjust her body in the seat before she was free from the belt.

Another screaming voice joined that of Maureen. Suddenly the girl was still, but the other voice went on in pulsations of silence and wild outcry. It was not like the shrill fluting of Maureen. It seemed to come out of a throat unused to making the sound. Once, during a hunt, a horse had gone down horribly wounded by the ragged stones of a wall. The shriek of the poor beast was still in Katherine's ears, and it was like this sound. This was the outcry of a man—of Burke or of Rylan, perhaps? And yet it seemed too far away to be from the inside of the plane. Through the blackness she had a picture of Maureen sitting hushed, forgetting her own terror as she listened to the agony of that other agonized screaming.

A wavering hand of light brushed past her window. She thought for an instant, with wonderful relief, that they were on an aviation field and that the light came from the electric torches of rescuers who were hurrying toward them. Then she remembered the rugged face of the mountain.

The light increased. It flared up high from the head of the plane, so that it showed her through the window the drive of the storm. It looked like nothing she ever had seen before, or as though the world were exploding into fine fragments.

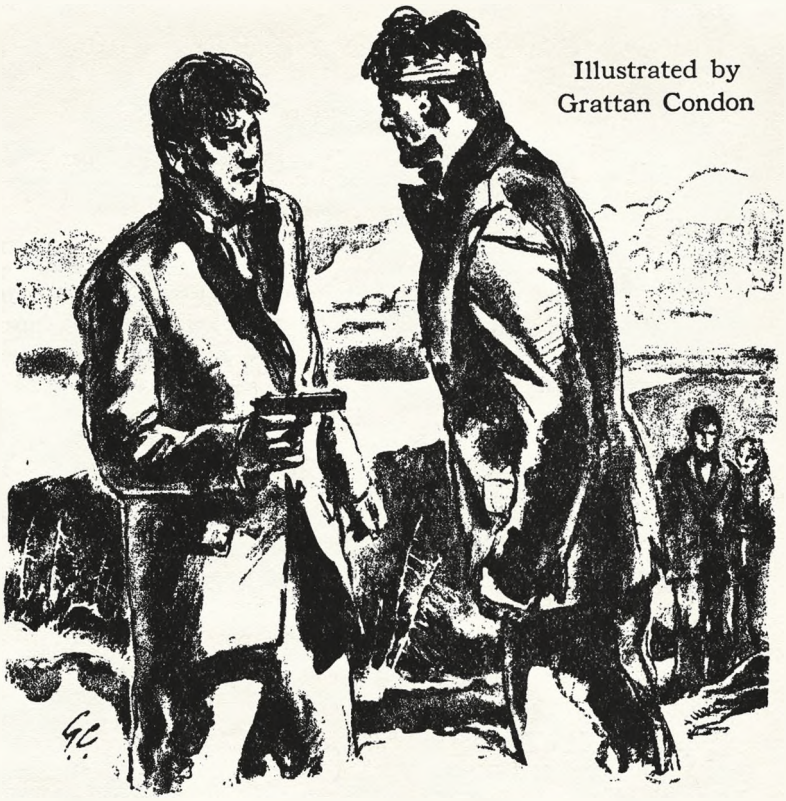
All this had gone at a quickstep through her mind while she worked free of the safety-belt and out of her seat. Then a voice roared out like the bellow of a bull: "This way! This way out! Look lively!"

She turned down the aisle. Dark figures swarmed there before her. Some one rushing from the rear knocked her aside with almost a greater shock than the landing of the plane. That was Detective Rylan, fighting to get through the compacted group. She saw his distorted face by the increasing flare of light that looked through the windows of the ship. Many voices were crying out. She knew she would be the last, and the flames would have her before she reached the open air. All at once she was beating with both fists, thrusting and struggling with the whole strength of her body.

THEN she was in the clear with the wind blowing the wits out of her head, wrenching at every garment. The cold closed on her like a shower of ice-water. She staggered in the gale as though she were about to blow away on it.

She could see, now, what gave them the light. The whole head of the plane was in flames that spurted out like jets of water; out of one wing ran a huge cascade of fire which the storm whipped away in double handfuls and sent bucketing off toward a fringe of snow-en-

Illustrated by
Grattan Condon



"Save your thinking till you're in the death-house where you belong! There's other people here to do the thinking!"

crusted trees that drew near and suddenly retreated and advanced again as the fire was flung toward them or died away. And off there at the front of the ship one man, a black, jumping ape against the yellow fire, was jerking open the door beside the pilot.

He disappeared inside as a long arm of flame slid up under the belly of the fuselage, as far as the very rudder of the ship. Around Katherine, people staggered in confusion, leaning one shoulder into the wind, shouting out aimless words.

Now from the open door of the pilot's cabin appeared a man who lowered and caught in his arms a limp body. He came away carrying it high against his breast. The head and legs and arms dangled down. There seemed to be ten joints in every limb.

Little points of fire adhered to both these figures. Something apart from her, impersonal in her brain, kept saying that that was heroic. That was the stuff heroes were made of. Then she saw that it was the red-headed criminal, Burke the murderer, who laid the broken figure on the ground. Burke himself lay down and rolled like a dog in the snow. Another figure issued from the open door of the pilot's cabin, walked with uncertain small steps for a little distance, then collapsed in the snow.

Somehow the feet of Katherine Lawrence had brought her to the place, by this time. She found the man lying on his back, his eyes closed, his mouth agape. He drew breath with a snoring sound; then the breath came out with a scream, though he was unconscious. It was his screaming that she had heard.

He was a fat man. One of the yellow moths of flame had lighted in his hair and was burning it away. She clapped a handful of snow over the place. She got hold of him and rolled him over on his face and over again on his back. All the flickering bits of fire had disappeared by that time.

SOME one grabbed her by the arm to drag her away. Davison cried furiously at her ear: "Come on, Kate! Get away from here! The plane will blow up in a minute."

"Help me!" she cried to him. "Help me carry him!"

He caught up the head and shoulders of the man. She supported the legs at the knees. The wind stopped them and staggered them with its invisible hands again and again as they bore the poor fellow to the place where Burke had laid his companion.

No one else had thought of tending the injured. Katherine jerked off her jacket and stretched it under their

heads. She knew, by a look at them before the plane had started, that the fat fellow was the co-pilot, and the senseless figure beside him was the pilot in command. There was a streak of blood diagonally across his face.

Some one crouched beside her to offer help. That was chubby Mrs. Patterson. When Katherine tried to speak, the wind shoved an icy finger inside her mouth and blew out her cheek like a rubber bag.

A VOICE was shouting louder than the storm. That was Burke, again. His was the same bull's bellow that had showed the way out of the ship in the first place.

"Where's the stewardess?" he was roaring. "Where is she? Damn you, have you been standing around and left her inside? Where is she?"

The rolling in the snow had not put out one avid spark of fire in his coat. Now the wind fanned that morsel of flame to strength. It was eating out a round spot, shining at the edge. It seemed to Katherine to be sinking a hole into his flesh.

The wind changed; or else some unusual eddy curving from the hollow forehead of the mountain counteracted for a moment the normal sweep of the gale and blew toward them the smoke and the flames of the burning ship. The oily reek half-choked Katherine. She had to lift her hands to defend her face; but through her fingers she saw Detective Rylan step to Burke and snap a handcuff over one of his wrists.

Then Rylan lay on his face in the snow, and Burke was racing back toward the plane. The flying smoke and snow-dust commingled met him and covered him from sight.

She saw Roland Davison and tall Patterson, that grotesque, run after Burke. But when they reached the level-streaking sheets of smoke, commingled with those red threads of fire, they stopped, recoiled with their backs to the ship and their arms up to cover their heads.

Then she saw Burke come out of the flying smother, making his way with uncertain steps. The stewardess sat up in his arms with her head fallen back on his shoulder. Davison and Patterson took that burden from him; and Rogers the artist was there also, too busy keeping his footing against the wind to be of any use. They were all vague images of men, at this instant. The real one was Burke, now stretched on the snow, hacking and coughing and fighting for breath. He had not even enough wits left to roll in the wet and put out the dozen bits of fire that worked at his clothes. Katherine with handfuls of snow smothered the flame wherever she found it.

He was up on one knee; he was on his feet, reeling; now he was brushing her aside and making for the stewardess. Katherine got to the girl an instant later, and found Burke manipulating her legs and arms. Her eyes opened, and she screamed. Consciousness came back, and she bit off the outcry, setting her teeth over it.

"Right leg's broken below the knee," said Burke. "Left arm's snapped above the elbow. She's in a hell of a mess. Listen, you! What's your name?"

"Is Fatty Wood all right?" she gasped at them. "Is Ken Wood all right? He's the co-pilot. Is he clear? For God's sake, are they both clear?"

"They're clear," said Burke.

He took Katherine by the chin and turned her face toward him.

"The fat fellow belongs to her," he said. "Go fix him up!"

He added to the stewardess: "They're clear. What's your name?"

"I'm Alice Gordon," she said. "Take me close to Fatty Wood—please take me close to him if he's hurt."

They could hear the pulsating cry of the fat co-pilot with the exhalation of every breath.

"He's all right," said Burke, "but you're a mess. Wait till we get you straightened out, and then you can have all of him you want. Here, you, and you tall fellow—give me a hand. We've got to get 'em to cover."

CHAPTER IV

THEY got the injured back among the trees, but the trees were no good. Only half a dozen ranks of them stood along a dangerous down-pitch that seemed to be sheer precipice; and through the scattering of the trunks the wind whistled all the higher octaves. They had at least one freezing night to face, and they had it to face in nothing except the clothes they stood up in. Nothing else had been brought from the plane. That fine silver fish which had been so at home as it swam through the sky was now a fire-gutted, twisted, deformed wreck. And they had not so much as a hatchet to fell saplings for a sufficient

wind-break. Instead, they had to use metal fragments torn from the plane to maul and beat the narrowest of the young trees until at last they could be bent over and broken off. A fire was supplied from brush which could be pried or torn up by the roots. Two dead trees gave a treasury of easily inflammable material. The women attended to the fire. Also they bent and beat and twisted off the branches and tufted tops of the saplings which the men managed to bring down. Out of the evergreen boughs they built beds for the injured; and men and women both were at a stagger with weariness before at last a wretched excuse for a windbreak was stretched across the trunks of three trees which stood providentially close.

KATHERINE LAWRENCE did her share, wondering the while why they continued the struggle; for the wind blew through her body and laid a lump of ice in her vitals. She wanted to lie down and curl up to cherish some last bit of warmth that must be lingering inwardly, with her life. If she lay down, death would come; but death by freezing, she had read, was a mere falling asleep; this other death was torment exquisitely prolonged, an agony of futile effort. They were like the last relics of humanity foolishly clinging to existence after the sun was blown out. That blowing darkness, that enormity of wind which howled around the mountain, was in fact like the end of the world. The firelight made only a feeble step or two into the hurricane which carried the snow-dust as thick as a London fog, at times. This firelight showed her the three injured people stretched in the growing shelter of the windbreak—the pilot, David Hardy, with open eyes and utterly still, while Ken Wood the co-pilot no longer cried out, but groaned with every indrawn breath. By the same light she saw the others of the party reeling into the storm, head down, or hurried before it with gigantic steps. Their faces showed her own bewilderment and despair. It was a miracle that they were still at work, except that the thundering tones of Burke found them here and there, and struck them like a whip, shouting orders; he was like an enormous voice of social conscience which forbade them to give up the struggle while there was breath to draw. He kept them at their work as a ship's captain may keep his crew at the pumps even while the vessel is sinking helplessly, and the sea lapping over the deck.

Wherever her eye fell, it found him. When she pulled hopelessly at a small shrub, a hand uprooted it for her with a single jerk. That was Burke.

Then some one held Michael Rylan by the nape of the neck like a wet rag of humanity, while the detective found his key and unlocked the handcuff that still dangled from Burke's wrist.

Again a giant mauled with some clumsy, edgeless tool at the base of a stout sapling, until the tree fell. And that was Burke.

Some one was using strips of bark and interwoven slender branches to fasten the windbreak together solidly. And that was Burke.

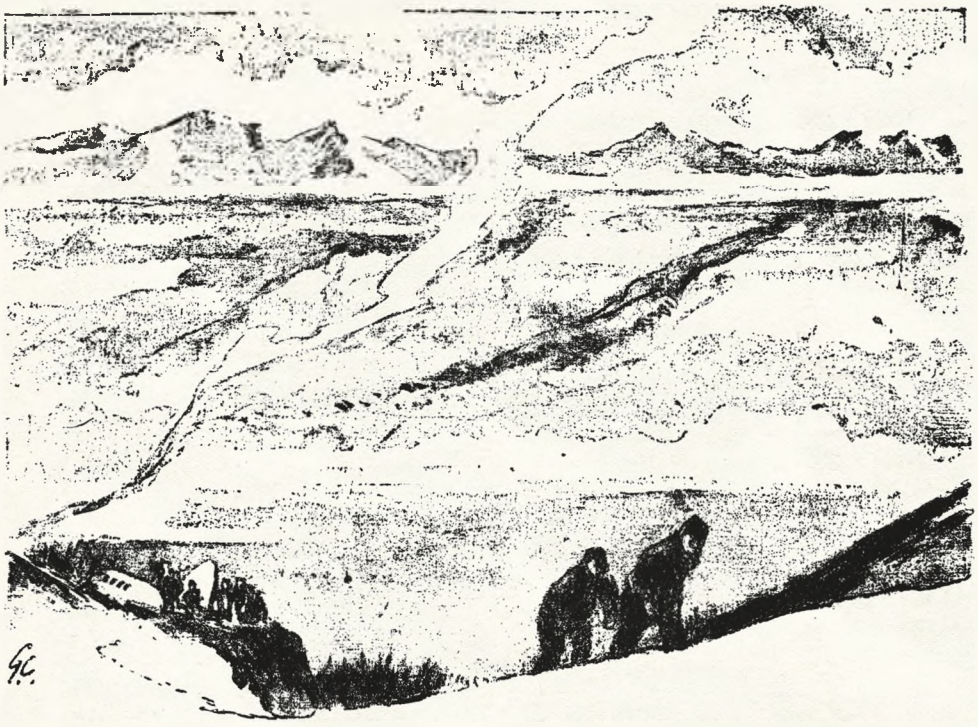
A side-wash of wind-driven snow almost overwhelmed the fire and reduced the place to darkness until some one lifted the embers and brought them to sudden life again. And that was Burke.

Now they all sat or lay in the shelter of the windbreak, exhausted by labor and fear. It was Burke alone who fed the fire until the flames rose in a yellow riot from which the wind flung the heat away in savage waste. He stood with his legs braced. His coat, his trousers, were torn in a dozen places where the shrubbery had put teeth in the cloth; and the fire which he had entered two times had eaten great holes and chewed at the edges until he was a man of rags.

HE was giving orders, pointing out his words with a stern hand of command. They were to take off shoes and stockings; they were to get off their clothes bit by bit and wring out the water. The nerveless hands of Katherine obeyed, and to right and left the others were dumbly obedient. Only the artist, J. Bashfield Rogers, lay back with his arms thrown out crosswise, utterly spent. Burke took him by the shoulder and shook him until his head flopped about crazily. Then Rogers was sitting up in his turn, wearily dragging off his coat to follow orders. They were all like children, or like a squad of raw recruits, bullied by the corporal.

Then some one said: "He's gone! Where is he? Where has he gone?"

Katherine, looking up from her bewilderment, saw that in fact Burke was no longer before them; and suddenly it seemed to her that the wind howled with a louder voice, screaming closer to her ear; and the windbreak shook as though



it were about to fall; and the wind-driven flight of the snow boiled past them thicker than before.

Mike Rylan stood up and threw out his hands in a gesture of utter despair, groaning: "Has he found a way out? Has he left us in the lurch?"

Then a sharp voice answered: "We'll do as well without a criminal to lead us, Rylan!"

That was Rollie Davison. He grew taller in the eyes of Katherine as she stared at him, but there was no time even to admire her man. The deep, shuddering groans of the co-pilot drew her to him to give him what ease she could. Wood lay on his back, turning his head in a regular rhythm from side to side, as though he were continually saying no to the world. His eyes never were quite shut, never fully open, so that his face was half blind. All the mind was gone from it, for the pain and the shock of his injuries had driven him quite out of his head. The flames had burned one cheek badly, and his forehead burned with fever. She brought a ball of snow, put some of it inside the handkerchief, and so made a crude ice-pack for his head, holding it in place carefully. She had an instant reward. The groaning lessened; the head presently was still. Something stirred in her as deep as her heart, for it was as though her hands were touching and cherishing the man's life. As he grew still, and the groaning changed to a pitifully audible and deep breath now and then, she looked at the other injured. Both of them were conscious, with open eyes. In those of the stewardess she saw the steady tension of pain. Hardy, the pilot, kept a blank face. The gray color gave the only hint of his torment.

"Tell me what to do for you," she begged the girl.

"I'm all right," answered the stewardess, and managed a brief smile. "I'm all right," she repeated. "Don't leave poor Ken Wood. See if Hardy—"

BUT a sudden outrageous howling of the storm drowned the last words. Then several voices exclaimed; and Katherine, turning her head, saw Burke come striding in through the storm, a figure as white as the flying mist, at first, and then his own burly self was in the lee of the windbreak, brushing the snow out of his hair and shrugging the cold out of his body. The icy air had turned him blue. He stood reaching into the flames, as it were, opening and shutting his hands to bring back blood and sense into them. Under one arm, the sole trophy from this excursion into the wild night, were a number of small sticks which he must have cut from the ends of branches. The other men watched him with curious blendings of fear and resentment and awe in their eyes.

Davison got up suddenly and advanced into the snow-smother as far as the

Burke called: "There's loose snow on the mountain. Watch your step!"

fringe of the brush. There his shadow could be seen wrenching the smaller branches from a dead tree. Patterson finally went after him to help gather the firewood.

Burke went over to the fat co-pilot, sat down cross-legged, and took hold of his wrist, feeling for the pulse; when he found it, he closed his eyes and counted, nodding his head a little. It was something like seeing an ape sit down to think, Kate felt. The same hand which now fingered the pulse of Wood, marking the ebb and flow of the life-stream, also had held a gun and murdered Charles Whitley. Murderers are not like other criminals, her father had told her; they are not victims of habit, but simply people whose balance-wheel runs slower. Emotion tips them out of the normal poise too easily. Momentary insanity turns them into beasts, and like beasts they kill. Perhaps in some primeval state of society their value would be greater than the danger from them.

On this night, for instance, except for Burke, two lives would have been lost in the plane; except for Burke, the rest of them probably would be huddled together in a vague heap for warmth, waiting for certain death. In Burke's account it might seem that a balance could be struck in his favor because he had taken from the world only one life and given back to it all this group. But the law, she knew, did not work in this manner. When at last he stood for trial, if he and the rest of them escaped from starvation and cold in these mountains, the entire jury would know about his heroism, and they would recommend him to the mercy of the court. Perhaps he would receive mere sentence for manslaughter. Ten or a dozen years later he would emerge from prison. Perhaps all the rest would have forgotten him. But Mrs. Roland Davison would not forget. With a calm patience she would give him help as long as he lived. During the prison years she would write to him once a month. Perhaps it was the thought of her own enduring virtue that choked Katherine a little; and tears of strange pleasure stung her eyes.

A WOMAN'S voice said: "How is he?" Maureen Ervan was bending over Wood and Burke. All the smartness had been drenched and then wrung out of her clothes. Her bobbed hair hung in straight dabs around her face. But she retained her brilliant eyes and too-vivid cheeks; even now she would take the eyes of men who did not pause to see the mingled voluptuousness and brute about her chin and mouth. With a startled interest, Katherine watched the two, the murderer and the cause of the murder.

"Can I help, Jimmy?" asked Maureen.

Burke, rolling back his head to look up at her, started to answer, but checked himself on an unspoken word. For an instant his lip remained with an upward

curl so that the teeth showed, like a dog about to bite, and too savage to give warning with even a snarl. Then he lowered his head.

"Ah, damn you, then!" croaked Maureen in her husky voice, and was gone.

The heart of Katherine was racing in her throat. *Murder* had been only a word to her; but now she had seen in the look of Burke the very face of it. If he were alone with Maureen Ervan in this wilderness, how long would it be before his hands found their way to the throat of the woman whose testimony was to end his life?

"What's your name?" demanded a harsh voice.

That was Burke speaking to her. He had blue-green eyes set well apart under a spacious brow. He was looking at her with a sharp but intelligent consideration, such as a doctor in a charity ward gives to a patient.

"I'm Katherine Lawrence," she said.

"That fellow—the handsome lad. Do you belong to him?"

"He's Roland Davison," she answered.

"Is he?" asked Burke, and deliberately read her face from left to right and from right to left. He smiled a little, and the smile said that he did not think very much of Roland Davison. "You're doing a good job with this one," he added, nodding at Wood. "You've got him asleep. You've got a pair of hands. Keep on using them."

IN winters, when Katherine was not riding, she did a good deal of gymnasium work. That was to do proper honor to the body which God had given her. Also she had learned to watch the way people move. That was why she noted that when Burke rose, he did not touch the ground with his hands. He stood up as a big cat might rise, with effortless ease. Then he was crouching by the chief pilot, Hardy. Katherine followed him with intense eyes; and it seemed to her as though she were making a swift journey on wings, not through space but through the mind and spirit of this man.

He was bending down, staring closely at the stone-colored face and the open eyes of Hardy. It was one of those true Yankee faces, lean of cheek, big of bone, and the straight lips had a good grip, one on the other. It was not a face full of large mind and gentleness of soul, but resolved, keen, eager as if for action even during this moment of complete immobility.

"Your name is Hardy," stated the criminal. "How are you, Hardy?"

The lips of the chief pilot parted after a moment.

"Right as rain," he said.

"You lie," answered Burke. "How much you're lying, I don't know. But you lie. You're hurt. You're hurt so that you can hardly crawl. You can't even crawl, or you'd be working on the others. It's taking all your guts to keep from groaning. . . . Am I wrong?"

"You're wrong," said Hardy, and looked him in the eye.

THE wind, fallen away to distant uproars for the moment, came rushing back with its many voices, making a noise like the rushing of seas around the trunks of the trees and a whistling shriek through the branches; and all the while, a deeper vibration like the rumbling of approaching drums came out of the distance, the sound of a whole army charging tumultuously, without order. The height of this confusion whirled away and left Burke still staring down into the level unflinching eyes of Hardy.

"Listen, old son," said Burke. "You're worth all the rest of 'em put together. All these females multiplied by ten; and all the men—they're not worth a damn compared with your little finger. . . . So tell me the straight of it. How are you?"

The lips of Hardy parted again, slowly.

"Right as rain," he said.

As he spoke, he smiled a little. Still for a moment Burke studied him dubiously. At last he said: "O.K. I've got to take your word for it. If things get too bad for you, will you sing out?"

"I'll sing out," said Hardy.

Burke stood up, gave a last look to the pilot, and then turned away; but the girl knew that he carried with him a weight of sympathetic understanding. Somehow there was a profound bond between the pilot and the murderer, a pull like that of gravity, a spiritual force that tied them together. And Katherine fumbled far into her mind, trying to understand this evaluation which classed her with all the rest of the passengers and the crew as mere nothings, mere trivialities which, heaped all together, did not compare in value with the pilot's life, and the soul behind that long, hard, narrow face. Of course she revolted against that judgment; and yet an odd instinct kept alive a voice in her that

said Burke might be right. She dared not listen to that voice. . . .

Burke was tossing off his coat, tearing off shirt and undershirt, and tearing them into strips. Through coat and shirt and undershirt the fire had eaten its way, here and there, into the flesh. On breast and back she saw the angry red spots. Some of them were blisters which had broken, and the wounds were weeping. She understood, now, that a dozen spurs of anguish were constantly in the flesh of Burke, but he was covered with such big waves and running ripples of muscular strength that the torment seemed a light thing, a triviality, a conversational gesture. Any one of those burns would have put her in bed, she was sure, with a rising temperature and sedatives to strengthen her nerves against pain; but to Burke they were as nothing, his strength of body was so great to her eye. But that negative voice inside her which kept denying her outward judgments was wondering if his bigness were not a matter of sheer spirit.

He said to her, as he worked to tear up the cloth: "Get the broken leg of Alice Gordon bare. Get the stocking off it. Go easy, but get it off."

Mrs. Patterson came to help, and kept reaching out her hands toward the work, but actually her fingers could not be brought to touch the injured leg; and she kept exclaiming under her breath: "Poor child! Poor thing! Poor dear!"

There was something oddly familiar about the exposed leg, to Katherine. It was a moment before she realized that it was like her own, with a knee such as sculptors carve out of their fancy but almost never see in the flesh; for it was not knocked inward, not softened out of shape by a thick padding of flesh inside, but made neatly and clean and small. It was almost shocking to Katherine that such beauty of body should be united with a mere saucy prettiness of face.

Now Burke was wrapping cloth around that small bundle of straight sticks he had brought in from the woods. The cloth would keep them from cutting into the tenderness of the flesh.

"Are you ready, Alice?" he called, as he dropped to his knees.

"Ready!" she said, through her teeth.

HE took her bare foot by the toes and the heel. His fingers gripped firmly, sinking into the tender flesh and the fragile, small bones of the instep.

"Hold her at the hips, both of you!" commanded Burke. "Both of you hold her. Ready—go!"

The leg below the knee was twisted at a sharp angle where the break had occurred. In spite of the shattered bone, Burke jerked back suddenly with such strength that the weight of the stewardess was pulled sharply forward in spite of the resisting hands of Katherine and Mrs. Patterson. A scream burst from the throat of the tortured girl, and died half uttered. She had set her teeth over it, as Katherine saw through the swimming darkness that whirled in front of her own eyes. Katherine felt that she would faint. What kept her from that collapse was the hot anger that burned through her whole body, and the bitterness of her revolt against Burke's brutality. Only a sadist could have given the leg that heartless wrench. Yet it seemed to matter nothing to Burke, now. The bone of the lower leg now was straight. He set about the arrangement and bandaging of the splints as though nothing of the slightest interest had happened.

He began to run out of bandages. Kate stood up, reached under her dress, and tore away her slip. He accepted the silken garment without a glance, without a word of acknowledgment, and began to rip it into strips for the bandaging.

CHAPTER V

AT last they slept.

Fear is exhausting, and extreme cold drains away the strength. Shock, also, left them weakened. So they slept.

Katherine, in the arms of Davison with her head on his shoulder, was unconscious for a few minutes, and wakened as he, in his own sleep, kept pressing her closer, not for love but for the warmth of her body. Even that closeness could not keep the cold away. Her side which was farthest from Roland was as chilled as though a bucket of ice-water had been doused over her a moment before.

Still the fire, like a great yellow flower of inexhaustible life, kept blooming in the middle of the storm. She sat up, shuddering, unclasping the arms of Roland.

The others lay heaped together, stirring wretchedly in their sleep. But the fire burned as though it were immortal; and then she heard a voice singing, broken by the howling of the storm.

That was Burke. He was over there sitting beside the stewardess, and his bass voice picked up the lowest note of the storm's orchestra and prolonged it into words. He was singing a song which cattlemen know and use when the steers are bedded down, so that the monotony of sound will soothe the sleeping animals, the dark mounds of flesh which at night on the trail are so many lumps of potential dynamite, ready to stampede at the first alarm.

Roll along, little dogies, roll along;
Keep adrifting, drifting like a song.
There's a barn chock full of hay
At the end of the way;
Roll along, little dogies, roll along—

Katherine went closer. She heard Alice Gordon say: "Go on and sleep, big boy. Go on and sleep. I'm all right."

He was not sitting up, after all. Actually he was half reclined, and he had one arm under the head of the stewardess in lieu of a pillow.

"Stop talking, Alice, and try to sleep," answered Burke, and sang another stanza of the old song, keeping vague time for it with his free hand, which stroked the head of the girl. It was love, no doubt, thought Katherine. What else could it be but love? Perhaps there was in the soul of the girl something as unexpected as the beauty of her body; otherwise surely it was a long descent from the man to the stewardess.

Katherine was astonished by the surety of her feeling; for how could it be a *descent* from a murderer to any woman? This gentleness he was showing was merely the velvet over the tiger's claw. It was merely that she recognized in him a great force, perhaps, and for the force would have selected some larger destiny than Alice Gordon.

AN outbreak of snoring made her look aside, where Mike Rylan and J. Bashfield Rogers had been driven by the cold into a close embrace.

The same cold was drawing her, shuddering, to the edge of the fire; but she could not help smiling.

The voice of Burke, deep as the rumbling note of a bass viol, still was singing like a musical thunder:

Step away, little dogies, step away;
There's a trail-end a-coming and the pay.
There's a stockyard and a train
And we'll never meet again.
Step away, little dogies, step away.

And the stewardess was sleeping, with her face turned toward Burke, and the pain smoothed from between her eyes for the first time. He began to inch his arm from beneath her head, moving it with infinite caution. It was plain that whole minutes would elapse before he was free from the girl.

WHAT was the mysterious source and fountain of his strength? It seemed to Katherine, as she turned away and looked past the fire, that with his sole hands he had erected the windbreak which saved their lives; and certainly he alone had tended the fire during this time of freezing and sleeping.

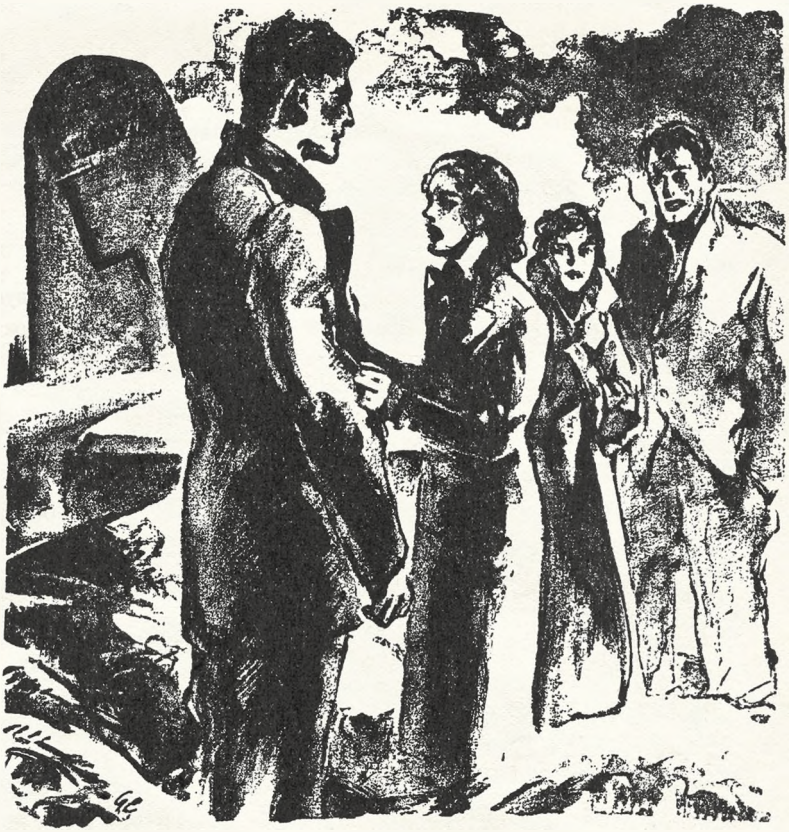
What was he? All turbulent male? There was enough of that in him for murder, to be sure; but there was also enough woman in his hand to enable it to charm the injured girl to sleep.

Katherine looked away from the fire and tried to free herself from the strange problem which made a tightness about her heart. The storm was more visible now. She could not say that it blew with less violence, but she could look far deeper into it, through the ranks of the trees toward the emptiness that lay beyond them. Down the slope a valley must lie; and in the light of the day which was dawning, perhaps she could bless her eye with the first glimpse of some village beneath them. Even a single house would be to her more than a single star in heaven.

She left the fire. One step from its radiant heat, the cold drenched her to the skin, as though with a violent sluicing of freezing brine; and then the wind got behind her and lifted her into long strides, as though she were about to be blown away. So she came through the trees. At the last rank of them, she was about to take another step—and discovered that the ground had disappeared from beneath her foot.

Fear dropped her to her knees. She lay flat, grasping an exposed root. Her face was above a boiling emptiness, like steam out of the spout of a vast kettle. Right beneath her the rock dropped away in a straight wall of cliff, veined with ice here and there. And through rifts and openings in the wild breath of the storm, she saw a valley as barren as the valleys in the salt sea.

It was all the grayness of stone and snow and bits of woodland like smoking streaks of spray between waves of the ocean.



Maureen Ervan caught Davison by the sleeve. "Oh, you fool, you've thrown our lives away!"

She drew back. Her knees shook as she pulled herself up beside the tree and leaned there a moment. The strength was so gone from her that she let the wind press her against the trunk, and the cold came out of it into her body and into her heart as the cold of a frozen iron comes into the hand on a winter morning.

After a while she went to the left. The light increased every moment. Over the edge of the cliff she could see clearer glimpses of the valley. There was no life in it. There could not be life within hundreds of miles of such a place, it seemed to her. It was an Arctic region. The face of it made her think of the death of men laboring toward the frontier.

And now, from a projecting point, in the clearer light she saw the cliff sweeping around in a great arc both to right and left, until it joined to tumbling sides of the mountains. There might be ways down from the place, but it would take real mountaineers to find a trail and use it.

Still, the valley beneath them seemed suddenly less desolate. It would serve at least as a road toward succor. Here above the cliff they were fastened to a perch too high and cold for the hawks and the eagles, even.

She turned and went back to the camp. Her way was easier than she had expected, for with the coming of the day the storm lifted a little, and now was shooting the clouds in sooty masses off the tops of the mountains. The wind-pressure along the narrow plateau was much more mild as a result.

SHE found the camp alive and alert, and thoroughly miserable. Hunger had been far less than their fear when they lay down to rest, but it was an equal part in their torment when they roused themselves again. The gooseflesh was visible in the blue of their faces; and they all too plainly felt what Katherine herself was feeling—a cold stone in the vitals, eating away the needed warmth of the blood.

She came back to huddle for an instant at the fire. Davison, stepping up from behind, put his arm around her. She looked up into his face with a sudden hope.

But he was saying: "Where have you been, Kate? Why did you leave me? Stay close to me from now on."

She looked down at the fire again. Perhaps he would think it a nodding of her head in agreement, but there was something in his words which she could not answer. Then he was gone to drag in

more wood; and she turned to give the injured what help she could.

Burke was there before her.

"Have you seen—out there?" he asked.

"I've seen," she agreed.

"You haven't talked about it," said Burke. "That's right. Keep what you know behind your teeth, and everybody will be better off. Some of these people are going to be jittery if they find out that we're behind a fence as well as out on a limb. . . . Take a look at Hardy for me and see how you think he is."

She went over to take a look at Hardy. He had that same stone-color in his face and an added tinge of blue in his cheeks. Whatever his secret feeling was, his lips were pressed together to keep it from escaping. She took his wrist. It required some effort and infinite delicacy of touch before her freezing fingertips could find the pulse. At last she recognized the pulsation. It was regular enough, and not very fast. Perhaps the weakness of it was merely apparent and not real, due rather to the cold which numbed her sense of touch rather than to a failing heart.

SHE went back to Burke to give that report, but found him shouting: "Everybody out! Out in the open! Get out from the trees and form a line."

Roland Davison dropped a heap of brush he was bringing in and answered: "Burke, you've been doing good work. You've been a handy fellow. But you're not in charge of the party. We'll have no more orders from you, Burke!"

"Won't you?" answered Burke.

"I've told you my mind," said Davison. "Rogers and Rylan agree with me. Keep in your place from now on, Burke."

He spoke calmly, in a clear voice, as he always spoke when there was an emergency. Katherine found herself looking anxiously from one man to the other; but there was no savage outburst from Burke after being checked in this manner. He seemed rather grimly amused than disturbed.

"Have it your own way, then," he said. "But listen! Kate, Patterson—come on out with me!"

"Stay here, Katherine!" directed Davison. "You're not at his beck and call."

"But listen! Listen!" cried Katherine suddenly.

She could hear it now. It came through the grain of the storm's noise like a saw through wood, the whirring sound of strong motors above them, in the clouds. There was no need for Burke to repeat commands, after that. All the group went storming through the trees and out into the open flat of the plateau. By the time they were clear of the trees, the noise of the motors was just above them.

"Form a line—hold hands and form a line!" shouted Burke. "And walk forward so they can see us move."

They formed the line, obediently. Katherine had the hand of pretty little Maureen Ervan on one side, and Davison's on the other.

Ruth Patterson screamed out: "Look! *Look!* They've seen us! They're coming!"

And in fact the plane, like a clumsy stiff-winged bird, dropped out of the higher clouds at that moment. But it was not coming. It was receding, and in another instant a cloud sponged it out of the face of the sky.

Maureen Ervan broke from her place in line and ran after the disappearing hope which had looked at them from the sky and turned away again so quickly. She ran, screaming hoarsely, holding out her hands, until she stumbled and fell to her knees with her face caught between her hands, her body swaying from side to side as she sobbed.

"We've got to get a fire out here in the open," said Burke. "I'm a fool not to have thought of that."

A crazy passion came over Mike Rylan. He shook his fist in Burke's face and shouted: "Save your thinking till you're in the death-house where you belong! There's other people here to do the thinking!"

HE seemed to realize that this sort of talk might be dangerous. Before he ended the words, he was backing up and pulling a long-barreled gun from his clothes; but Burke made no gesture toward him. The big man had swayed forward a little as the words struck him; he seemed in the very act of springing at Rylan, and then something checked him on tiptoe and settled him back on his heels. Somehow Katherine knew it was not the mere sight of the gun which made him hold back. There was more than brute in him, then; there was the thin silken leash of reason, as well.

Afterward he hurried to bring out burning brush from the fire in front of the windbreak, and on the level snow he deposited it. Katherine herself helped to bring more fuel. They built the flame

high. Then green branches on top sent up a thick column of smoke that boiled up aslant through the sky.

It looked to Katherine like an endless arm held up to arrest attention and summon help.

CHAPTER VI

EVERYTHING at that moment conspired to raise their hopes in spite of the disappearance of the airplane, for the wind changed direction a little and lifted still higher from the earth, splitting the clouds apart and tumbling them like a great furrow down the sky. Katherine, dragging more fuel for the fire, looked up, agape with joy, at the blue of heaven and the bright sun that poured down over the mountains.

Davison appeared beside her and laid a hand on her arm.

"Let the brush alone, Kate," he commanded. "We'll end in a disaster if we let a common murderer give the directions in our camp. Do what Rylan or Rogers tell you. Or you can take my own advice. But stop trotting about like a puppy at the heels of Burke. I should think your own good sense would warn you not to do that!"

She had dropped the branches she was dragging, and looked down at the hand on her arm while he spoke. Then, silently, she lifted the hand, picked up her burden, and trudged on toward the fire. It was not until she was tossing the branches onto the burning heap that she realized the possible significance of what she had done; and glancing back, she saw Davison still in place where she had left him. Only then did she realize that she had taken what might be the longest step of her life, if she persisted in it. It seemed to her a temptation to evil, and gave a guilty lift to her heart; but all the while she was assured that nothing could be broken off, and that in the end, if they lived, she must go on to New York, where that formal wedding, like a state ceremony, awaited her. Then with the farther lifting of the clouds, she saw a picture that drove all other thoughts from her mind.

For all the mountain peaks in the same instant were revealed with the brilliancy of the sun on them and the wind flaring out behind their heads long banners of snow-dust. Sometimes where the windward slope of the mountains was very steep or almost concave, the snow rushed upward like an endless explosion, hanging vast clouds of radiance in the sky; but as a rule each summit wore its flag of translucency, its flying veil of sunshine made visible. There was such a dazzle of beauty, such a glory over the white mountains, as though they were keeping a festival and rejoicing together. The wind, singing high above them, was the voice of that ecstasy.

She looked away from the heights, to find that all the rest were down-headed with their thoughts; only the murderer, Burke, looked up toward the mountains. And even he had something more than scenic beauty in his mind's-eye, for now he was calling Mike Rylan and pointing.

She saw what he meant a moment later. High above them and far away on a ledge of the upper cliff, a huge mountain sheep had come out to the edge of the precipice to look over the morning. The hunger which had been gnawing at the vitals of Katherine rose upward and threw a spinning darkness across her eyes.

She saw Davison come with high, floundering steps through the snow; Patterson was there, also, and Rogers, all pointing and staring at some two or three hundred pounds of meat on the hoof; and then Rylan's automatic was in his hand. Still more talk, and finally the gun was passed to Davison.

She felt a pride that lifted her head. They had heard, then, of the big-game hunting of Roland Davison, and they gave way to him. Only Burke, now standing somewhat aloof from the rest, called, as Rylan and Davison started away: "Careful, boys. There's a lot of loose, soft snow on this side of the mountain. Watch your step."

Davison turned silently, gave Burke a careful look, and then went on with Rylan.

The others gathered closely together to watch the decision upon their fate. Hunger does not kill very quickly, but at the end of three or four days it paralyzes even a strong man with weakness. Up there on the ledge was salvation for them all, if Davison could make the shot.

RYLAN and Davison, swinging off to the right of a straight line, seemed for a moment or two to be growing larger against the snow; then they dipped into a swale and came up on the farther side as small figures. The spots of darkness which their feet left behind them seemed

almost as large as the bodies of the laboring men.

Their strategy seemed faultless. They were going to the right, away from the straight line toward the big ram, and now they were cutting in under the edge of the cliff where his lordly eyes could not see them; after that, they could come out again into view of the big fellow and drop him with a quick short-range shot.

Katherine went to Burke and murmured to him—as though a raised voice might frighten the sheep away even at that distance: "Will they get it? *Can* they get it?"

"They ought to go up high," answered Burke. "A rising shot is hard to make; and then there's the snow; if they start a riffle in it sliding, that sheep will be off like quicksilver."

"They ought to have you with them!"

"They'd rather have me in jail," answered Burke.

She could not speak, after that. Far, far beyond the level of the plateau, and high up the slope at the foot of the cliff, the two little figures were moving. It seemed that they were directly beneath the sheep now. Perhaps they were coming out from under the rock, to make the shot; at that great distance it was impossible to tell.

"I knew it!" said Burke suddenly.

For the big mountain sheep with his curling horns had disappeared now, and where the two little black figures stood rose a puff of white smoke, barely discernible. She thought at first that it might be smoke from the gun, before she realized that smokeless powder would leave no stain in the air.

A FAINT cry came from the other watchers as they saw the mountain sheep disappear; but even that universal exclamation was muffled, all had been watching with such tense hope. The white rising of the snow-dust, like smoke, continued and increased. The two hunters were lost behind it. And still the dust grew until it was like a flag, blowing straight up from the ground and advancing with increasing rapidity.

"It's a snow-slide," announced the calm voice of Burke. "Get out of here, and get fast!"

He led the way at a dog-trot to the right. The rest, hesitant for a moment, floundered slowly after him. Katherine he held by the right arm, high up close to the shoulder. When she looked back across the level of the plateau, she saw that the slide had gathered head and speed with wonderful rapidity. Gather-

"If there's any back-talk, I'll use my hands on you! Get moving!"

ing mass, it now was cutting down through the snow to the soil and rock beneath, and left a widening V of darkness as its path. Well above, she saw at the apex of the inverted V the two little figures of the men.

"This ought to be far enough," said Burke, and let her halt and turn back. The others, thoroughly panic-stricken, went by them like a covey of quail.

For the snowslide was showing both a face and a voice, now. Its front was a wild white wave that careened down the mountain as fast as a galloping horse, flinging up small dark objects as it ran, like a juggler with a thousand hands. Those would be the rocks and boulders, which it caught up with the bottom of its flying plowshare. Its voice was like a wave also, an endless breaker roaring on an endless shore and rushing momentarily closer.

From behind it the flag of snow-dust shot up continually higher in the air. Now the whole mass, striking a swale, veered off and headed almost toward Burke; again it plunged against a hummock and knocked a spray of snow-clots and boulders a hundred feet overhead, then swayed to its right again, and changed its voice as it struck the level of the plateau.

It seemed to Katherine that the mass must stop there on the flat; but it ran on like something on wheels with hardly arrested momentum. It reached the down-slope on the farther side. It struck the trees with a sound like a thousand axes, and a thousand tree-trunks fell. Instantly stripped of bark and limbs in the wild mill of the slide, white, glistening tree-bodies leaped into the sunlight like great silver fish out of a tidal wave.

And then silence. . . . The slide had reached the edge of the lower cliff and plunged forth over the valley. It was gone, and only the echoes boomed close by and then echoed far away, rattling among the higher peaks. Their voices had not died when a huge report boomed up from the valley floor, followed by an instant of rushing noises. The last echoes fondled these sounds. They died. The morning was left as before, with those wild white banners streaming from the mountain tops. And two little figures, incredibly small, almost invisible as they toiled down the rough path of the slide, were returning empty-handed to the hungry people.

"They've lost the gun," said Burke. "They've lost the gun, or they would have gone on, anyway. . . . The sheep knows it, Kate. Look up there!"

As a matter of fact, three ledges above the place where it had first appeared, the little silhouette of a mountain sheep appeared against the crystal radiance of the blowing snow.

And the automatic was gone. It seemed to Katherine, as she went down-headed back toward the trees, that a great event had happened in history.

MIKE RYLAN, filled with excitement, was trying to tell how the slide had begun, how the snow had slipped, suddenly, beneath the feet of Davison. How the whole slope had turned to water, carrying them swiftly along until a projection of rock held up its hand and stopped them. How they had lain there flat on their bellies and watched the white monster come to life with increasing strength and begin to plow its way down the mountain-side. But Rylan had no good listeners. Only one thing was of importance. This present failure could have been forgiven a thousand times over; but Davison, as the snow shot away beneath him, had let the automatic fly out of his hand.

Maureen Ervan caught him by the coat-sleeve and croaked into his face:

"You've thrown our lives away. Oh, you fool, you damned high-headed fool, you've thrown us all away. . . . Go jump off the cliff! . . . I wish you had never been born!"

Maureen was the only one who put thoughts and wishes into words. The others said nothing, but they looked at Roland Davison as honest men regard a traitor. She heard big Patterson say: "Burke should have gone, of course. The only luck we have is what Burke gives us!"

Then they were back at the camp, where Hardy continued to look into upper space, silently, and his co-pilot, Wood, once more out of his head with pain and his injuries, kept turning his face from side to side, groaning on every indrawn breath. The stewardess, flushed, bright-eyed, enduring, had her head lifted by Burke, who was giving her a drink of snow-water, melted in a twisted, hollowed fragment from one wing of the wrecked plane.

Burke lowered her head and stood up before them.

"Get back there in the open!" he commanded. "Three or four of you get out there and stay out there. Keep that fire hot, and keep feeding green branches to make the smoke. That's the one chance we have of making a signal. And unless a plane lands for us on the plateau, most of us are going to die right here. Does that make sense? Die right here, unless we have wings to fly away. We'll have no more arguing about it. Rylan, you and Rogers and Mrs. Patterson can take the first watch out there by the fire. And if there's any back-talk and delay, I'll have to use my hands on you—and I'll do it! Get moving, the three of you!"

IT was not the trio that Katherine watched, but the face of Davison as he stood up ready to protest. Rylan and he, for an instant, eyed one another gloomily. But no action followed. Rylan, Mrs. Patterson and Rogers moved off through the trees.

But they had an almost hopeless task ahead of them, for suddenly, like the closing of the door of a bright room, the brilliance had gone out of the sky; and with the disappearance of the sun, the clouds rolled lower down, the wind dropped closer to the earth, and changing to its old quarter, began to blow the mist of snow-dust through the trees. A false gray twilight covered the world.

With blistered, weary hands, Katherine started once more moiling and toiling in the brush to get more fuel for the fire. But the dead bushes seemed to have been exhausted already. She had to go farther in among the trees. And the wind cut through her torn clothes as though she were a naked body. She was tired of dreading death; she was too exhausted to feel fear. And when she stood, carelessly, on the edge of the precipice with the smoking valley far beneath her, it seemed an easy thing to make that one brief step into nothingness.

CHAPTER VII

ONE freezing hour tending the fire on the open plateau was all that flesh could stand. The first trio came back. Then Katherine went out with Patterson and Roland Davison, to stand her watch. Burke was gone all that time. He still was gone when they came shuddering back to the windbreak and its life-giving fire. But a moment later he appeared, the wind huddling his coat up around his shoulders and showing his half-naked body, blue with cold except for the red spots which the fire had left on his flesh.

He sat down by the fire, borrowed a knife, and took from his pocket a creature no larger than a squirrel, with a tiny, delicate head. He began to skin and clean it. He went off into the storm again, returned with a larger section of twisted metal from the wing-sheathing of the plane, heaped this with snow, and when the water was hot, dropped the body of the little rock-coney into the dish to stew. Another and another of those small dead creatures he took from his pocket, skinned, cleaned, and put into the improvised pot.

Where he had found them, how he had caught them, they did not even think to ask. It was sufficient that he had performed the miracle, and the odor of the stew carried a heavenly fragrance to the others as they bent close.

After a time he began to prong the meat with a pointed stick. A dozen of the little creatures were in the pot. He picked up the best done of the lot with his stick and began to scrape the meat from the frame with the point of the pocket-knife. When the frame was clean, he broke the skeleton in two.

"Who needs food the most?" he asked, holding up the prizes.

A hungry silence lasted only an instant. Then Maureen Ervan screeched: "But I'm starving, Jimmy! I'm dying. I haven't eaten all yesterday. Jimmy—Jimmy—darling—"

"Maybe you're a step nearer crazy than the rest," agreed Burke, and held out half the skeleton without touching the girl with his eyes.

"You take the rest," he said to Katherine.

"There are the sick," said Katherine. "There's Alice—"

He looked at her with strange eyes for a moment.

"The sick are going to have the meat," he answered. "They'll have the soup and the meat. . . . Take this. Chew up the bones. Chew 'em up small, and they'll do you a lot of good. Chew 'em bit by bit, and mash them up fine. Then you can swallow, and they'll do you no harm. . . . Take this."

She took it. It was a mere wisp of bones, but the taste of life came out of it. Sounds rose in her throat and almost passed her lips, animal gruntings and murmurs of content.

There were more of these priceless morsels. Patterson got a share, and then Ruth Patterson and Rogers and Davison, and Maureen again, and Katherine—till she said: "What do you keep for yourself?"

"I can live off my fat for a week," grunted Burke. "Don't argue with me. Do what you're told."

She did what she was told.

WHEN the last skeleton had been stripped of flesh, he divided the stew into portions in three of the fire-bent, battered twists of metal from the plane. He took the first to Alice and left Katherine to feed her. Mrs. Patterson braced up the head of Wood and offered him his share, but Burke himself went over to Hardy.

"Take a sniff of this," he said, and slipped a hand under the shoulders of Hardy to lift him a little.

"It's no use," answered Hardy.

"That stew, old son," said Burke, "is as good a slumgullion as any camp cook ever turned out. I cooked for a gang of punchers one month, myself, when I was a kid in this part of the world, a long time ago. And I never cooked anything better than a coney, Hardy. This stuff is going to do you good. It's going to warm you up and put the red back into your blood."

"Old Jimmy!" murmured Hardy, and smiled at the murderer.

Burke laid the stewpan aside and stared more earnestly into the eyes of the pilot. He said: "Let me have it straight, Dave."

"I'll let you have it straight," murmured Hardy. "Come closer."

Burke put his ear close to the lips of Hardy. All that Katherine could hear was the sibilance of the whisper, but she saw Burke's head jerk up, then lower again to listen.

AFTER a while he sat up straight. He took Hardy by the coat-shoulders. "You can hang on, Dave," he said.

The thin lips of Hardy smiled, briefly. Pain, before the smile had ended, twisted his mouth sharply to one side. The torment in which he lay had grown so exquisite that his face was no longer mere stone-color. It was a greasy gray.

"I've got more to say," murmured Hardy.

Burke leaned again. Presently he half-straightened and took a gold watch and chain out of a vest pocket of Hardy's clothes. From Hardy's coat he drew a small notebook and a pencil, and scribbled a few quick words. Then he leaned again for further instructions. And again he straightened to write, not for a moment, but long enough to fill two of the small pages of the book. He closed the notes, put them into his own pocket, drew out a handkerchief, wrapped the watch in it, and placed that with the notebook.

"Is that all?" he asked.

"That's all," smiled Hardy.

"You knew right from the first," challenged Burke.

"I knew right from the first," agreed Hardy.

"I was a blockhead. I was a fool. I saw the look of you, and I should have guessed," declared Burke. No bodily pain had so altered and twisted his face as the words he had been hearing from Hardy.

"There was nothing you could do," answered Hardy. "All the doctors lined up in a row—there was nothing they could've done. . . . Jimmy—"

"Yes?" said Burke. He leaned closer again.

Then he called out in a great voice that made the heart of Katherine swell and then contract to a stone. "Say it again, Dave!" cried Burke. "I didn't quite get that last."

"I guess I'm going to let go all holds—" said the faint voice of Hardy. He closed his eyes as he spoke. "You'll find her, sure?"

"I'll find her, sure," said Burke. "I'll give her the stuff. I've got all your words written down. And I'll have something to say to her besides. I wish to God I'd met up with you long ago, Dave."

"Old Jimmy!" sighed Hardy.

HIS face was altering from moment to moment. Now that his eyes were closed, Katherine realized they had been open constantly all this time, looking steadily upward, without a shadow of complaint in them. Now from instant to instant he was growing years older as the flesh relaxed about his cheeks, about his mouth.

"Let go all holds, Dave," said Burke. "It's all right. I'm going to find her. I'll speak the whole piece, and she'll believe me."

Hardy tried to answer, but his lips made only a slight motion in framing words. They remained parted. After a moment his eyes opened a little. The partly opened eyes and the faintly smiling lips gave him the appearance of one who has thought of something very pleasant.

Burke, leaning over the body braced on his two big arms, studied the face of the pilot with a savage intensity. He looked as though he were about to burst into copious profanity. Instead, he lifted a hand and drew down the eyelids with the utmost delicacy of touch. After that, he remained sitting there for a moment cross-legged, his chin on his fist, and his gaze probing a great nothingness. . . .

Hardy was dead, and the stillness of that death seemed greater than the uproar of the storm, to Katherine. Tears came into her eyes. She dared not wink, for fear the water would run down her face.

Yet it seemed to her that the tears were more for the grief of Burke than for the dead man. That analytical mind of the girl took this fact back and forth, turning the thing this way and that for a deeper understanding. Burke, who never had seen the pilot before he boarded this plane—Burke the murderer, whom the law was bound to kill in turn—this same fellow Burke sat with a grimly stricken face of grief because he had seen a man face the inevitable without a murmur, and without a murmur die.

A light came out of the distance and flowed inward upon the mind of Katherine. Still the storm had no sound for her, but every moment there was a deepening understanding of why Burke had told the dead man that his life was worth the lives of all the rest. She wondered how they were revealed to one another; just what look about the eyes and what carriage of the head, what words and what voice had made them known? Was it like the chime of steel on steel that went through them and gave them that profound recognition? This bond which they had felt so quickly, might it not have lasted for life, in spite of time and of space?

The voice of Davison sounded calm, high-pitched, as he was saying: "I think that's a dead body, Burke. We'll have to move it away from here. We can't have—"

Burke looked up, slowly, and the voice died away from the lips of Davison. The murderer picked up one of the green boughs which had been brought to thicken the beds in front of the windbreak. He laid the thick fragrant green of the pine bough across the breast and the face of Hardy.

CHAPTER VIII

BURKE stood up with the food intended for Hardy in his hand. It had cooled rapidly. The top was covered with a white scum of fat, but even the fat seemed to Katherine delicious beyond price and words. And there was the deep meat and the broth of the soup beneath, of course. He did not pause to make a choice. He merely said: "Here, Mrs. Patterson. Divide this with Maureen." And they asked no questions, made no offers, but fell upon the dish.

He turned sharply to Katherine. "You've got a belt," he pointed out. "Pull it up a notch or two. One like you," he added, surveying her with that bright eye of his, "one like you can live on your fat, for a few days."

Phrased in that manner, it might have been an insult, but she knew it was in fact the greatest compliment that ever had been paid to her. All the smirking boys and the leering men and the flattering elders, and all their speeches rolled into one were not half such a golden tribute as this speech from Burke. Perhaps, she thought, he had found in her some of the true metal; perhaps he had

Was he dead? .... She heard herself saying: "My dear, my dear, I thought you were gone! I thought you were gone from me!"

heard, however faintly, the ring of the true steel.

He did not pause to add to his words, but went stalking off into the whirling snow-wraiths of the storm. As they rushed shifting through the air, he was covered, revealed, covered, seen again, then lost among the trees. And suddenly she took after him.

For she knew that he was going to try again at the same larder from which he had brought back food before; and though he would not trust their clumsiness, perhaps she could surprise him by being of help. She ran in the direction which he had taken. A hard gust of the wind knocked her, in the blindness of a snow-smother, against a tree-trunk. Half her breath was beaten out of her, and she could not catch it again; but for fear of losing the trail, she scrambled to her feet and rushed on, bent over almost double like a child with a stomachache.

BUT Burke was lost to her. The false twilight of the storm thickened the trees to an endless forest, a mystery through which she ran stumbling until a sort of black stepladder lifted before her, dimly, and changed at closer range to bleak ridges of rock, shelves eight or ten feet apart up which, high above her head, Burke was climbing. He hung now by his hands from an upper lip of the stone, and swung himself up, rolling immediately out of view.

She stood closely in the lee of the largest tree-trunk she could find, but the wind curled its icy fingers around the tree and thrust the cold into her body. She crouched doubled up between the roots trying to give her body warmth from her legs, and hugging her knees with her arms. Still she watched through miserable minutes, staring through the tremor and fog of the snow-dust until Burke loomed again on the same ledge where he had disappeared. Both his pockets bulged with such a promise that hunger made her heart leap into a new hope.

He was descending, now, hanging by both hands, by one; he was reaching with feet, that scraped half blindly against the rock, while the wind swung him, pendulous. And no one would make a record of this. No one would write it down, so that the future could know what heroes are made of.

She forgot the cold. She stood up. There was such a strange rejoicing in her that she could have sung in spite of the storm.

He was at the third ledge. He was at the second. And suddenly he was flat on the ground, lying stretched on his back with his arms thrown above his head. Was he dead? She found herself crouched by him, shaking him by one shoulder with a futile hand and screaming out his name. The wind plucked the sound from her lips, whirling it away

into empty confusion. In both hands she took his head, to find where the abrasion must be. It was not there. She slipped an arm beneath it, and found herself looking down into his wide-open, puzzled eyes.

Without volition words broke from her lips. She heard herself saying: "My dear, my dear, I thought you were gone! I thought you were gone from me!"

"Gone?" said Burke. "Why, if I'd been gone to hell, I'd have come back for this! Is it true, Kate?"

That right hand which had held the gun and done the murder lifted, touched her face, as though to make sure of her. She pressed the hand against her breast. She touched with her finger-tips the deep mark between the eyes which was the token, perhaps, of that headlong passion which had overruled him at least once in his life.

He was sitting up, slowly. She was asking him where he was hurt. He was smiling at her. She was telling him that he had to confess, because he belonged to her. He was on his knees. She was helping him to his feet. He stood uncertainly, half-reeling in the wind, letting his weight sway against her. One arm hung helplessly over her shoulder.

"Only a couple of ribs," said Burke, gasping out the words. "It's an odd thing that a hulk like me should be ribbed up with toothpicks. Nothing but a couple of ribs, Kate. I'll get a breath or two, and then I'll be all right."

SHE began to help him toward the first tree, looking not at the ground but up into his face, in mortal dread of seeing there the same calm smile with which Dave Hardy had died. But the jaw of Burke was hard-set, fighting, and the hope that had sickened in her returned. Once he stumbled and went almost to his knees. The burden of his loose weight staggered her, bent her. But she supported him to the semi-shelter of a broad trunk.

"No brains in my feet, no sap in my knees," said Burke. "But they've held out long enough to find a way to you, Kate. Think of it, will you? When I know that everything is finished, first I find a man, and then I find the woman."

She could not speak. Joy made her heart race, and sorrow stopped it. She could only go on beside him, giving all her strength to buoy that handless, footless weight of his, until the fire glowed before them, dimly.

Burke gathered himself and pulled his arm away from her supporting shoulder.

"I'll make it from here," he said. "And don't let them know that anything is wrong with me. Some of them think I'm their luck. Don't steal their luck away from them, Kate."

She had a thousand words of protest against everything he said, but before she could speak them aloud, she knew that she would have to obey. The taste of that obedience, bitter-sweet, was new to the life of Katherine.

She went on beside him, slowly. Once, twice the wind blew him to a stop. He leaned gradually against it and went on. Coming beside the fire, he drew the little coneys from his pockets. A dozen of them he dropped in the snow. Now he was sitting down, while she watched the suppressed groan whiten his face. He was sitting down there cross-legged, peeling the coneys like apples, and coring them, and dropping them into the stew-pot. It was to be the turn of the men, now, and they gathered like wolves to watch. A pale figure, hunched with cold, shouldered among the rest. That was the fellow named Davison, whom she had known once, thousands of years ago.

Then she went out to stand her turn at the fire on the open level of the plateau. They would save her a portion of the food. Burke would see to that. And in the meantime there was work to warm her, and something great in her heart that gave her the strength of a man in her hands. She freshened the fire while poor Patterson, helpless with cold and weariness, pulled futilely at tough green shrubbery that would not give way at the roots or in the branches. She freshened the fire and heaped on the green stuff again until the strong column of smoke once more slanted in a crooked exclamation mark into the sky, where it was lost in the low sweep of the clouds. The brief gesture of it tied earth and heaven together. That thought had whipped through her mind when the noise of the storm changed to a rougher, louder note that grew with amazing suddenness, seeming to point a finger of sound at her. She recognized at last the loud roar of motors in the sky above.

THE force of the wind staggered her as she looked up. She had to fall on her knees, and from that position she scanned the sky. But the noise of the motors blew over her, the plane lost in the clouds or above them. It was far to

the right. No, it was not quite gone, for now the stiff-winged bird dropped out of the high smother just as it had done before, that morning. It appeared for an instant, and was lost again in the wild sweep of the mist. She stood up, more beaten in spirit than ever before, and saw poor Patterson with his arms clasped in despair around his head. All the rest would be running out of the woods in a moment with hope singing in their brains, and only the smoky flow of that sky to torment their eyes after all. The fire was burning well enough, and yet she pulled blindly at the green branches to thicken the smoke column.

WHEN she glanced up at last from that work, the people were streaming out from the woods, but they did not come and stand in despair. Instead, they were running wildly forward, waving their hands high above their heads. Little J. Bashfield Rogers was leaping into the air, ecstatic spy-hops, like a rabbit chased by the hounds. Patterson, too, was running furiously across the snow and holding out his arms before him. And at last she saw what it was. The plane, unannounced by the motors, which had been throttled low as it glided down against the wind, was sliding over the snow on long skis, slowing, stopping—a huge plane of the same type that had brought them to this place and crashed. And they were safe. A bridge of swift wings was ready to arch through the sky and carry them back to the cities of men in one long sweep above the storm.

After that, impressions grew muddled in the brain of Katherine. The moment was clear when Davison came up to catch her in his arms—Davison with a face made strange by exultant laughter. She pushed him away and held him off.

"But that's ended. That was ended long ago, Rollie," she told him.

What Davison did or said, she forgot. She remembered, also, how the men from the rescue plane came out, huddled in warmth, their bodies swollen with clothes. She remembered how the injured stewardess was carried to the plane, and poor Ken Wood after her. She remembered some of the faces, all distorted with joy, and then how they carried the body of Dave Hardy to the ship for his last journey; but all the while, there was an overmastering sickness in her soul, for she knew what the coming of the plane must mean to James Burke.

There he moved, walking slowly, until he was in the lee of the big ship and Mike Rylan stepped up to him there and snapped a pair of handcuffs over his wrists. How carefully Mike must have saved them for this moment! And Burke, without a protest, accepted the new arrest, merely looking down in silence, and spreading out the bigness of his hands. The wind had fallen for a moment. That was why Maureen Ervan did not have to lift her voice as she said: "I can't do it—I can't do it! A right guy like him—and me with my lungs most gone, anyhow!"

She went on, drawling now: "Take them off him, Mike. Are you fool enough to think that this sugar-and-pie Sunday-school boy knocked over Charley Whitley? No, no, honey. You want to know who did it? 'Why, I,' said the sparrow, 'with my little bow and arrow!' That's the fact, Mike. Charley knew too much about me, and he began to tell Jimmy, that day, some of the things he knew. And it sort of went to my head, Mike, if you know what I mean. I knew that old Whitley library better than I know a pair of gloves. So I found the gun while I was right in the middle of the first heat. And I shot him right through the attic, with his own little automatic. Afterward, I thought Jimmy would look better in the electric chair than I was ever meant to look. Get the irons off him, you flat-faced dummy! Oh, Jimmy, damn you, I've been sort of loving you the whole time!"

PERHAPS it was that moment which knocked Katherine's brain into a whirl from which she did not recover until long later, when she sat by the side of Burke as he lay stretched on cushions, his eyes squinted a little at times by the pain, but watching her steadily. Men like Hardy, men like James Burke, would be calm and smiling before they died. Pain could not bend or twist them from that stillness of resolution. The fight that showed in Burke's face meant that he would live. So nothing mattered.

Maureen Ervan came over and halted beside her.

"How lucky are you, sister?" asked Maureen.

Katherine looked up at the girl, and remembered everything, and nevertheless was able to smile at her.

"I know only a part of it," she said. "I want you to tell me the rest."

THE END

The fourth story of "Trumpets from Oblivion"—a brilliant series which makes real and reasonable the strange legends that have come down to us.

The Singing Sands

Pen drawings by John Richard Flanagan

"Norman Fletcher," I stated, "has a theory that the race of men aren't fools; that the myths and fables of old have a basis of fact."

"Something to that!" Parker kindled. "Fletcher! Do you mean that Yankee scientist who's accomplished such wonders with ultrasonic waves? Why, he's one of the world's most famous men!"

"Well, he's got our local Inventors' Club about gaga," I said wryly. "He's been giving us weekly demonstrations of a sort of wrong-way television; he claims

"St. George! Send help against these spirits of evil! St. Michael! To the rescue of good Christian folk!"

# of Prester John

By

H. BEDFORD-JONES

that it recaptures and brings back scenes and sounds of the past, on the principle that light and sound never die. He's promised some day to bring back Cæsar's dying voice, and so forth. Just now, he's been recreating the origin of old myths. I don't know, none of us know, whether he's having fun with us, tricking us with some illusion, or really showing a marvelous instrument of the future."

IN his own way, Parker is as famous as Norman Fletcher is in electrical wizardry. He has traveled everywhere,

chiefly in Asia. Mention any obscure spot in the middle of the Gobi Desert and he's been there. It was Parker who brought back that wild story, later proved to be fact, about the grave of Genghis Khan.

As we discussed Norman Fletcher's remarkable feats, my friend's interest kindled. He scoffed at my skepticism; Fletcher, said he, was too famous a man to indulge in any childish illusion or trickery. Especially as Fletcher allowed us to give him, each week, a subject for the next week's demonstration. Rather shamefacedly, I admitted that tonight we were to witness a subject I myself had suggested.

"You see, I wanted to obviate any chance for trickery," I said. "A week wouldn't give him time to get a movie faked up—though we're fairly certain that what we see isn't a motion picture. We have some good technical brains in the Inventors' Club. I suggested the old explorers' yarn, reported by Marco Polo and even as far back as Herodotus, about desert sands that sing. In fact, I did more: I quoted a line from some old poem, and he took it for this week's subject—the Singing Sands of Prester John. Of course, there's no connection between singing sands and the mythical Prester John—"

PARKER had been looking at me with an amazed expression.

"But there is! My Lord, man, there is!" he broke in. "The singing sands—I've heard 'em, just as Marco Polo did! They're open to scientific explanation. Like the famous singing Memnon—when Lord Curzon was in Egypt, he investigated the statue of Memnon and proved just how it had happened to sing."

"But Prester John was in Abyssinia!" I exclaimed.

He shook his head.

"No; it goes farther back, as far as the Crusades. Prester John was in Asia. These yarns about him, and about the singing sands of the Lopnor desert, date back to the time when that desert was the garden of the world and the richest province in China. But deforestation, changing streams and lakes, ruined it and the desert moved in. Why, Sven Hedin found an entire city scooped bare by the sand, a whole forest! And next week it was covered from sight again. Even now, travelers there make fires from sand-buried poplar trees that died a thousand years ago! Look here, I'd give a good deal to attend your séance tonight!"

Easily arranged: I phoned Norman Fletcher; he had heard of Parker, and was delighted to include him in the invitation. So there we were.

OLD Fletcher, white-haired, affable, perhaps a bit lonely, had come to cherish these weekly meetings. He loved to make each meeting the occasion of a bang-up dinner; and tonight was no exception. When at length we rose from the table and followed into his laboratory, where stood an open humidor of cigars, we knew we had dined well.

Norman Fletcher took his seat at his switchboard, the only piece of apparatus in sight. The entire house was of cut stone; we sat facing a bare granite wall. I felt a trifle guilty over bringing Parker, for if there were anything amiss with what we saw, he would know it; yet Norman Fletcher seemed unperturbed.

He switched the room lights low, and turned to us.

"While the tubes are warming up, my friends, let me say that to tune in tonight's subject has been extremely difficult; why, I cannot determine. Not until late this afternoon did the results become good."

Wallach, our technical genius of the screen, spoke up dryly.

"Then I presume you've not changed the sound effects that you've recovered from oblivion? The characters won't speak in English, but in some forgotten tongue?"

Norman Fletcher gave him a twinkling glance.

"They'll speak in English, Mr. Wallach; that's been arranged—the words have been fairly well synchronized. Indeed, it's highly necessary! You're about to witness a scene from Central Asia of a thousand years ago; the language recovered is today unintelligible. I suppose you gentlemen are aware that in the Seventh and Eighth Centuries Christianity, in the form of the Nestorian Church, had spread far over the Eastern world? From China south to Sumatra, it was so widespread that there were more Christians in Asia than in Europe. According to legend, they were ruled by a king named Prester John."

"Didn't the Pope send an embassy to him?" asked some one.

Fletcher nodded.

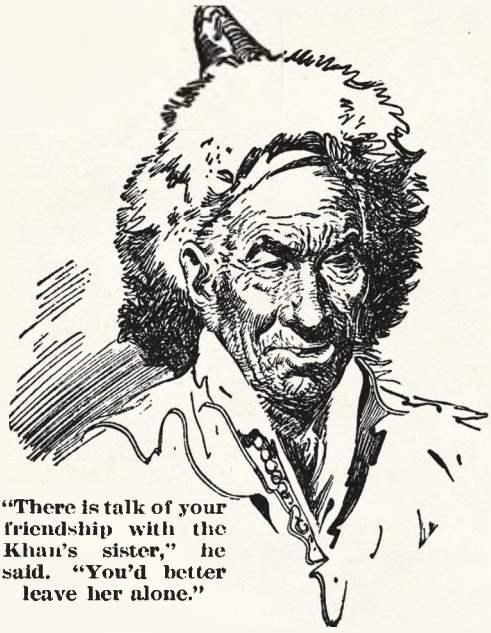
"More than once, but too late. In the Twelfth Century Pope Alexander III

sent an envoy and a letter; the monk Sergius went—and was never heard from again. The Crusaders hoped that while they attacked the Holy Land from the west, Prester John would attack from the east, as their ally. Remember, it was a day of simple faith, of credulous beliefs, when men fought terribly, sang lustily and reached for the stars in childish confidence! What you're about to see and hear, is a trumpet from oblivion, a sweet-toned trumpet—it happened three years after the monk Sergius started east to find Prester John, in the year 1180. For two years he traveled; then he died and his letter was taken on by another—"

Norman Fletcher checked himself abruptly; there was a crackling sound from his unseen tubes, and the blank, solid stone wall before us showed a faint drifting light that gradually became stronger. Now, I had examined this wall with the greatest attention. It formed the exterior house wall, was unplastered, and was composed of large granite stones. Yet now, as previously, it dissolved before our eyes as the light increased!

Fletcher played with his switches. A queer, thin sound grew and grew, yet remained very faint; it was something like the sound of wind in a pine tree, but sharper, more definite, like distant singing on two notes only. The light grew stronger and the wall dissolved—we were

"Why," he demanded suddenly, "do you say it means death to visit the palace of Ung Khan?"



"There is talk of your friendship with the Khan's sister," he said. "You'd better leave her alone."

looking through it now, as though through some window. I heard Parker, beside me, utter a low gasp.

SAND was flying amid jagged, scattered rocks; a desert scene, the wind blowing hard, the sun shining bright and strong, and more and more definite came the uncertain song of the blowing sand —but always upon those two notes, until one fancied in it a distinct motive, a cadenced rise and fall, like that of a singing voice.

A horse dashed from behind the rocks, then another. Two riders, whipping, spurring hard, so muffled in strange garments that to see anything of them was impossible. One caught peals of laughter as the horses leaped away. They plunged through the sand, came upon a long, low shoulder of rock, and crossed it. The sound of singing ceased entirely, as the horses raced across sand and rock to a double line of huge green poplars.

Past the trees, in upon cultivated lands. More trees ahead. A river valley grew to the eye, and a road, trodden deep and wide—the great Silk Road, with a glimpse of lakes shimmering far southward, and high Himalayan peaks and glaciers across the sky. The Silk Road of China, one of the great arteries of the world, on which silk and woven stuffs and paper and printing were flowing into the western parts of the earth, as they had been flowing these thousand years and more.

A city grew in the river valley or rather gorge—a city walled and guarded. The great road passed on the uplands beside and behind it, where a second little city of caravanserais and shops arose; but the city itself lay within walls, and the two horses raced on to its gates, where armed guards halted them. The first rider showed a signet of jade and both were passed with respectful salutes.

NOW, threading the narrow streets to the palace, also walled and gated, the riders threw back their wraps. The first was a girl, beautiful, of Chinese cast. The second was a man, with short curling golden hair, blue eyes and white bronzed skin. At the palace gate they entered, unquestioned by the guards, and drew rein before separating.

"You have an hour," she said. "Then, remember, my father wants to hear more about the western lands. When the feast is finished and the lamps are low, come to the Pavilion of the Western Fairies; I'll be waiting."

"Listen, Lady San-kao!" he exclaimed, his brows knotting a little. His words were not fluent; he spoke slowly, carefully. "You've promised day after day to tell me what no one else will or can tell me; the way to the realm of Prester John, him whom you call Ung Khan! What's the mystery? What's the secret?"

She leaned over, her eyes laughing. "Tonight, T'ie Kia! I swear it!"

Then she was gone with a leap of her horse; but he, frowning, sought the quarters that had been assigned him, turned over his horse to the battered old half-Tartar servant who had come with him out of the west, and sought his own chamber.

There he removed his outer garments, took off the flexible mail-shirt that had given him his Chinese name of Iron Armor, and sank down to munch a huge peach from the salver of fruit the Khan had sent him. For he was an honored guest in this city of Taklamakhan, Great Palace of the Khan, at the edge of China; he had been here some weeks, awaiting some response from the Emperor of China as to whether he might be admitted to the country. And he might be more weeks or months ere the response came. The Khan loved to hear his tales of the west, of Byzantium and other lands; he was accounted a good liar and a right merry fellow.

But not a soul would, or could, tell him anything about Ung Khan, or Prester John.

His servant came in and squatted respectfully. This old Tartar had been

the servant and guide of Friar Sergius, when the monk lay dying in a town at the verge of the Indian mountains. Walter of Sicily, young and filled with the breath of adventure, had come upon them there, abandoned the traders with whom he traveled, and took up the glorious task of carrying on the dying monk's errand.

And now, a year later, he was T'ie Kia, or Iron Armor, waiting at the door of China, with the letter from the Pope in his baggage, and Prester John as far away as ever.

"Have you learned anything, Hung?" he asked.

The Tartar shook his head.

"Nothing more than we knew already, Lord. Somewhere in this land was the realm of Ung Khan, but his name is unknown today. I met an ancient man this morning, a Buddhist pilgrim bound for India. He said there had been such a ruler, but the Mongol tribes had stamped him out and his whole people with him, long ago."

Walter's keen, vigorous features were despondent; his wide-shouldered, powerful body drooped, and he spat out the peach-stone with a muttered oath.

"If I had not sworn on my honor to deliver this letter from the Pope, I'd quit now; but an oath to a dying monk —well, slow oaths are best kept! I'll find out something tonight, after I leave the Khan. The Lady San-kao knows, and promised to tell me."

THE old Tartar wrinkled up his face. He had traveled far to the west, had seen many men and women of all races; he eyed women with a warrior's disdain —an old warrior's.

"There is some talk of your friendship with that lady," he said sourly. "She is the Khan's sister. This is not China, where the position of great ladies is circumscribed; but all the same, I've heard talk. You'd better leave her alone."

Walter laughed, his eyes kindling. "Ah, what a girl she is! And you've taught me enough of the language so I can get on with her; but never fear, the Khan and I are friends. Look here! If Prester John is dead, if there's no Christian kingdom in these parts, then I'm free of my oath to Friar Sergius!"

The Tartar grunted, caring nothing about oaths as long as he got his pay regularly. Fired by this thought, Walter rose, took a walk to stretch his legs, left the palace and sauntered out into the city bazaars. Behind, at some distance, followed a palace official who was charged with his safety. Some of these Tartar, Mongol or Tungan tribesmen might be tempted by this white stranger's glittering gold chain to try rough jokes.

AND such a city! Even to one who had seen Byzantium and palaces of Ind, this place held a blaze of glamorous color. The golden stupas or domes of shrines and temples mingled with the tender apricot and peach orchards; soldiers thronged the streets, wild tribesmen, Chinese regulars in gayly lacquered armor; patches of mulberry trees along the turbulent little river at the bottom of the gorge, and the sheds of silk-workers, flanked the bazaars where all manner of tradesmen and merchants thronged.

Chariots and huge winter-shaggy camels, horsemen, fishermen from the lakes, red and yellow lamas from monasteries, jugglers, musicians—a wild thronging medley of life. Over all, and everywhere, lifted the *tinkle-tinkle* of camel-bells, coming from these patiently plodding beasts who threaded the great Silk Road from the Jade Gate in the east to western Samarkand.

Searching the bazaars, Walter chanced upon a curious red coral necklace, highly carved, and bought it as a gift for Lady San-kao. He paid with links hewed from his golden chain; a chain that was rapidly shortening, since funds were running low. Then back to the palace, in time to change for dinner.

A long and interminable meal, this, broken by jugglers and by dancing-girls; the hall with its enormous carven pillars and gay lanterns and fantastic costumes —Tibetans, monks, soldiers, diplomats, with the Khan himself at the head. A morose man, not old yet older than his sister, the Khan honored his guest from the western regions with the same passive air with which he would kill him if orders to do so came from China. He was a vassal of China, of the Kin dynasty which ruled in Peking, the fabulously wealthy and corrupt imperial line soon to be stamped out of existence by the Mongol hordes.

When the feast degenerated into a wild carouse, with the tiny cups of hot wine coming thick and fast, Walter quietly took his leave unobserved. He picked his way, alone, across the wide palace gardens. A spring moon hung in the sky, red and angry with the desert dust

that blew afar; from the lower gardens came the turbulent sound of the river, whose waters were high but confined within the walls of the gorge, and the mill-wheels were running full blast. It was because of the water-power here that the city lay in the gorge itself.

Curious weather, he reflected; the river was full, the lakes were overflowing, yet there was no rain. These torrential waters came in hurtling masses from the snow-covered mountains above.

SOFT voices greeted him; the two slave-girls of Lady San-kao were watching, and led him to the little summer-house where she awaited him. A curious dim lantern of fish-skin lighted the soft pillows, the sweetmeat box of many trays, the rich rugs, the rustling silken garments—strange luxury for a girl who could ride and think and act like a soldier!

Girl? No; woman, alluring and lovely, touched with Oriental mystery and yet frank and open-hearted as a child. She smiled as Walter sank down beside her, and reaching out, touched the strings of a queer long lute stretched across the floor, and sang, almost under her breath, a song of unknown words and barbaric rhythms. It struck him with an odd sense of familiarity.

"What song is that?" he demanded, as her voice ceased.

"You do not recognize it, Lord T'ie Kia? It is your own song, the song of your quest here, your long travels; it is a song which will never cease nor have an end; the song of death and its terror, and of life that has no end."

"I'm in no mood for riddles," he said, with a touch of irritation. "Death has no terror; we all die, and why fear it?"

"Ah, rough soldier! But who wants to die young?" her soft voice chided him. "Do you know what that song said? A queer, simple song of the camel-men:

The wind blows and the stars twinkle above the hill,
As they did when we, like you, rode this way;
But now we know all that you have yet to learn.

Walter frowned.

"More riddles, eh? There's nothing about me or my travels in that song!"

"You'll see, Lord T'ie Kia! Perhaps you'll understand it tomorrow, when I take you to the palace of Ung Khan. We'll ride there together, you and I, as we rode today."

"What?" He thrilled to the name. "You mean that Prester John is near here?"

She assented softly. "In two hours we can reach his palace."

"By the saints! Then why haven't I learned it before now? Why has everyone shrugged and denied knowledge of him or his realm? Why is his very name apparently unknown?"

She stirred, and spoke earnestly, her voice tender and melancholy as the voices of the wood doves in the peach orchards by the river.

"Here is the answer, Lord; to mention that name, to discuss it or the things concerning it, is bad luck, for it is accursed. You know where we were riding today, out beyond the long ridge of rock? That was once all lovely country and beautiful gardens, stretching over the horizon; now it is desert. Few of our people have ever heard the name of Ung Khan. We care nothing about the past, and know little of it; we live our own day, which will soon be gone, for the desert comes drifting slowly upon us and nothing can hinder it. That ridge of rocks holds it off, and the dikes and irrigation walls; but some day these will burst, and there will be no people to rebuild them, and the desert will be lord of all."

"Then," demanded Walter quickly, "is Prester John, whom you call Ung Khan, dead?"

"He and all his people are dead, yet they are not dead; they are accursed and can never die. They prey on the caravans. Men are lured from the road by voices that call to them; they follow, and die. Sometimes whole caravans perish, for camel-bells lure the beasts off the track. Only last month, Ung Khan himself and a party of his horsemen were seen, marching with drums and trumpets; they attacked a small caravan and it perished. One man was picked up, dying—and he told of it before he died."

"And you know where his palace lies?"

She smiled rather sadly.

"Yes. I'll take you there tomorrow, even though it means death to do so; for I know, Lord, that to you the fulfillment of your vow means more than life—or love."

"That is true," said Walter abstractedly.

He was plunged in thought. That she herself believed this fantastically strange

and impossible story, was quite obvious; along the caravan route, he had heard much of these evil spirits and ghostly attackers. Never, though, had anyone previously mentioned the name of Ung Khan in connection with them.

What to believe? He crossed himself furtively and struggled with the facts. He was well assured that evil spirits existed; this was easiest of all to credit, for everyone knew that devils inhabited the desert. What puzzled him was that Prester John and his folk, who had certainly been good Christians, should now be devils and spirits of evil. Well, no use trying to understand; he might learn much more tomorrow. So, like many a better man, he consigned theological riddles to limbo, and turned his mind to the woman beside him.

She stirred him, as she would have stirred any man; he was well aware of her liking for him; yet, in his simple way, he regarded her as a pagan, a worshiper of idols, and forced himself to fight against her charm.

"Why," he demanded suddenly, "do you say that it means death to visit the palace of Ung Khan?"

"I don't know," she rejoined. "So it is said; people have gone there and have not come back, so it must be true. Perhaps the evil spirits live there."

"Ah! That must be it. Well, they'll not hurt us!" he exclaimed vigorously. "I'll take the letter of the Pope with us; besides, the sign of the Cross will banish any devils. So have no fear."

She laughed softly, sadly. "I have none, Lord T'ie Kia, if you are with me!" Her hand went to the lute again, and she gently repeated the refrain of the queer little song. Once more Walter frowned at its haunting familiarity, but could not place it.

He gave her the coral, which was rare in this heart of Asia; she was delighted as a child. They sat, talking, till the lantern flickered out, and talked on while the moon mounted the sky, still ominously tinged by the sand-dust floating on the eternal wind that blew from the high peaks. Outside, the two slave-girls twittered and laughed, and from the Khan's great hall the thin sound of music and dancing and drunken song drifted faintly across the garden.

WHEN the party there broke up, and flitting lights showed the guests being assisted away, Walter stirred; he found himself with Lady San-kao practically in his arms, and in his heart such a joyous bliss as he had never felt. Therefore, he reasoned, it must be wicked, since she was a pagan, and he lost no time in departing, after arranging to meet her on the morrow.

But, as he went his way into the darkness, it was with a strange mingling of happiness and of regret, and the words of the singular little song followed him in farewell, with the inexplicable sense of familiarity in its tinkling refrain:

The wind blows and the stars twinkle above the hill,
As they did when we, like you, rode this way;
But now we know all that you have yet to learn.

He went to his own chamber, where the Tartar servant snored, got out his long straight sword and wiped it well, wiped his mail-shirt, produced the crucifix that Friar Sergius had bequeathed to him, plumped down on his knees and prayed, and tumbled into bed. But, despite the crucifix still clutched in his hands, he dreamed of the lovely, vivacious pagan features of Lady San-kao, and heard her gentle, mournfully cadenced voice pronouncing his Chinese name; and when he wakened, staring into the moon-glow with startled eyes, it was all in vain that he invoked the blessed saints to banish the thought of her. So, sensibly, he ceased trying.

HE was oddly worried by her premonition about the morrow; the very inflection of her voice showed how deeply she was convinced that it meant death to guide him to the palace of Prester John. Absurd! Such pagan superstitions were not for him. Still, he knew in his heart that she would do it wholly for his sake; this was at once disturbing and heart-warming.

He recalled his vow to the dying Sergius, his undertaking to deliver the papal letter at the palace of Prester John. His eyes widened. Why, sure enough! The morrow would see his errand accomplished, his vow fulfilled! Whether Ung Khan lived or was dead, no matter; here was the way out, and no evasion either! Upon this pleasant reflection, he slept again. . . .

With the morrow, then, he was up and about very early, in high spirits. To the astonished old Tartar, Hung, he confided the surprising news that they were not going on to China at all; that, in

"A message, Ung Kahn! Greetings from him who sits in Rome, and a letter! Is it your will to receive it?"

fact, they were probably returning westward in a day or two; and that he himself was sallying forth this day to do battle with all the evil spirits and devils of the desert. He was only half serious in this, but the battered old Tartar peered at him anxiously.

"And if you do not return, Lord?"

"Why, then go back and bear word of me to any priest or monk you find, and go your way!" said Walter, laughing.

He got out the papal letter, with its huge lead seals, all enclosed in a water-

tight cylinder; rubbed up his hauberk afresh and polished his steel cap; and dressed himself with care, when he had scraped his face clean. Mid-morning found him ready, and he sent Hung for his horse. A keen wind was blowing as usual, but the sun shone brightly.

He girded on the long, straight sword, hung the crucifix about his neck, and donned the muffling skin coat and hood that concealed all except the aquiline lines of his face. Passing outside, he found the horse waiting, and at the saddle-bow hung the letter-cylinder by its carrying-strap. He was just mounting when Lady San-kao appeared, clattering up to join him with a gay greeting.

She parted her fur to show him the coral necklace at her throat. Laughing, he leaned far over in the saddle, caught her hand, and pressed his lips to her slim fingers. A party of Chinese, passing, looked with horrified incredulity at these actions; the sister of the Khan thus conducting herself, and riding alone with a barbarian! Still, these people of Taklamakhan were more than half barbarians anyway, and unversed in rules of conduct.

Laughing, jesting, in huge joy that the end of his labor and travels was now in

sight, Walter rode out beside her. Here in the gorge along the water, built half on former islets of the stream, the town was sheltered from the keen wind; but once they had left it and mounted to the height above, where the Silk Road ran, the snowy wind hit hard. A huge caravan had come to rest near the caravanserais, eastward bound; seeing the two riders setting forth alone, a number of the camel-men ran toward them with shouts of warning. They drew rein.

The fur-muffled men surrounded them, all talking at once. The caravan, which had just come in, had encountered peril not twenty miles from town. Evil spirits had assailed them, ghostly parties of horsemen had killed some of the guards; these ghosts had worn ancient armor and had made wild music with drums and trumpets. And, when the caravan closed up and made firm head of resistance, they had vanished in a puff of sand.

Laughing, Walter jested heartily when the two rode on, leaving behind the well-meant warnings.

"Ghosts or devils, we're safe from them!" he cried, indicating his crucifix. "Besides, when have ghostly weapons prevailed against steel and iron? No danger!"

"That remains to be seen, Lord T'ie Kia. Those ghostly riders, evidently, were Ung Khan and his company."

"More likely, imagination," he scoffed. "If you're right, then we're doubly safe; do I not bear this letter to Ung Khan himself?"

This was a reassuring thought.

THE two of them rode hard and far, and saw no living thing. Noon came, and Lady San-kao pointed to a huge expanse of jutting rocks and twisted dead trees ahead.

"There!" she exclaimed. "The palace of Ung Khan!"

So Walter comprehended that there was no palace after all, but the ruins of one, amid the ruins of a vanished civilization and forest. It made no difference, he reflected; his vow would be fulfilled just the same.

Devils? Evil spirits? Looking back in the direction of the ancient, lonely Silk Road, Walter of Sicily could well believe anything possible in this eerie land. All the desert seemed on the move, now in puffs and flurries that hid half the landscape, again in high invisible swarms of sand that turned the blue sky to brazen yellow, and dulled the sun. Not hard to imagine anything happening in such a country. He crossed himself and rode on.

The two of them came in among the long-dead, twisted poplars, only half uncovered by the sand. A cry of astonishment broke from Lady San-kao as they headed among the rocks.

"Look! It's all uncovered! And when I was here before, almost nothing showed!"

"So you've been here before this, eh?" And Walter uttered a loud, joyous laugh. "Ha, curiosity! Ho, Ung Khan!" His voice lifted in resounding tones upon the emptiness. "Visitors for you, Prester John! An errand from afar!"

BEFORE them the palace lay silent, swept for the moment almost bare of sand. A palace once, perhaps, and a city stretching for miles, blurred by whirls of drifting sand-eddies. A palace of dry stark timbers, huge, cavernous, roofless. They rode up, dismounted, and tethered the horses.

From his saddle, Walter took the precious cylinder that had come so far, and walked beside his companion into the dead palace. He could not doubt it was the place he sought; those massive, eroded beams showed deep carvings, among them the Cross and other religious emblems. They came to what had been a hall and stepped on a mosaic stone pavement bare in spots of its sandy covering. Walter faced the upper part, halted, flung up his hand.

"A message, Ung Khan!" roared his voice. "Greetings from him who sits in Rome, and a letter! Is it your will to receive it?"

As it chanced, a scurry of wind lifted the sand at the far end, lifted and whirled it up in an eddying shape. From Lady San-kao broke a cry of terror; to her eyes it seemed like a response to the challenge. But Walter saw it for what it was, and with a laugh strode forward into the whirling sand, and laid down the cylinder.

"The vow is accomplished!" he declared, and made the sign of the Cross. "Now, in the name of God, accept my charge!"

He faced about, and halted in astonishment. Here in the ancient building, and among the near-by masses of rock, all the sand began to be moved and stirred by the wind. It rustled against the dry, glass-brittle wood, and then a singing sound arose, strident, thin, and far-off.

Walter recognized it instantly; he had heard the same sound among the rocks on the previous day, the sound of singing sands. But he recognized something else, and stood staring at the girl in sudden comprehension. This music of the sand was an oddly monotonous sound, yet definite, like a song that had only two notes.

"The song, Lady San-kao!" he burst out. "Your song! There it is!"

She nodded, though fearfully.

"Yes," she answered. "Now you understand why I said it was your song—this song of the singing sands that the camel-men sometimes chant as they walk along! If— Ah! Listen!"

She went white to the lips. From somewhere came a new and distant sound; the rolling beat of Mongol drums, the thin clash of cymbals, the blare of trumpets. It was so real, so distinct, that for an instant Walter felt fear clutch at him, but, with an abrupt oath, he strode past her, came hastily out to the entrance, and looked.

A cloud of sand was sweeping down upon the lost city and palace. Horsemen with it, two-score and more, wearing strange ancient armor, carrying strange weapons. They had sighted the tethered horses, and now began to spread out. Something whirred in the air, whirred and whistled and sang shrill. Lady San-kao caught at him.

"Arrows! Singing arrows!"

"Then, by God, they're real!" Walter whipped out his sword. "Real or false, pagan or devil, flesh or spirit—look on this!" He held up the cross-hilt, high. "St. George! Send help against these spirits of evil! St. Michael! To the rescue of good Christian folk! One of them, at least, a good Christian," he added hastily.

The words were still on his lips when the girl beside him cried out again, and caught him, turning him around. He looked, and his jaw fell. There among the rocks above appeared other figures of men, strangely dressed and armed. More arrows flew, arrows with pierced heads that whistled and shrilled high as they passed through the air. But the shafts, from one side and the other, were not directed at the two who stood here.

SUDDENLY the scales fell from Walter's eyes; superstition left him, in a blaze of comprehension.

"Ha! By the saints, I have it!" he cried, catching the girl in a wild and joyous hug in his eagerness. "Look! No devils at all, no evil spirits; this explains everything! Desert men, Huns or Tungans or Mongols—caravan raiders! They fear to attack the caravans direct, but sweep down with sandstorm or night, luring the guards, killing a camel here and one there in the lagging file—ha! Devils? All nonsense! Here are two bands of them, enemies! They care nothing about us—"

She too understood, and shared his laughing exultation as all thought of the supernatural passed in prosaic, reasoned explanation. His words were true. Here in the bared old ruins, perhaps, each of the raiding bands were seeking shelter from the sandstorm. As the two figures watched, the opposing parties circled out, swept away, and were lost amid a clash of arms and a roll of drums as the sand hid them.

Walter sheathed his sword, turned to Lady San-kao, and caught hold of her.

"So let all idle fancies perish!" he exclaimed. "You are mine, I am yours; by the saints, I'll make a good Christian of you yet! Do you understand? Will you go with me into the west?"

"Yes," she whispered, lifting her face to his. "Yes, oh, yes! But I think we had better be quick about it—the sandstorm promises to be a bad one!"

Roaring with laughter, he put her into the saddle; they headed away, with the storm sweeping and hissing behind them and the sky there a dull yellow.

IT was a supreme moment, a wildly joyous moment, with life swept clear and all paths straightened, and ahead the road of life opening before them, as the great Silk Road opened when they won back to it and headed for the city again. Yet it lasted for only this little while, as the horses galloped.

Sand clouded everything ahead of them, as behind—and this was a strange thing. They came to the rocks where they had been on the previous day, where the long rocky ledge barred the desert from the fields and groves and town. There Walter drew rein suddenly.

"Listen! This is where we heard the singing sands first. Ah! God's love!"

His sudden startled ejaculation rang high. Higher still rang the burst of voices from beyond the rocky height; no singing sands now, but a wild tumultuous screaming of folk, both men and women, in utter mad panic. It surged up and up. People appeared on the rocks, running

and staggering and shrieking, women holding babes, men wild-eyed, soldiers, tradesmen. At sight of the two on horseback, the wild sobbing cries became shrieks of rage.

"What is it? What has happened?" demanded Lady San-kao.

A howl of fury answered her.

"The dikes have burst! A wall of water and gravel higher than the city has swept it away—all are dead—the city is gone! It's your doing, you who have betrayed the gods and companied with the foreign devil—"

It was fearfully sudden and terrible. Arrows flew, a spear darted, weapons flashed. One low cry burst from Lady San-kao as a barbed shaft thudded; a wilder, more passionate shout of grief and fury from Walter, and his long sword whirled. His horse leaped into the throng and he struck to right and left. They fled away from before him and were gone, all save the dead, and he spurred back to where Lady San-kao still sat her steed among the rocks, her head drooping.

He saw the feathered shaft protruding from between her breasts, and tore at her with frantic fingers to bare the wound; one glance told him all was useless, and a bitter groan came from him.

Her eyes opened, mistily. Her fingers went to his, twined about them, and a smile touched her wan lips.

"Dear—dear T'ie Kia!" she murmured. "It does not matter; nothing matters. I am happy. And listen, listen to what the sands are singing—"

To him came the odd little two-note whisper of the sand among the rocks, as the yellow waves beat down upon them and muffled out the whole world, and her voice repeated, faintly and more faintly:

The wind blows and the stars twinkle above the hill,
As they did when we, like you, rode this way;
But now we know all—all that you—that you have yet—to learn—

Her voice died out, her hand fell, the yellow sandswirls beat down upon them and the dim figures vanished completely.

Vanished in darkness; only the faint sound lingering, the distant, thin sound of the singing sands. And this too ended. In the silence, Norman Fletcher switched on the room-lights.

Fletcher reached for a cigar, then turned and looked at us. Not a man of us moved or even spoke, for a long moment. Then somebody sighed, and the tension broke.

"By gad!" burst forth Wallach, his eyes shining. "Fletcher, you have something there! A logical, simple explanation of Marco Polo's remarks; more, reality and human interest—why, those people were living people!"

"Of course." Norman Fletcher smiled at his enthusiasm, and glanced at me. "I trust you found it satisfactory?"

Unable to find words, I merely nodded; but my friend Parker spoke for me. He leaned forward in his intent way.

"I COULD add a touch or so to that story," he said quietly. "But first, may I ask what subject you're going to take up next week?"

"Perhaps you have a suggestion?" our host asked courteously.

"Well," said Parker, with hesitation, "I'm bound for North Africa, but I'd stay over if you'd undertake to look into a pet hobby of mine—the old myth about the Amazons, the country of fighting ladies, you know. There are many theories about it; but I'd give a week of my time to learn where it really started!"

"I'll be very glad to attempt it, Mr. Parker. And just what is the touch you could add to this story from a thousand years ago?"

"Well, I've been to that very place we just saw, for one thing," rejoined Parker. "I've heard those singing sands, have written about them. But the queer part of it is that the city in question was actually buried by a flood, as related at the close of the story—and was uncovered a few years ago by the wind! Sven Hedin the explorer passed by and saw it."

Then he became silent. Our meeting broke up, and I don't think Parker said another word; he seemed preoccupied. But, as I was driving him back to the city, he touched my arm and spoke.

"Funny thing; do you know, the camel-men up in the Lopnor country still chant that apparently meaningless song as they stride along with the camels? Fact. And, until tonight, I never understood it." He quoted the words softly: *"But now we know all that you have yet to learn."*

The next story in this fascinating series deals with the world-wide tradition of that supposed race of warrior women, the Amazons—and is a specially colorful and spirited narrative.

Illustrated by
Raymond Sisley

The Phœnix Egg

A picturesque story of Nor'west Jane and Jimmy the Rag—by the distinguished author of "Vaiti of the Islands."

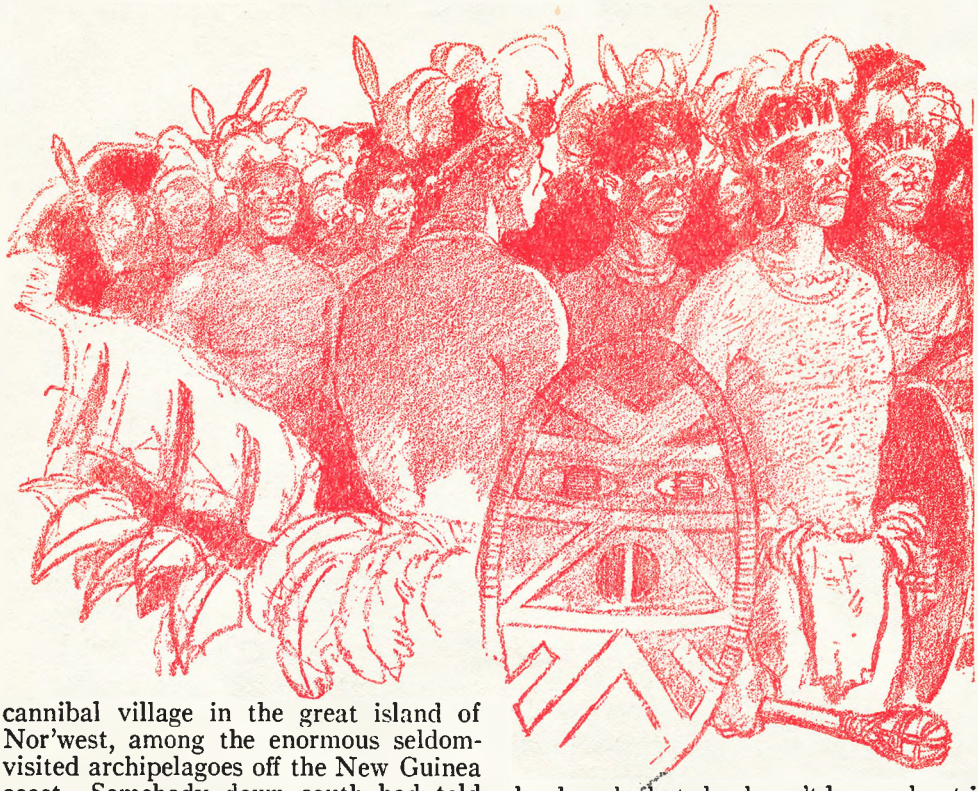
By BEATRICE GRIMSHAW

THEY all rode up to the stockade together—Lombard the anthropologist, Jimmy-the-Rag, and Nor'west Jane.

It had been searingly hot on the way from the trading-store; they had ridden along white sand where the heat struck up from the ground, and flames beat down from the sky, in a duet of mutual fury; they had cantered through marshy places, where "calling crabs" sat up on heaps of mud, beckoning the riders, with a slowly waving claw, to "come along, come in—the mud is fine today!" They had crossed a river or two, and heard the crocodiles, nowhere visible, belling like stags at bay; and Jane had said, carelessly turning in her saddle, "Look out for croc's," and Lombard hadn't known how, but splashed on through, hoping for the best. And so they had come at last to Napi-Napi village, to look for a phœnix egg.

Lombard was thrilled, as they approached, to see that Napi-Napi was guarded by sentinels, two sorts, one live and one dead. The dead ones were skeletons, set up in commanding posts among the trees. The live ones were white cockatoos, tethered to the tops of the surrounding stockade. These, as the strangers approached, sent forth wild cries of rage and warning, reminding Lombard, who loved to find analogies, of the famous geese that guarded Rome.

And indeed, it was his delight in such things that had brought him here, to a



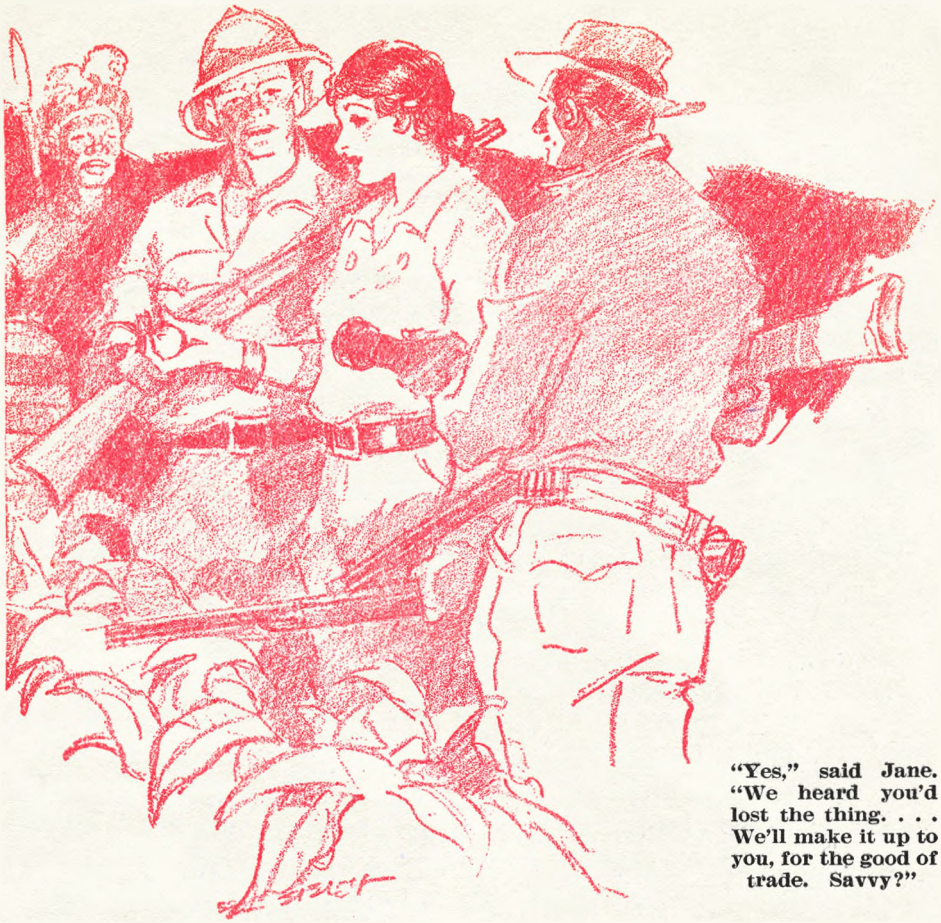
cannibal village in the great island of Nor'west, among the enormous seldom-visited archipelagoes off the New Guinea coast. Somebody down south had told him that the natives of Nor'west believed in a bird that, like the phœnix of Egyptian fame, laid magic eggs in the midst of fire. Somebody else—a Papuan prospector, busily engaged in painting Sydney red with the contents of what is known in the islands as a "good shammy of gold"—had confirmed the tale; adding to it his conviction that there was usually something at the bottom of the native nonsense.

Lombard liked him; found that he was known as Jimmy-the-Rag—so called by the Irish miners, among whom the word meant a gypsy, a wanderer, something lawless and untamable—and felt that he might do worse than engage Jimmy as a sort of Cook's guide for his quest. Jimmy, who had happily gone through four thousand pounds, with nothing left to show for it but a set of leather suitcases and a vintage Panama, was quite willing to accept the job. He liked, he said, an anthropologist bloke who was like this anthropologist bloke; mostly they were too silvertail for him, and had gray beards, and bleated. Lombard was clean-shaven, yellow-haired and thirty-one, and didn't, so far as anyone had ever noticed, bleat. If he was silvertail,—Jimmy's synonym for aristocrat,—he was aristocrat enough not to emphasize the fact.

"I'll take you round," Jimmy said; "but when we get there, Nor'west Jane's the one for you; she owns and runs the island, and what she doesn't know about it, you could put in a mosquito's pocket and never miss it."

Lombard had figured Jane as a typical pioneer woman, lean, hard-featured, hard-voiced and unattractive. He found her, in her picturesque trading-store on the top of a palmy hill, with her invalid husband put away clean and tidy in the background, a woman of less than his own age, made like a Boadicea, majestic as an Elizabeth, knowledgeable though uneducated, using bad grammar with a dignity and an emphasis that made it sound better than good; a green-blue-eyed ginger-haired five feet ten of dynamic energy and steel-hard character, with more than a touch of feminine charm about her, leashed, kept down, but there.

Jane hadn't said what she thought about the phœnix egg; she had merely produced horses (Nor'west having not yet struck the motor age), and told Lombard that she would take him to the hearthstone of hell and back again, for a pound a day. In pursuance of which she led him, with Jimmy, to the stockade of Napi-Napi. "They've got a pretty choice brand of sorcerer here," she said, as she reined in her horse, "and there's a chap I've leathered with a stock-whip to learn him manners, who knows all about any devilment going on in Nor'west. Likely the phœnix-egg business will be devilment; but that's what you want, I lay."



"Yes," said Jane. "We heard you'd lost the thing. . . . We'll make it up to you, for the good of trade. Savvy?"

Lombard asked, inconsequently, what she had leathered him for.

"Good and plenty reason," Jane said, keeping her eye on the gate of the village, behind which nodding plumes could now be seen, moving excitedly about. "He killed and eat one of his wives. Says I, I won't have the like of that in my island; the Government, they trust me to keep order here, and keep order I will. Says he, I couldn't help it, my wife she talked too much; she never stopped, says he. Says I, well, you've stopped her talk for good, and now you can do a bit of talking yourself, Bokolo, says I; and I ran him round the village with my whip, and he howled like a native dog. He never killed one of his wives after that, no matter what they done to him. That's him coming out now."

Bokolo, an innocent-looking young man with a fine figure, no clothes, a good deal of paint and feathers about him, and a disarming smile, had just stooped down to dodge through the low-set door that protected the village entrance. He said: "Hallo!"

"He speaks English?" Lombard asked, in astonishment.

"Most of them do," said Jane. "I learned them."

Jimmy-the-Rag cut in: "She wouldn't let them use native when they came to the store. If they opened their mugs to say a word of it, she had them run out by the neck, with all the others laughing at them. I tell you, they weren't long learning."

Jane now broke in: "There's too much yap about this outfit. Are you coming or not?"

"But certainly," Lombard assured her. They dismounted. Bokolo stood waiting, a brilliant grin glued upon his brown, painted face.

"Them's horses," Jane informed him. "Not breakfast nor yet dinner for nobody. No more's my dog. Mind that." Bokolo looked as if he would mind.

FOLLOWED by the inquisitive terrier they went into the village. Nothing was new to Jimmy-the-Rag or to Jane: brown earth, beaten hard by dancing feet, thatched houses, high-peaked fore and aft, like medieval caravels; smell of dust, of smoke, of pigs, of ancient rain-wet thatching; sight of naked warriors carrying clubs and spears; of mop-headed girls, all hung

with beads and shells, matrons with cropped heads and no ornaments ("They don't spend no time running after busses when they've caught them," Jane explained), brown naked babies tottering about in the dust. Lombard was secretly thrilled by the novelty and interest of it all. "If I can run to ground this myth about the phœnix egg," he thought, "there'll be a pamphlet out of it that'll make some people sit up." He did not expect to find anything in the business but the usual sun or moon myth; but it was sure to have interesting side-issues.

Jane was talking to Bokolo in swift native. "He says," she told them, "that there was once a bird that came up out of the fire and laid a magic egg, and they found the egg on Brandon Cay, out there where you see a bit of blue."

"That's where the submarine volcano exploded in the seventies," Jimmy-the-Rag put in. "Upset all the Admiralty surveys that said it was out of soundings, and sent up the bottom."

"And he says the egg has the sun and moon in it," Jane went on (Lombard visibly brightened), "and there'll be sun to ripen the crops as long as they keep it."

"It sounds extremely interesting," said the anthropologist. "One wonders where the idea arose. Moon myths are—"

"You coming into the sorcery-house?" asked Jane. "I never seen this one; they club their women on the head if they go in, but I'd dare them to touch me. Bokolo, don't you go picking no red hibiscuses; I'll smack your chops for you if you do."

The savage grinned uneasily. "Me no wantum flower," he said, withdrawing to a safe distance.

"A red hibiscus stuck into the hair," Jimmy elucidated, "means murdering a woman."

"Very interesting," Lombard answered. "Let's hope there'll be no illustrations."

Jane had gone up the steps into the sorcery-house. "Come along," she ordered. "I've not seen this one, and it's good."

JIMMY-THE-RAG professed himself to be bored with sorcery-houses. "They're nothing but butcher-shops," he explained, lounging easily against the doorposts, and—as Lombard noticed—keeping a quiet watch on the men outside. He himself was anxious to see the place, so he followed Jane.

It was dusk inside. Sun here and there pierced the wattled walls; when you had stood still for a little while, you could see. You could make out the nightmare patterns of the tall carved shields; see the grinning teeth of the crocodile-heads; the shapes of strange beasts made of plaited cane, with red glaring eyes, that stood in the background. Skulls were hung like ropes of onions up the supporting posts; seven-foot bows, and clubs with "pine-apple" stone heads, stood ready for immediate use, against the walls. Something vaguely resembling an altar projected from the side of the house; it was a foot or so high; it had shells and feathers on it, and a skull with a pig-snout fixed on with clay, and—

"God's Rod!" said Jane, using an expletive that she kept for moments of extreme emotion. Lombard would have asked her where she got it, if his eyes, at that moment, had not fallen on the thing that Jane had seen.

It was an egg.

IT had caught the early rays of the sun, striking through a chink in the wattled walls; and it shone—it glowed—as surely no egg ever laid by mortal bird was known to shine.

The anthropologist stared at it. "It's not—it's not—a myth, after all," he faltered.

"No," said Jane. "You won't make no scientific sermon out of that, whatever it is. Because it's there. And what you scientific prospectors is prospecting after, is mostly something that isn't there, so you can yap about it till further orders. You aren't the first, nor the fifty-first skull-hunter come to New Guinea."

Lombard had already realized that there was no coincidental myth stretching from Egypt to Melanesia, in the immediate offing; nothing that he could— But good Lord, if there was not, what was the thing? And what hard luck it was for a man to feel, as he felt, that he was bound by the honor of his profession to let it alone!

"Don't you go touching it," Jane warned him. "It's as much as your head's worth, pretty near, to be in this place at all; and if you get up to any funny games, you'd go and spoil my trade for ten years on me—if not worse."

Lombard said: "I can believe it. In the forties, there was a naval lieutenant, Jukes, who went exploring up the Fly from his ship, and stole goods from the natives. He tells about it himself. He seemed to think it fun. . . . I believe they were killing prospectors fifty years after, on account of that." He stared at the thing, got down on his knees to it. "My

God," he declared, "if it wasn't impossible, I'd say it was a pearl. But no oyster that ever grew could produce a thing like that. An oval pearl—as big as a hen egg—such things don't happen."

"Leave it be," Jane told him, "and come away now. I've fair earned my pound today. And they're beginning to get nasty outside. No, you aren't going to stop and take no notes of their squawking; put up that book. You're coming back to the horses."

Outside, the warriors were beginning a curious kind of chant; a rhythmic bellow with a threatening sound. Lombard realized that Jane might be in the right of it. He put away his notebook. Jimmy-the-Rag, outside, stuck his head round the corner of the door. "I don't want to hurry anyone," he drawled, "but I can't enjoy my meals without a head to eat them with; so if we're going back to dinner—"

"That reminds me," Jane told him, "Jack'll be wanting his." She hurried down to the horses. Bokolo, dancing in the hot sun, made faces at her as she passed.

Jimmy and Lombard followed. "It's rough on her," Jimmy-the-Rag remarked, "to have had him go like he did, on their wedding day."

Lombard was betrayed into saying crudely: "What?"

"Jack and she were spilled going over the reef in a whaleboat as they landed from the steamer. They'd just been married aboard. The keel struck him, and he never stirred hand or foot since. Six years."

Lombard wanted to say, "Good God!" but remembered in time that he didn't believe in gods. He thought, however, that he understood some things about Jane that hitherto had been dark, in the light of this revelation. One still puzzled him. "Why is she so keen on money?" he asked, keeping an eye on Jane, who had passed the gate, and was whistling for her absent dog.

"Surgeons," Jimmy briefly informed him. "Trips to Sydney—and hospitals. Things that she thinks might be done—for Jack."

SO much emphasis went with the last two words, that Lombard, hurrying to join his hostess, found himself compelled to slacken pace and ask: "Why not—for her?"

Jimmy didn't reply. Instead, he remarked irrelevantly: "That was a bonzer girl-friend of yours who threw the paper ribbons when the boat was leaving Sydney. The one," he explained, "who held on to the last ribbon till it broke in your hand, and then—"

"This must be a sago-palm," Lombard hurriedly observed. "Do they grow—"

"Blew her nose," Jimmy concluded.

Jane looked back at him as he dived through the gate. "I'm not waiting for no dogs," she stated. "The little brute has gone ahead, I reckon. Let's go." Lombard found himself wondering why a shade of red-gold in some one's hair, a litheness of limb, a stately poise of head, could avail—as seemed to be the case—to transform bad grammar into attractive idiosyncrasy. He gave it up. Jane was Jane.

LATER, sitting on the veranda of the store, they talked over the business of the phœnix egg. Lombard was delighted yet disappointed. Delighted, because the thing he had seen was a miracle, or very near; disappointed, because no scientific theory, designed to flutter the dovecotes of universities, could be founded upon it.

The Napi-Napi natives, plainly, had found the thing somewhere or other, made up a story about a bird of fire, and kept the egg, or the pearl, because it was remarkable, because (no doubt; here he felt at home again) it really was mixed up in their minds with the various bird-cults, bird-myths, of the islands.

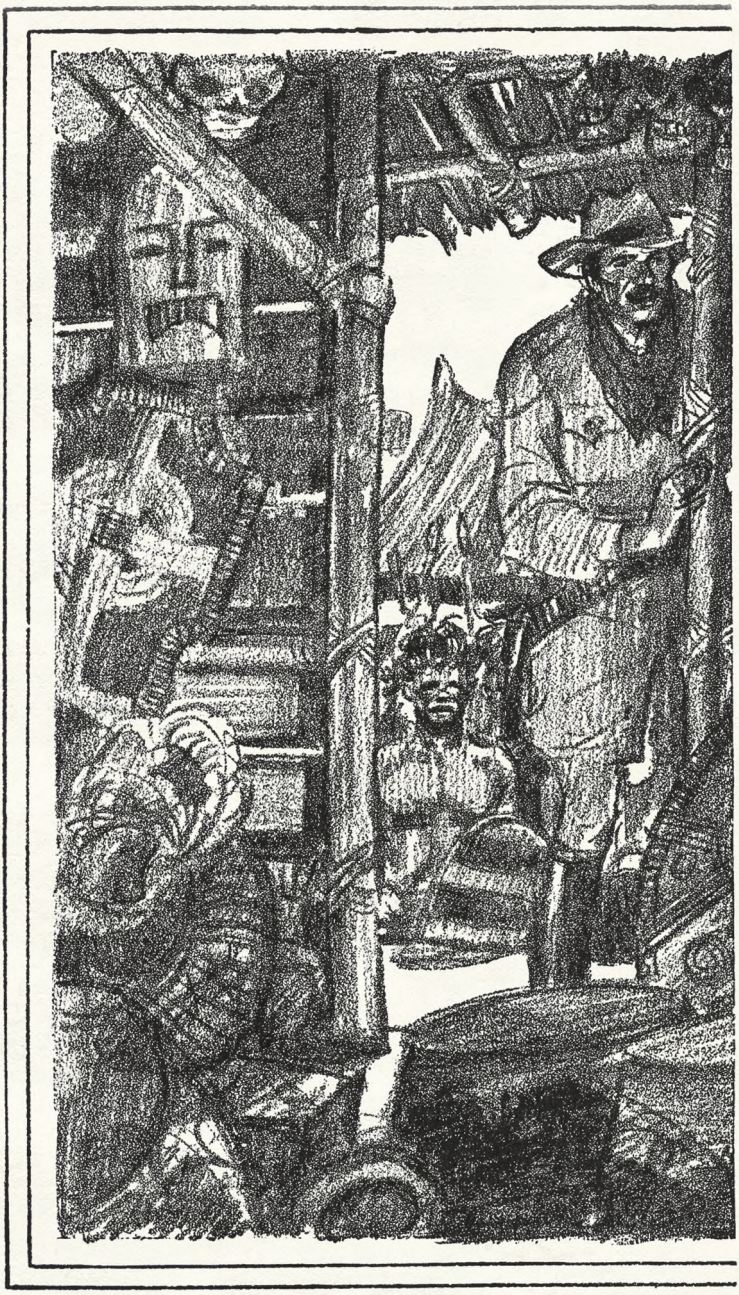
So far, so good. But not all his scientific training, not all his public-school and university education, kept him from feeling every finger in both hands a-tremble with desire to pick and steal.

If the thing was a pearl—but it couldn't be.... Well, suppose for the sake of argument it was, what couldn't it do! To himself, and Jimmy-the-Rag, and Jane and—maybe—a nice little girl in Sydney who had held the end of that paper ribbon when the ship sailed.

And to Jane's husband. Yes. Yes, of course. . . .

It was Jane herself who broke into his musings, carrying out a tray from the bedroom where her invalid husband lay. He didn't care for visitors. He had been heard grumbling to Jane about their presence, about the presence of strangers; if you couldn't quite catch what he said, you couldn't help hearing what Jane's clear voice, a minute ago, had replied.

"No, not perticklerly. Yes, fairly so; reckon it's his hair or something. No, my oath, no; not if he was the last man in the world. Sup it up; it's getting cold."



"Don't you go touching it," Jane warned. "It's as much as your head's worth, to be in this place at all."

Jane was with them now, sitting on one of the veranda chairs, silent, after she had joined the others, for a minute or two; listening, as they listened to the night sounds of Nor'west Island; the noise of the coral reef, like distant engines, like swarming, giant bees, like sea-beasts grumbling, turning in their sleep; ghost-pigeons in the near-by forest, wailing as at night they wail—dead souls, the natives call them, eager to entrap a wanderer and lead him into fatal, impassable places; crocodiles, far away or near—one could not be certain which—belling like stags at bay.

Jane remarked presently: "It's no use your saying it isn't."

Jimmy-the-Rag seemed to understand. "I never said it wasn't," he replied. "I'd have said if you asked me, that it doesn't matter whether it is or not."

"How can you sit there, with your belly full of my good curry-and-rice, and talk to me as if I was a fool?"

LOMBARD intervened. He was thinking, as they all were, of that miraculous egg, of the impossibility of getting hold of it without setting the entire island in a flame; of what it was worth, and what it could do. He was, like Nor'west Jane, a little feverish, a little overexcited about the whole matter. Jimmy-the-Rag,

curiously enough,—he who was a gold-miner, had been a pearl-diver, and knew all about precious metals and stones,—Jimmy-the-Rag kept cool.

But Lombard eagerly said: "Of course it's real; nothing else could shine so—a perfect drop-shaped blue-white pearl, as big as the Cullinan diamond; relatively—actually, it's bigger." (He was on the road, he thought, to become like the *Red Queen's* friend in "Alice," who trained herself to believe six impossible things every morning before breakfast. . . . "But it is, it is!")

"You're not thinking much," Jane dryly remarked, "of the book you was going to write about the sun and moon and all that gab."

"Not much," Lombard admitted. He had been thinking, as it happened, that pearls, ordinary-size pearls, of course, would suit the little girl down south; but a woman like Jane ought to wear emeralds. In lumps, in handfuls. He could see her wearing them.

Jane asked: "How do you reckon, with all your learning, that thing was made?"

"I'm not a biologist," Lombard said.

"Nor I'm not, but—Jimmy!"

"Eh?"

"Was you ever down in the Solomons, where them giant clams is?"

"Not such a fool."

"Well, there's them that have been, and they say there's some, just where it gets too deep, that's seven feet long and a ton weight. And in Gesila Strait, of Samarai, there's an oc'upus has eyes on him as big as the tops of card-tables, and can stretch the length of today and tomorrow—and he's just below the depth the men can live in. That deep place off of Brandon Cay, they said it was beyond soundings."

"Was," said Jimmy, taking out his pipe and tapping it against the wall.

"That's right. Was," said Jane, and sat looking at him.

"Whether I'm a biologist or not," Lombard contributed, "and even though I never 'went down,' I can see what you're driving at. You mean that the depths beyond where divers go, can produce new things. And as a matter of fact, they often have."

"That's right."

"Then, probably, the giant pearl—is a pearl?"

"That's right."

"And, probably, we can't get hold of it?"

"That's right. Not, and keep the heads of us on us."

"Surely there should be some way!"

"That's what that bird Jukes, that you told us of, thought, wasn't it? Got what he wanted, and went off. And left the next lot to carry the baby."

"But you want it, don't you?"

"Want it? It makes me fair go to market to think of it."

Jimmy-the-Rag took his pipe out of his mouth and looked at Jane with a curious expression. "Sure?" was all he said, before stopping himself up again. Jane said almost violently: "Of course I am. It would make anyone ropable to lose a chance like that."

"Philological treat, isn't she?" Jimmy said, very softly, to Lombard. ("When I get time," thought Lombard, "when I can collect myself, I'll want to know where you got—several things.")

JANE was suddenly on her feet, speaking in a quiet voice: "Jim—Mr. Lombard! There's rifles, loaded, on the wall behind you. Cartridges in the table drawer." She had a rifle in the crook of her arm almost immediately. Jimmy-the-Rag beat Lombard to another by two seconds. They were all armed, all standing together, with the lamp put out, before the ghost-pigeon in the trees cried twice again.

"Can you see?" Jane whispered. Lombard saw.

In the starlight, in the dusk that was clear as shadowed water, a dark tidal wave was visible, gliding toward the store. Hundreds of natives, moving silently together. "Attack?" Lombard asked, with a not disagreeable prickling sensation somewhere about his spine. Now, maybe, he could show Nor'west Jane something....

Jimmy-the-Rag had somehow managed to work himself in front.

"They aren't coming on," he said quietly. Suspense seemed to fill the atmosphere like smoke. Of a sudden it cleared; breath came easily again. A single figure had detached itself from the formless mass, and was moving forward.

"BOKOLO, that you?" sharply demanded Jane.

"Me," the native agreed; "me wantum egg."

Jane caught her breath, turned to Lombard: "You didn't—"

"Certainly not."

"Jimmy, did you—"

"Jane, did you," scornfully mimicked Jimmy-the-Rag.

"Somebody has," she stated, "and they're snake-headed about it." She was very cool now. Lombard did not like that coolness. She ought to be out of this, he thought, but who was to make her go?

Bokolo stood among the shadows, a shade himself—but a shade, as Lombard very well knew, who had it in his power to send them all to the company of the eternal shades, if once he gave the signal to that mass of leashed savagery behind. The tiger was growling; out of hand at last—or so nearly out of hand, that every moment one expected the yell and the leap. What was Jane doing? Was she mad, attempting to go down the veranda steps? If she was, he was mad too, of necessity. Where was that brute Jimmy? "Keep alongside me, Jane. I've got the gun along my arm. Hope it won't come to that, but I'll shoot her myself before—"

Jane was addressing the shadow that was Bokolo. "What's this about the precious egg? Who do you think took your dirty egg?"

"You. Him," Bokolo replied. They could see the whites of his eyes, though he himself was all but invisible; it had a weird effect.

"He believes it," Jane told Lombard. "Sorry we got you into this." She addressed the shadow again.

"No one got your egg. You go home quiet, and I'll say no more about this."

Bokolo said firmly, again: "Wantum egg." Through the mass of half-invisible warriors behind him, a movement like a shudder ran, and passed, and ceased. Lombard saw it. So did Jane. He did not give her the chance to speak again.

"The first man makes a step nearer," he shouted, "I'll shoot him. Do you understand that?"

Jane said: "Shut up!" Bokolo laughed unpleasantly, turned his head, and said something to the warriors behind.

"It don't do no good," said Jane. "If we're going to get through this— What do you want now?"

Behind her, as she spoke, Jimmy-the-Rag had come up. "Cross your heart and die, did either of you touch it?" he demanded.

"Take me for a fool?" and "Most certainly not," came from them together.

"Then—it's a chance." He clicked on a torch, and the beam of white light struck Bokolo, standing unafraid some few yards away. "Here, Jane," Jimmy said, pushing something into her hand, and moving back.

"God's Rod!" said Jane, and actually giggled. She held up her hand to the light. It flashed with many colors. They heard Bokolo catch his breath and utter a clicking sound of astonishment.

"Yes," said Jane. "We heard you'd lost the thing, which isn't worth a stick of tobacco anyhow—but we'll make it up to you, just for the good of trade. You savvy?"

"Me savvy," came with a flash of teeth. Lombard wondered if those teeth— But what was she doing?

IN the full light of the torch she was holding up a giant glass marble, of the kind that used, long years ago, to be sold for two pennies. Lombard remembered having seen it in the house, employed as a weight to keep papers down inside a box. He'd noticed it; he hadn't seen one of the things since he was a kid. Certainly no Nor'west Islander ever could have— What?

"This," Jane was saying in an impressive voice, "is an Egg. A proper sort of Egg. Because I've made trade with you, and you're good boys when you don't forget, I'm going to give you this. And I'm not going to charge you no copra, nor no nothing not at all for it. There."

She tossed the marble high into the dark; and as it fell, and crossed the bar of light again, it dropped into the eager hands of Bokolo. Jimmy kept the torch on. Bokolo turned the huge marble in his hands, saw the play inside it of pink and green and blue, and swiftly dropped it into the bag at his belt.

"What do you say?" demanded Jane.

The cannibal, collecting his English painfully, said: "Me tell you, thank you very much." With a sudden war-whoop, he departed. And before you could have struck a match, the shadows in the background were gone too.

Jane lighted a lamp inside the house. "I'll go and see my old man," she said.

EARLY next morning Jane was heard in the henhouse, scolding Jock the terrier. Nobody took much account of that; but when the scolding was followed by a piercing scream, Lombard and Jimmy-the Rag made no bones about running to the rescue as hard as they could.

"I never heard Jane scream before," Jimmy panted. "If she's bit by a snake—but that wouldn't make her—"

They found her outside the henhouse, staring like one hypnotized at something that lay on the ground, oval, white and shining in the morning sun. The giant pearl, the phœnix egg!

"Jock," Jane gasped, "Jock done it. He steals eggs—I've smacked him before. Jock done it, as sure as eggs is—"

"Pearls," put in Jimmy-the-Rag.

Dreams filled the very air about the three, as they went together back to the little trading-store. Dreams of what could be done with a pearl the like of which the world had never seen. Jane and Lombard were vocal with theirs. But Jimmy-the-Rag, gold-miner, pearler and adventurer, was silent until some one spoke to him, and then he said: "Me? I don't know. There's liable to be a catch in most things that look too good."

Lombard went on thinking in terms of yachts and Sydney harbor and chairs of science (as a sort of afterthought) endowed, and—maybe—beautiful girls who held paper ribbons till they had to let them go. Maybe. And Jane was heard to say that when you got as far as Cairns Hospital, there was no reason why you shouldn't go a sight farther, maybe round the world; for even divided three ways, the Phœnix Egg would be enough. Then when her "old man" called, she went in.

Beatrice Grimshaw will contribute to an early issue another colorful story of the South Sea Islands far from the tourist routes.

The

As they roared down the shaft, a glowing speck detached itself, leaving a trail of bright sparks—a burning cigarette.

THE fire in the Mayflower shaft started Friday, in the first hour after midnight; and Thursday evening was Lodge night. Otherwise the tight little drama accompanying the catastrophe might not have worked out along the lines it did. It was cast according to the sound old triangular recipe: two men and a woman—Joe Carkeek the shift-boss, Kennedy the floater, and Nancy Gardner.

It was warm on Thursday evening, without a breath of air stirring, and the roar of the stamps in the Mayflower mill came into the open windows of the second-floor hall down on Church Street where Joe and his brother Masons were going through the ritual, or whatever it is that they go through during these weekly sessions. He was in his early thirties, compactly built, what they call a big-little man, and one of his shoulders drooped. If you happened to look closely, you would notice that the foot on that side dragged when he walked. A slow man when it came to speech, and his clear eyes had a habit of searching the eyes of anyone with whom he was talking, as if he was reading the other's mind. As regularly as Lodge evening came around, excepting for those months when he was on afternoon shift, he was to be found here in his regalia.

Of the other two main interests in Joe's life, one lay deep beneath the surface of the earth. He had been working underground, eight hours a day, six days a week, ever since he was a boy. The only time that he had missed during all these years was an interval in the company hospital after a slide of loose rock had caught him when he was climbing up a raise. That was ten years ago; he still retained the drooping shoulder and the dragging foot as mementoes. Hard-rock mining is like some of the noblest professions in one respect; it takes hold of a man until often it becomes a passion rather than a mere means of livelihood. Joe had been soaking in its knowledge and its traditions ever since he could remember, in a community where even the schoolchildren talked readily of dips and faults and intrusions and ore bodies.

The third interest in Joe's life in point of time—and first in importance—was Nancy Gardner. On those evenings when he was not underground or in the lodge rooms, he called on her. Sometimes they drove out in his modest car along roads that wound through the pine-clad Sierra foothills; occasionally they went to the motion pictures; but more often they sat on the latticed porch behind the screen of flowering vines which covered the front of her father's cottage, with the roaring of the Mayflower mill coming across the cañon while they planned and replanned their future.

Kennedy knew all these things, for Joe had confided in him with the freedom

Graveyard Shift

A story of mining-men by a writer who knows—the famous author of "Sindbad of Oakland Creek," "The Hazardous Highway," and other noted stories.

By FREDERICK BECHDOLT

Illustrated by Jeremy Cannon

which so often marks a silent man's credence in one who is smooth of speech. Perhaps the bestowal of faith had come more readily because of generosities which had preceded it; it was the quiet shift-boss who had fed Kennedy while the latter was a rustler, wearing out his shoes from one mine superintendent's office to another in search of a job; and had managed to get him on at the Mayflower six months ago. But the memory of obligations, material or otherwise, never interfered with Kennedy's desires. He was a good-looking young fellow, if you like that style—patent-leather hair and bold brown eyes; and the trail of his wanderings was a long one. From Butte Hill to Bisbee Cañon and from Cripple Creek to the Mother Lode, it was marked

by brief sojourns and hurried departures, by disillusioned women and their outraged menfolk.

And Nancy Gardner's blue eyes had a trick of gazing up from under the long dark lashes which was as unconscious with her as breathing. Set in a heart-shaped little face, whose vivid color was as fresh as that of a flower, they were devastating. The best-intentioned young fellow in the world would have found himself slipping after looking into them; and Kennedy's intentions, as has been intimated, were about as honorable as those of a cat on a backyard fence. So he was sitting on the porch behind the screen of flowering vines while Joe was down in Masonic Hall, and the fire which was to start in the Mayflower shaft three hours later was not the only one tonight.

IT is peculiar how time flies when a man is engrossed in his purpose, and Kennedy was making the most of his opportunity. He was what they call a fast worker; but the clock in the little living-room behind the open window was ticking off the seconds, the seconds were piling up into minutes, the minutes into hours. He was watching those disturbing eyes, speculating as to what aroused emotions might lie behind them. He was making what he would have been pleased to call his first pass at her, when Nancy said:

"Do you think Joe would like that?"

There was something in her voice which nettled him and he answered swiftly, with blind recklessness.

"Joe! That's a laugh! Listen, kid, you aint falling for the line he hands you? Why, Joe's playing round with two dames I know of—" The scorn which had been vibrant died; his voice trailed away to silence at a heavy footfall on the gravel pathway. He was wondering just how loudly he had been talking when he arose, but practice is a great help, and this was not the first time that he had been caught in a tight corner.

" 'Lo, Joe. Back already?" His manner was casual as he brushed by the newcomer on the porch steps. "Well, I'm on my way." He saw the steady eyes boring into his.

"I'll be seeing you," Joe said, and that was all.

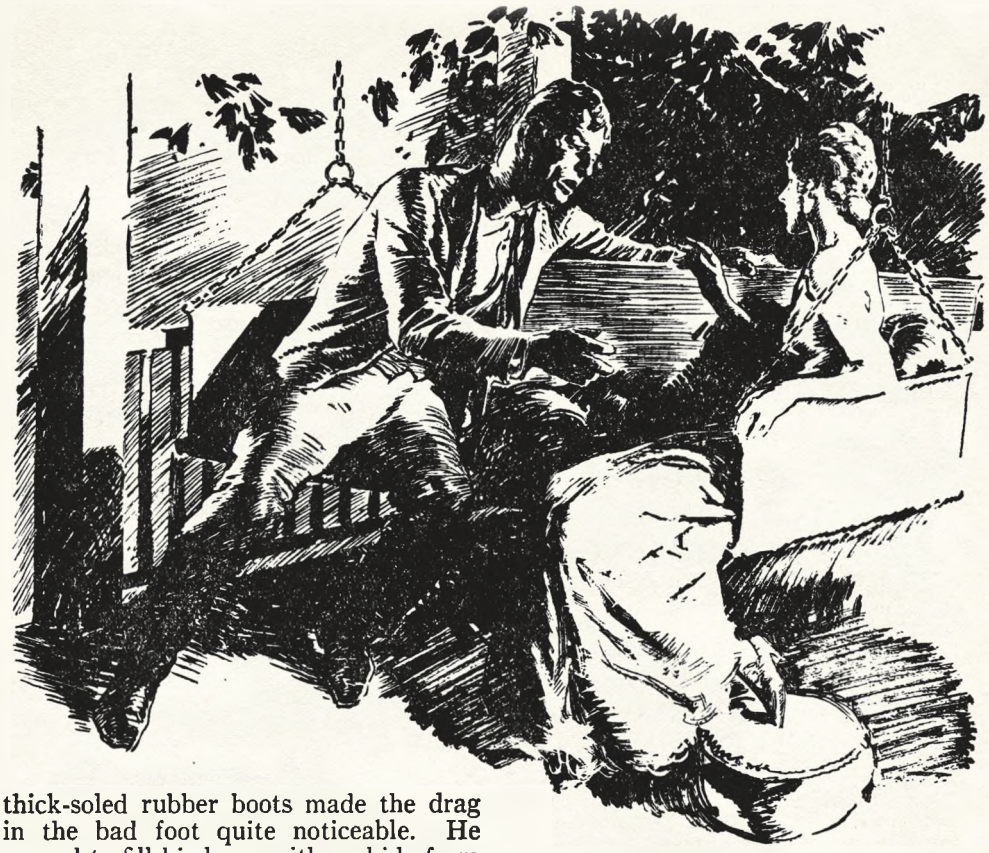
While he was pressing the starter in the gaudy little secondhand roadster which he had talked the salesman into letting go on a ten-dollar-down payment, Kennedy wondered what lay behind

"Joe! Listen, kid, you aint falling for the line he hands you? Why, Joe's playing round with two dames—"

those words. That was the trouble with these silent fellows; you never could tell. And now that he was thinking on the subject, it occurred to him that he had caught Joe searching his eyes more intently than usual yesterday morning when they came off shift. Or was that right? He was still pondering on these matters when he drove up the hill to the change-room at the Mayflower mine an hour later. . . .

Electric lamps spilled a wide pool of dazzling white light about the shaft collar. The long iron gondola hung by the cable, waiting to carry the last of the shift down. The narrow track, on which it ran, stretched above it where the lofty headframe vanished in the shadows of the night, and plunged beneath into the blackness underground; its slope was so steep that the men in the shallow car seemed on the verge of pitching forward from the cleats which served as seats. Their heavy boots and oilskin jackets were stained with gray sludge; the carbide lamps on their miners' hats sent pale little jets of flame into the surrounding brightness. Kennedy had settled into the topmost place, overlooking all the others, and he was holding his lunch bucket between his feet, his hands cupped upon his lap, when he saw Joe come out from the clanging blacksmith shop.

The droop in the shift-boss' shoulder was more pronounced now that he had changed into his digging-clothes; and the



thick-soled rubber boots made the drag in the bad foot quite noticeable. He paused to fill his lamp with carbide from the can near the shop door, snapped on the patent lighter, and passed the huge timber piles under the overwhelming din of the mill upon the hillside. As he drew near the fence which guarded the shaft collar, he raised his head; his eyes ranged upward, taking in the men in the gondola; he nodded once or twice, answering their greetings, and finally his gaze met Kennedy's. It lingered for a moment; it seemed to bore in and in. Then he jerked the bell wire for the station, swung into the car and pulled the starting signal.

AS they roared down the shaft, the flicker of the carbide lamps sent shadows squirming between the sets of thick timbers which swept by within a scant arm's reach. At intervals a station light gleamed briefly and disappeared above them. They had dropped nearly a thousand feet when a glowing red speck detached itself from the upper end of the gondola, leaving a trail of bright sparks behind it in the blackness of the narrow hole. By the time the burning cigarette had settled down into a corner where dry rot had left a pocket of dusty punk at the base of an old stull, the character of the ground had changed; the car was plunging now through heavy dampness; beards of white mold waved from the posts which held the roof, and patches of moisture glistened on the living rock.

The fate or luck or whatever it was that had arranged for a passenger of this particular breed to be aboard tonight had been good enough to see to it that all the men on graveyard shift were working on the same level, which turned out to be a little help later on. And when they stopped at the three-thousand, Kennedy was one of the first to climb out. The station lights revealed a large chamber, hewn from the living rock, and the black mouths of two narrow passages leading off into the heart of the mountain. A pump was thudding somewhere in the outer darkness; every so often it exhaled a windy sigh. Big drops of water spatted dully on the plank platform around the shaft where the miners were busy getting lengths of steel and bitt frames out of the gondola. Joe was standing over by the first-aid locker listening to the skip-tender who had ridden down with them. He was so intent that he did not notice Kennedy's departure until the latter's carbide lamp was a wavering speck of yellow receding in the gloom of the north drift.

Kennedy heard the shift-boss calling him, but he did not turn his head. The

memory of the look which Joe had given him at the shaft collar was staying with him. Other lamps were bobbing up and down behind him. Some one shouted, "The boss wants you, Kennedy!" He answered, "Tell the boss to go to hell," and hurried on.

He was working in the face of the north drift; a long crooked passage leading away, as a branch of a tree shoots from the trunk. And the trunk was the shaft, two thousand feet from here. On either side of him—so close that they seemed to be crowding in upon him—thick timbers supported other timbers a few inches over head; some of them were warped where the living rock was shifting, pressing its weight upon them. The air drill was slung to an iron column, pointing toward the face of the drift. Kennedy was holding the crank lightly with one hand, reaching forward with the other hand to the valve key, while the drifter vibrated with the force of its assaults upon the virgin rock, filling the narrow passage with a roar like that of twenty machine-guns. The memory of that look which Joe had given him remained in the back of his mind. Two hours had passed; his helper had gone to the station after more steel. And Kennedy was thinking what a lovely place a mine is for accidents: A tool dropped in a shaft, a car of waste dumped down a raise at the wrong time, a hoist man misreading a signal.

Or a shift-boss giving the wrong order!

He passed his hand across his brow, wiping away the beads of sweat and his lips moved, but the roaring of the drifter drowned the oath. A moment later he shut off the air to change the steel. He was picking up the new length to insert it in the chuck when a thought came to him.

"Supposing Nancy told him!"

AND all this time he had been wondering whether Joe had heard! What difference did that make? He wiped the sweat from his forehead with his sleeve. Now he knew why the shift-boss had eyed him that way at the shaft collar. And what was in his mind while they were riding down. And what it was Joe wanted at the station when he called. If he had only turned back then they could have had it out with others to look on and see fair play. It was a lonely spot here at the end of the two-thousand-foot-long drift. Many things can pass as accidents, underground!

Something was moving behind him. He was brandishing the length of steel as he whirled in time to see a big fat mine rat scurrying off behind a set of timbers. That settled it; a man has to justify his own cowardice when he is faced with it. He said:

"I'm getting out of here while I've got the chance." And he started back to the shaft station. He had gone a little more than a quarter of the way when he heard the rattle of the electric motor which hauls the ore cars. It was Joe's habit to catch a ride down the drift. There was a crosscut just ahead which they had driven for two hundred feet. Kennedy dodged into it. He found an empty powder box and sat down, waiting for the cars to pass, and it occurred to him that it was after one o'clock; at the half hour the shift-boss always rode up to the surface with samples for the assayer.

"I'll stick where I am," he reflected, "until he's gone."

THEY had blasted in the face of the south drift, and the shot had uncovered an ore body for which they had been searching during the last three months. Joe was returning to the shaft station with a bag of samples which he had taken for the assayer. He didn't need the latter's report to tell him that it was good stuff, and the look of the rock which the dynamite had exposed assured him that there was plenty of it. There is a big streak of the prospector in every seasoned miner; the knowledge that the tiny stringers of quartz, which they had been following for months, had fulfilled their promise put other matters from his mind for the time being. He was whistling when he came splashing through the puddles on the narrow car track. But when he reached the station the whistling ceased; he halted on the plank platform; his eyes were on the two holes where the shaft opened in the roof; he was leaning forward, and his nostrils were twitching.

A faint haze was drifting out of one of the holes, so tenuous that it was barely visible against the light of the incandescent lamps. If it had not been for the odor he might not have seen it at all, but there was no mistaking that tang. Wood smoke! He dropped the bag of samples.

There was a telephone beside the shaft. He had started toward it when he heard the rumble of the descending skip. The huge car which carried the ore to the surface shot into sight and came to a

They staggered up the drift; it was all they could do to keep walking.

stop, an iron box on wheels, open at the upper end. The skip-tender was riding the heavy bail by which it was hooked to the cable. He swung off to the platform; a smooth-faced young fellow with the wide mouth and turned-up nose of a born comedian; every day when he came into the change-room to strip he was sure to be surrounded by a group of men in various stages of nakedness, shouting with laughter at his latest mimicries. But there was no trace of the jester in him now.

"Fire in the shaft," he said.

Joe nodded. "Where?"

"Just this side of the eight hundred. Two sets of timbers. On the hanging wall."

Joe stood without moving for a few seconds. It was quiet here at the station; the only sounds were the thudding of the pump off in the darkness, the *phut-phut* of the drops from the roof, and the distant rattle of a string of ore cars. During that little interval his thoughts traveled far. They went to the surface, three thousand feet away; they returned into the depths; they followed several miles of intricate workings to their ends. And on their way they dealt with various large possibilities.

Thirty-eight men down here and their only means of reaching the surface was the shaft. It was what they call a downcast shaft, sucking the outer air into the mine. So no smoke would be showing on top. There were two compartments, and the ore skip which had just descended had a clear track. But sooner or later the flames would burn through to this compartment; and a short time after that had happened the track would be blocked by fallen timbers. Then, if anyone remained down here, the carbon monoxide would come upon them. The fire was generating it now, sending it down, to fill all the workings, to smother everything that lived.

Joe stepped to the telephone and rang for the hoist-man.

"Fire in the shaft. Just below the eight hundred. I'm holding the skip here to get the men out." He hung up and turned to the skip-tender.

"Take the south drift. There's sixteen working in that end. Be sure you get them all." As he went on giving his directions he saw the web of narrow passages which led away through the living rock; he saw them as plainly as if he were reading one of the big blue-prints lying on the drafting-table in the superintendent's office; he envisioned the miners scattered through them, standing at the cranks of the thundering machine drills, stooping to their shovels at the muck piles, with the light of their carbide lamps flickering on the walls of dripping rock which enclosed them. Two of them in the face of the long drift;

two others on a narrow staging at the head of a steep raise which slanted upward like a rabbit hole for a hundred feet above the level; eight toiling in one of those huge dim caverns which the miners call stopes; four at the foot of a deep winze. He named them all off.

"Got them?" he asked. The skip-tender nodded.

"I'm on my way."

The rattle of the ore cars had been growing louder and the train came into sight. The haze of smoke was thicker at the shaft now. The car-man had shut off the juice and started for the platform before Joe raised his arm to beckon him; there was no need to waste words in telling the news.

"O.K.," he said, "I'll bring 'em in from my end." He ran back, unhooked the electric motor and rattled off down the north drift. The noise died away. The only sounds were the thudding of the unseen pump and the drops falling from the roof on the plank platform. The telephone rang. Joe took down the receiver. A voice said:

"I've sent four men down to the eight hundred. They'll report—" The phone went dead.

"She's getting hot," Joe told himself. He turned and peered into the dimness beyond the station lights. Thirty-eight men. He started naming them over, ticking each name off on his fingers. He pulled out his watch and looked at it. Seven after one, it said. It seemed to him that he had been standing there for a long time, for hours perhaps, when he heard the noise of the electric train again but the minute-hand of the watch had barely passed the quarter hour. They had hooked on three empties and the cars were loaded down with men.

"Supposing Nancy told him!" he thought.

THEY trooped to the platform in silence; Joe noticed that there was none who had failed to bring his lunch bucket with him. It was one of the lessons that had been learned from mine disasters, to carry that little store of food in case you were cut off from the surface and had to bulkhead yourself in at some dead end while rescue-crews were trying to fight their way to you before the gas seeped through the barricade and got you. When they saw him standing there some of them nodded as was their habit whenever they met him; then their eyes went to the shaft. The incandescent lamps glowed down upon them, paling the little flames which jetted from their hats, showing their intent faces. Joe said:

"All right. Pile in."

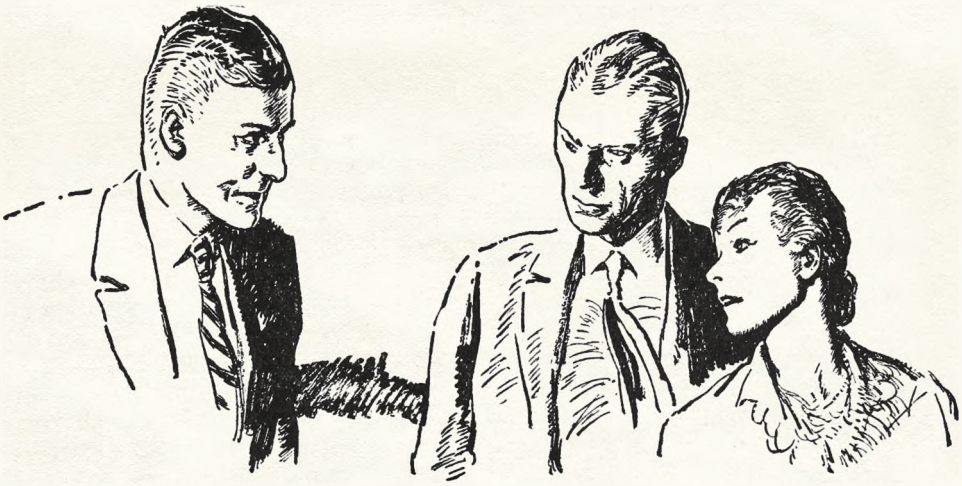
He ticked them off as they swung into the skip; he fixed their names in his mind. Thirteen men. Twenty-five to go. He pulled the bell-wire. There was a sick little interval, then the skip shot up into the shaft. He wondered whether it would ever come back again. The men from the south drift were beginning to arrive. The group on the platform were staring at the shaft. No sound came from it. Only little puffs of smoke, and once a spark that drifted on down and vanished in the ore pocket below. The minutes dragged. The skip-tender said:

"The service here aint what it used to be. I'm going to complain to the management."

Some one laughed. The skip shot into sight and came to a stop. Joe nodded at the group on the platform.

"Married men first."

His fingers moved as he ticked them off. He pulled the bell wire. The huge iron box shot out of sight. Twenty-six gone. Twelve to go. The smoke was getting thicker. The timbers above the thousand-foot were as dry as bone; there was no telling how long the bulkhead between the two compartments would hold.



Stories of mine disasters went through his mind: a fire in a dry shaft at Tonopah where flaming timbers had derailed a skip loaded down with men.... Forty-seven miners entrapped in one of the lower levels of the Argonaut mine, and smothered by gas. Stay down or go up, you took your chances. And the decision lay with him. All he could do was to use his judgment and hope for the breaks. Thirty-eight men—twelve were left. He turned his head to look them over and the electric lights winked out.

There was no sound now except the dripping from the roof. Then a voice said:

"I wonder if that hoist-man has gone to sleep."

The carbide lamps shone dimly through the mist of smoke. Joe stood with his head thrust forward, counting them. Eleven little jets of flame; eleven faces under them, intent upon the shaft. Some one sighed deeply as the skip appeared.

"All right, boys," Joe said, and when they had taken their places: "There's one man missing—Kennedy. I'm going after him." He seized the bell-wire, but before he pulled it he finished his directions. "The wire will go any minute now. Tell them to send the skip down and hold her here,"—he calculated swiftly, —"ten minutes." He gave the starting signal. He waved his hand at them as they vanished and he turned away.

Ten minutes while they held the skip for him. Three minutes for them to haul to the surface, unload the men and send her down. Thirteen minutes in all. The north drift was two thousand feet long. The footing was poor; his boots were heavy. That was cutting it pretty close but the flames were working fast. It was a race. He set off down the narrow passage....

Sometimes, when a police band marches up the street before the hearse, playing the "Dead March," or when a steamship goes down with her skipper on the bridge, we hear of the fine traditions of the men who earn their bread in hazardous occupations. The curious thing about those traditions is that the ones who observe them do not take thought of them. They merely carry them out when the time comes. They are too busy with the details to speculate on other matters. Joe's mind had dismissed all outside things, including the thirty-seven men who had gone up the shaft; it was occupied with the thirty-eighth.

The drift wound, following vagaries of the vein. The water ran ankle-deep on the narrow car-track; there were patches of slippery mud and there were holes between some of the ties. He was swinging along at a dog-trot and several times he came near to falling. The air was getting bad; the pace which he was holding crowded his lungs until they seemed about to burst. He had gone nearly three-quarters of the distance when he caught sight of a pin point of light bobbing up and down ahead of him. He shouted. The light stood still. And then it disappeared. He called again:

"Kennedy!" There was no answer.

The long drift ran straight here to the face. The rays of his carbide lamp cut a slender pathway in the darkness, revealing the dripping timbers, the little stream of water that gleamed between the rails, and that was all. He went on slowly, looking behind the stulls that rose on either side, thick columns of pine coated with wet sludge and bearded with white mold. He reached the mouth of the crosscut and halted.

IT was peculiar how that light had blinked out and there was no sign of anyone before him in the drift. In the years while he had been working underground he had listened to the stories of

many mine disasters; he had heard of strange things that they had done to men who had a streak of yellow in them. He turned into the crosscut.

The walls were narrower than they were in the drift; the roof was so low that he had to bend his head. The timbering was heavy, for it was swelling ground here, and many of the huge stulls were twisted out of shape by the pressure of the hanging wall. There was no light excepting the yellow flow from his own lamp. Black shadows moved between warped posts and there was something else that stirred. He heard the tinkle of rock fragments and he called:

"Come out of this. The shaft—"

He ducked just in time. The shadow had detached itself from the gloomy recess between two timbers. Kennedy had put out his lamp and the hand which held a ragged fragment of waste rock had remained invisible until the missile left it. The hard miner's hat took the most of its force. Joe stumbled to one knee and his hat fell beside him. The place went pitch dark.

His head was swimming when he started to get up. It was muddy here, the slippery wet muck of disintegrated serpentine, and his foot slipped. He was off his balance when Kennedy leaped upon him and bore him down. His face

Joe gripped him by the slack of his jacket and lifted him from his feet; he flung him in as if he were a sack of grain.

was pressing into the ooze now. It is curious how a man's mind works in the brief moments while large action is taking place. Joe was thinking now of the minutes that had been passing since he had left the shaft station. The skip would be back by this time, waiting for them. In a little while the hoist-man would slacken off the cable and take it up again, jarring the car to warn them he was about to haul it to the surface.

Joe raised his face from the stifling mud and the air filled his lungs again. He wrapped his arms around Kennedy's body. He was not conscious of the blows that were raining upon him. They wrestled blindly in the darkness. He let his weight drop back and, as the other sank with him, he twisted himself with all his force. He felt himself sliding out from under and he freed an arm. He struck, one blow and then another, and the luck that sometimes abides with a good man saw to it that the second blow found Kennedy's chin.

Joe got to his knees and groped for his hat; he found it and he snapped on the patent lighter; the carbide lamp jetted a thin stream of flame. He gripped the shoulders of Kennedy's oilskin jacket and dragged him out into the drift. He scooped some water from the muddy stream which ran along the car-track and flung it into his face.

"Get up," he said. Kennedy rose slowly. "Get moving now."

THEY staggered up the drift and neither of them spoke, but Kennedy's eyes kept searching Joe's face; they were like the eyes of an animal that has been driven into a corner. The air was failing fast; it was all that they could do to keep walking and, as they stumbled to the platform at the station, the smoke gushed down upon them. It was coming from both compartments of the shaft now. They could barely see the skip; but the rattle of the wheels and the jarring of the cable sounded terribly loud against the silence of the rock chamber as the hoist-man gave his signal that he was about to haul up. Joe said:

"Pile in!" And Kennedy whipped another of those frightened looks at him. Joe gripped him by the slack of his oilskin jacket and lifted him from his feet; he flung him in as if he were a sack of grain. The skip started upward with a jerk.

It was about to disappear into the shaft when Joe leaped, landed on the bail and seized the cable in time to save himself from falling. He let himself slide down into the huge metal box and he was pulling his oilskin jacket up over his shoulders, wrapping it around his head; he was hearing the roar of the wheels on the rails; the hot smoke was searing his lungs; he was conscious of a greater heat and he was ticking off a number in his mind: *Thirty-eight.*

His lips were moving, trying to shape themselves to it as he sank unconscious.

JOE was lying flat on his back and the morning sunshine was slanting through the window, casting a patch of brightness on the brown linoleum which covered the floor. The door swung back and forth behind the white-clad nurse who had departed into the hospital corridor. There was a smell of antiseptics in the room and the bandages which they had wrapped about his head hid one of his eyes completely. The other eye was fixed on Nancy's face.

She was sitting beside his bed and her face was very close to his. He was still feeling the soft warmth of the lips which she had pressed, ever so gently, upon his own. Her eyes were wide now, looking into his.

"They tell me Kennedy's gone," he said. She nodded, and the shadow of trouble was in her eyes.

"He wasn't hurt at all badly. Just the smoke. You saved him from the fire, lying on top of him. He got his time and went down the hill this morning."

Joe moved his bandaged head from side to side.

"You mustn't do that," she told him.

"I wanted to have a word with that fellow," he said slowly.

It had been heavy on her mind ever since Joe had climbed the porch steps last evening. She had wanted to tell him then, but the fear of what he would do had kept her silent—the dread that he might bring harm to himself.

"And you knew all the time," she whispered. "You heard what he was saying?"

"What he was saying?" Joe repeated the words dully.

She told him then, and when she had finished:

"I didn't know," he said, "but it's just as well he's gone." And then, seeing her look of bewilderment: "The skip-tender caught him smoking in the shaft. I tried to get hold of him at the station, but he slipped away. It was in my mind to fire him, once I got him to the surface."

The Forest Fire

By ROBERT R. MILL

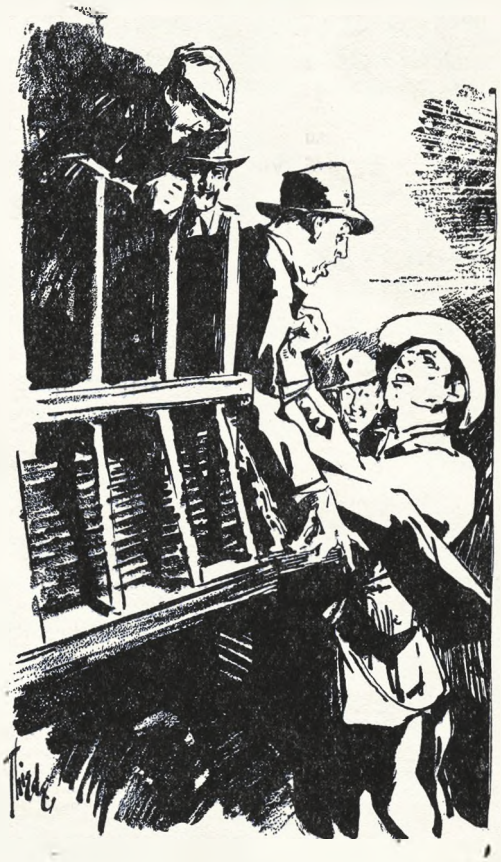
LESTER HOWARD stepped from the observer's cabin atop Wolf Mountain, and slowly rubbed his sleepy eyes. He knew, even before he glanced at the luminous dial of his wrist-watch, that it was just midnight. For the last two weeks his nights had been punctuated by hourly awakenings. That unpleasant state of affairs would continue until nature sent the only possible safeguard for the parched forests—rain.

There was no sign of that relief tonight. The moon, a red ball of fire, floodlighted the barren peak upon which the observer stood, and illuminated the surrounding valleys, which were covered with valuable stands of timber.

Howard stood there for a moment, debating between duty and inclination. Duty prompted him to climb to the platform of the observation tower near by, a better vantage spot from which to discern the first telltale flame that would herald the almost inevitable fire. Inclination suggested that he could do quite as well just where he was, and thereby save considerable effort. Duty had an ally in the traditions of the New York State Conservation Department, in which Howard took pride. Inclination, however, received support from the knowledge that the land protected by this observation post was, for the most part, not State-owned land. The greater part of it, and the most valuable timber, was owned by the Mountain Lumber Company.

Howard's face clouded at that thought. The Mountain Lumber Company meant John Vanuel.

Mechanically, Howard began to climb the ladder leading to the tower, cursing Vanuel as he went up. He was a conceited young waster. Not much like his dad, old Bruce Vanuel. Perhaps old Bruce had stolen his land from the State. There was no doubt about the fact that he had driven his lumberjacks a little harder than anybody else. But he had been all man, up to his death, some two or three years ago. While John—



"I'll have your job for this!" Vanuel

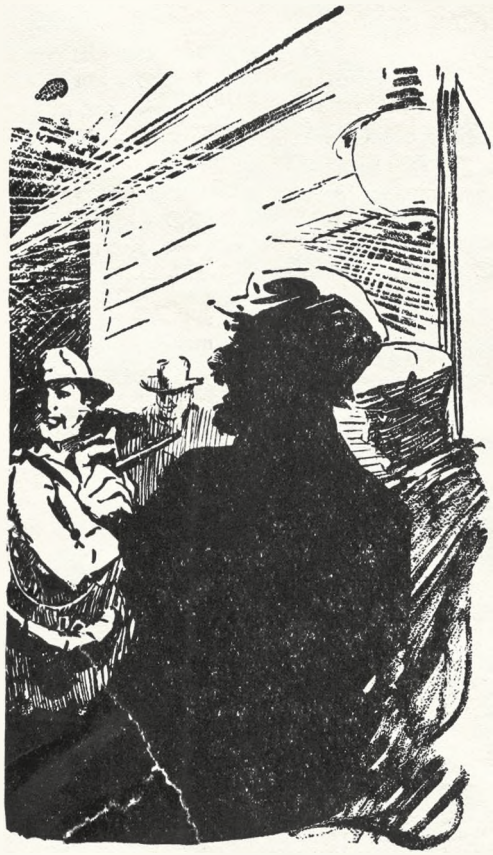
Howard gained the platform, and glanced about. The beauty of the scene belied the ever-present menace. The moonlight hid the fact that the leaves on the trees were browned and dry. Its vari-colored rays spread a charitable blanket that covered tinder-dry branches, leaf-strewn ground and a bed of dry duff beneath those leaves.

The observer stood there, using his night glasses to glance about in search of a dull glow or flashes of fire. He walked around the platform, covering all directions. Here, off in the distance, were a few twinkling lights that marked the sleeping village of Deerville. But there was no trace of the menace he feared, and so Howard made his way to the ground and walked to his cabin. He moved rapidly, for he was eager to resume his interrupted rest.

Murder

One of the strangest cases that Tiny David and the State Police were ever called upon to solve.

Illustrated by Henry Thiede



cried. "I'll call Captain Field! I'll—"

Standing in the shadows formed by the cabin, was a man. He waited until the observer was almost upon him. Then there was a flash of light, and the bark of a revolver. Howard went down.

The gunman stood over him for a moment. Then he began the descent of the mountain. As he neared the first stand of timber, he fumbled about in a package he carried and produced an oil-soaked rag. He next struck a match, ignited the rag and tossed it among the dry wood and duff.

He repeated this operation as he continued down the mountain, heading for the village of Deerville.

AS Lieutenant James Crosby piloted a car belonging to the Black Horse Troop, New York State Police, along a not-too-smooth mountain road, he noted with satisfaction that the slumber of his companion had been disturbed.

"Sorry," murmured Mr. Crosby. "Why don't you write the Highway Department? A lot of taxpayers have done the same thing. But if you tell 'em the road was so bad it woke you up, that should get action."

Lieutenant Edward David, better known as Tiny, stretched his long legs as far as the limits of the car would allow.

"What time is it?" he asked.

"Quarter of one," said Mr. Crosby. "Shall I draw your bath?"

Mr. David pondered awhile.

"No," he decided. "I'll wait until we get to the barracks."

"The next stop," Mr. Crosby declared, "is Deerville. I crave some coffee. How about it?"

"Don't need it," said Mr. David. "Your driving keeps me awake."

THE car rounded a turn, and the headlights picked up the figure of a man walking in the direction of Deerville, which was a mile or more ahead. But before the car overtook the man, he had vanished in the trees beside the road.

"That's funny," said Mr. Crosby.

"Stop the car," Tiny David ordered.

He walked to the side of the road, listened intently, heard a branch snap, and called:

"Come out of there! State Police!"

The moonlight revealed the man as he obeyed the command. He was in his early twenties, and rather well dressed.

"Out rather late, aren't you?" asked Tiny David.

"Maybe."

"What have you been doing?"

"Walking."

"You have a nice night for it. What's your name?"

"Thomas Horton."

"Where do you live?"

"Deerville."

"Where do you work?"

The youth smiled bitterly.

"Past tense on that. I was with the Mountain Lumber Company. I—I got through today—yesterday, rather."

"Hop in," Tiny David directed. "We have an empty back seat. It's as empty

as"—he jerked a thumb at Crosby—"as empty as his head."

They had driven a short distance, when Tiny David turned to face his passenger.

"Walking any particular place tonight?"

"No, just walking."

"Why pick on him?" demanded Mr. Crosby. "We all have our weakness. I listen to radio comedians."

THEY discharged their passenger in Deerville. Mr. Crosby went in search of coffee. Mr. David visited the hotel, on the long chance there might be a message for them.

The night clerk threw up both hands as he entered.

"You are out of luck," he declared. "Not a bed."

"Convention?"

"You might call it that. Been a bad dry spell that's strictly local. Woods around here are dry as punk. That's why we have about half the Conservation Department wished on us."

The clerk swore under his breath as he seated himself before a telephone switchboard, where a light was flashing.

"All right, I'll try the observer on Wolf Mountain again for you. But I called him just ten minutes ago, and he doesn't answer."

Tiny David stood in the office waiting for Crosby.

The clerk's, "Can't raise him," soon was followed by the appearance of a man who finished struggling into the green uniform of the Forestry Service as he descended the stairs.

"Get the night wire chief," the ranger directed. "Ask him for a report on that line." He recognized Tiny David. "Hello, Lieutenant."

"Having trouble?" asked the trooper.

"Afraid so. Can't raise Howard, on Wolf Mountain, and I know he's on the job."

The clerk looked up:

"Wire chief says the line tests okay."

The ranger gestured resignedly.

"Here is where I do some high-grade walking. Only four miles from the road, and all up-grade."

He walked to the porch, Tiny David with him. Involuntarily the two glanced up at the distant mountain. Tiny fingers of flame were darting about a short distance below the top.

"That makes it perfect!" cried the ranger. "I'll round up my gang, but we will need more men. We had a C.C.C. camp near here, until they yanked it away from us. That won't help now. Grab what men you can for us, and send them along to the foot of the trail, will you?" And he reëntered the hotel.

Tiny David walked along the deserted main street, paused at an all-night lunchroom to pick up Crosby, and then led the way to the firehouse, where they routed out the night-man.

A siren wailed its summons to the sleeping town. Soon men began to appear at the firehouse.

"How many of you men own trucks?" Tiny David asked.

Four or five hands went up.

"Get them," the trooper ordered.

Trucks appeared. David and Crosby recorded the names of the men loaded into them, and gave the lists to the drivers, to be turned over to the ranger.

"Thomas Horton," said one man.

Tiny David looked up from the paper

"Hello, there. All I seem to be doin tonight is booking rides for you."

The truck pulled away.

SOMETIME later, when the last truck was waiting to complete its load, a young man strolled into the firehouse.

"All right. In you go." Tiny David jerked a thumb at the truck. "What's your name?"

A snicker went up from the men gathered around. The young man made no move toward the truck, and he ignored the question.

Tiny David's eyes narrowed.

"Is he deaf and dumb?" he asked

There was no reply.

Mr. Crosby, his thumbs hooked in his gun-belt, contributed an observation:

"He looks to me like the local hotshot."

"Has anybody seen Tom Horton?" the young man demanded.

"He left two trucks ahead of the one you are going out on," Tiny David declared. "Why?"

"I fired him yesterday. Now my timber is on fire."

"So what?" demanded Tiny David.

The young man shrugged.

"While you are puzzling it out," Tiny David directed, "hop in the truck. What did you say the name was?"

The young man drew himself erect.

"I am John Vanuel, president of the Mountain Lumber Company."

"That's just dandy," declared Tiny David. His big hands shot out and

"Come out of there!" Tiny David called. "State Police!"

deposited the man in the truck. "Get rolling," he ordered the driver.

"I'll have your job for this!" Vanuel cried. "I'll call Captain Field! I'll—"

"And give my regards to the folks," said Tiny David.

They stood watching the truck pull away.

"Things don't look so hot for Horton," Crosby observed.

"No," Tiny David admitted, "they don't. He'll have to be a bit more definite about his yen for walking."

They worked on, rounding up what men they could. It was daylight when Tiny David was summoned to the telephone. His face was grave when he returned to Crosby.

"That was Jakes, the ranger. He got through to the top, and found Howard, the observer. He had been shot through the head."

"Dead?"

"Yeah. And Jakes says the fire was a touch-off. Broke out at once in too many places to be anything else."

"Isn't that nice?" said Mr. Crosby. "What do we do next?"

"We wait here. Jakes is sending the body down. He was afraid to leave it, because the fire was going that way. He took a look around, but he couldn't find any revolver."

Mr. Crosby lighted a cigarette.

"All we have on our hands," he declared, "is a little dish of murder, with a slight dash of arson."

"And a first-class forest fire," added Mr. David.

"Not to mention a suspect," Mr. Crosby contributed. "And a motive. What do you say to finding out where Horton lives, and checking up on whether he owns a revolver?"

"Good idea. Hop to it."

"What will you be doing?" demanded Mr. Crosby.

"I," said Mr. David, "will be thinking."

"I'll wake you up when I get back," Mr. Crosby promised.

MR. DAVID, however, postponed his nap in favor of taking a stand before the firehouse, where he engaged in animated conversation with the various residents of the street, mostly feminine, who began to make their appearance as the daylight hours advanced. Appetizing odors that denoted breakfast were coming from several houses when a girl, obviously nervous, left one of the houses and approached the firehouse.

Tiny David eyed her with respectful approval, and she paused.

"Is it a bad fire?" she asked.

"Any forest fire is bad when the woods are this dry," he told her. "But

the Conservation people got a good start."

"Did—did you hear what caused it?"

"Yes."

"What was it?"

"Somebody started it purposely."

The girl caught her breath.

"Do you know who did it? You see, I—I work for the Mountain Lumber Company."

Tiny David registered mild interest.

"Happen to know a chap named Thomas Horton?"

"Yes, of course."

"Why did he get fired?"

A flush crossed the girl's face.

"Mr. Vanuel doesn't—doesn't like him. There was nothing wrong about his work."

Tiny David shrugged.

"Do you think Tom did it?" she asked.

"It makes sense," Tiny David declared. "He got fired. Then he got even by setting fire to Vanuel's timber."

"No, *no*. He couldn't—"

"But he could," Tiny David persisted. "He was on the road, not far from the mountain trail, at just the right time. And he ducked when he saw us."

The color surged across the girl's face again.

"What time was that?"

"About quarter of one this morning."

"Did you talk with him?"

"Some. He rode back to town with us."

"Did he say where he had been?"

"No, he said that he was just walking, and I told him that he had a nice night for it."

She faced him with determination.

"I'll tell you where he had been: He was at my house. He stayed there until after twelve. If you met him near the trail to the mountain at a quarter of one, he couldn't possibly have been up the mountain."

TINY DAVID'S manner became more official as he produced a notebook.

"What is your name?"

"Ruth Williams."

"Who else saw Horton at your house?"

"Nobody. I am alone. Mother is visiting in the city."

Tiny David smiled in a superior way.

"But you have to believe me. Tom came to talk about getting fired. He wanted me to quit my job. He—he doesn't like Mr. Vanuel. He—"

"Why are you so sure about the time he left?"

"Because I mad him go. I looked at the clock, and it was ten after twelve. I told him that if any of the neighbors saw him leave, he'd have to marry me in order to make an honest woman out of me."

Tiny David grinned. It was a friendly grin.

"He didn't leave right after that, did he?"

"No-o," she admitted.

"Don't blame him," said Tiny David.

She ignored the remark.

"Do you believe me?"

"Yes," he told her.

"Then do you still believe Tom did it?"

"How would I know?" he parried. "By the way, are you busy at the office?"

"No," she said. "I am not telling any secrets, because everybody knows that the Mountain Lumber Company is about at the end of the road."

Tiny David pursed his lips.

"Then this fire won't help?"

"It certainly won't," she told him. "I am afraid it means the end."

"Maybe not," he said. "How about insurance?"

"Did you ever hear of a lumber company carrying insurance on standing timber? Even if you could get it, I don't know what Mr. Vanuel would have used for money to pay the premiums."

"That—" Tiny David began.

HE halted as Mr. Crosby appeared, carrying something in a handkerchief. Mr. Crosby was torn between the desire to announce a discovery, and interest in Mr. David's companion.

"What do you have?" Mr. David demanded.

Mr. Crosby unfolded the handkerchief, and displayed a revolver.

"Nice little .38. Been fired once. Recently."

The girl's jaw dropped.

"That's—"

"That's Horton's gun, isn't it?" Tiny David asked.

"Yes." She faced him defiantly. "He has a permit for it. What does that have to do with the fire?"

Mr. Crosby, who had been silent too long, hastened to explain:

"Couldn't have a successful fire with the observer on the job, so somebody killed him."

Ruth Williams stood looking at them, her hands holding the door of the firehouse for support.

"Where did you find it?" Tiny David asked.

"Behind a loose brick of the fireplace in Horton's living-room."

"Tom never kept it there," the girl cried. "The gun always was right out on the table. He kept a box of cartridges and the cleaning-rod in the drawer of the table. I often saw him get them when he went out to shoot at target."

"Look in the table drawer?" Tiny David asked.

"No," Crosby admitted. "I saw the loose brick right away, and found what I was looking for."

"Go back and take a look at the drawer," Tiny David ordered.

Mr. Crosby hesitated.

"Today," Tiny David added.

WHEN they were alone, Tiny David turned to the girl.

"Did Horton say where he was going when he left your house?"

"Yes." She faced him frankly. "He said he was going to walk until he was so tired that he'd be able to sleep."

A crooked grin crossed Tiny David's broad face.

"Don't you believe me?" she demanded.

"I do," he said. "But I doubt if anybody else will." He saw her face cloud. "Don't you worry. Why don't you go to the office just as if nothing had happened?"

"That's good advice," she admitted. "As long as you believe me, I feel everything will be all right."

After the girl departed, Tiny David devoted the time to thinking, until the return of Mr. Crosby, who carried a box of cartridges, a cleaning-rod for a revolver, and five used targets. Mr. David centered his attention on the targets.

"The boy is good," was his verdict.

"That," declared Mr. Crosby, "won't help him."

"You never can tell," was Mr. David's observation. "And while we are waiting to find out, let's eat. I am four meals behind."

They remedied that. When they came out of the hotel, they met Ranger Jakes, black of face and smelling of woodsmoke.

"How is it going?" asked Tiny David.

"Not so bad. The wind changed, and it is helping us. We have brought in lads from three C.C.C. camps. Won't need any more volunteers. I brought back most of those you sent me."

"That's Horton's gun, isn't it?" Tiny David asked.

He lowered his voice.

"Took Howard's body over to the funeral parlors. Doc Cranford is doing an autopsy. Vanuel was shooting his mouth a bit up on the mountain. I am all for you getting the guy who did this—think I could pull the switch on him myself; but I can't figure Tom Horton for the job."

Tiny David shrugged. "We'll be seeing you around," he promised.

"And how!" said the ranger. "After the fire-fighting, comes the survey. I may get a little break after that, but then the tree-planting will start. Guess this will be my permanent address."

The ranger hurried away.

"Doc Cranford," said Mr. Crosby, "will be able to tell us the caliber of the bullet."

"Yes," Mr. David admitted. "And I am betting it is a .38. Suppose you take a run over there."

"Where will you be?"

"Hither and yon."

Mr. Crosby sighed.

"All right, Big-brains. Make it simple for me. What am I supposed to do?"

"If it is a .38," Tiny David ordered, "pick up Horton. We want him where we can get our hands on him. If Doc Cranford recovers the mortal bullet, get in touch with our alleged experts. We will get them to fire some test shots from Horton's gun, and compare them with the mortal bullet. Not that we will get anything we don't know now, but it will look well on the report. Give the whole thing a scientific aspect, or how would

"We are the only ones who know this story, Vanuel." He pushed the revolver over closer.

you like to master chemistry in three easy lessons? Meanwhile, give me the gun."

"What do you want with it?" Mr. Crosby demanded.

"I want to use the sight to pick my teeth."

"Don't scratch your head with it," warned Mr. Crosby, whose patience was reaching an end; "you'll ruin the gun."

Tiny David grinned.

"I am not trying to act mysterious, Jim. I am guessing. If the guess goes sour, I don't want you to have any part of it."

Mr. Crosby, mollified, departed for the undertaker's establishment.

IT was some time later when Tiny David entered the offices of the Mountain Lumber Company. Ruth Williams looked up from a typewriter.

"Hello. Any luck?"

Tiny David shook his head.

"Not yet. Is Vanuel here?"

"No. He came here when he came back from the mountain. Then he went home." She went to the door to point out the house. . . .

Vanuel answered Tiny David's knock and led the way to a living-room, which served as an office.

"Guess you were right," the trooper admitted, when they were seated. "We found a gun in Horton's house. Won't be hard to match up the bullets." He drew the revolver from his pocket, and placed it on the desk. "You know, we came across Horton on the road near the mountain when we came to town this morning."

Vanuel nodded with satisfaction. Then a look of regret passed over his face.

"It seems hard to believe," he declared. "I can understand Horton disliking me, and wanting to do me harm by firing my timber. But it still seems hard to believe he hated me so much he would kill poor Howard in his desire to harm me."

Tiny David shifted his form in the large rustic chair.

"It doesn't strike me that way," he declared. "Murder is easy to explain. There usually are a score of possible motives. But what I can't understand is why any guy who was sore at you would set fire to your timber."

Vanuel snorted. "That's obvious, isn't it?"

"Not if the guy knew the spot you were on, and knew the laws of this State," Tiny David asserted.

"What do you mean?"

Tiny David leaned over the desk, pushing the gun closer to Vanuel's hands.

"You are hard up," he told the lumberman. "Damned hard up. You have run this business into the ground. Your only hope was to sell."

Vanuel laughed harshly.

"So what! Is charcoal easier to sell than timber?"

"In a way, it is," Tiny David told him. "Right now, lumber companies aren't buying timber-land. That leaves only one purchaser, the State of New York."

The trooper paused for a moment, then hurried on:

"The State, according to law, can't buy standing timber. But the Conservation Department has a fund to buy burned-over land in the Adirondack Park for reforestation purposes. It won't be the heavy money you would get for timber, but it will be better than hay. In fact, in your present condition, it will be a life-saver. You are planning to take it. Jakes told me he was going to make a survey, and that after that, he would have tree-planting to do."

"All right," Vanuel said. "Horton tried to do me a dirty trick, but it turned out to be a favor. What about it?"

"It upsets the applecart," Tiny David declared.

"What—what do you mean?"

Tiny David grinned.

"This will sound goofy. It is so goofy that I haven't told it to anybody else. You and I are the only persons who are going to hear this story. But you are going to listen to it, Vanuel:

"We came across Horton walking on the road near the mountain trail early this morning. I questioned him, and he admitted you had fired him. The whole thing looked a bit queer.

"A little later fire broke out in your timber. That looked bad for Horton. But he was among the first to show up when the siren blew the forest-fire signal. I'll admit that might be cleverness on his part.

"You owned the timber, but you were among the last to show. Even before you knew how much of a fire it was, you made a point of getting in a few digs at Horton.

"Then, when we heard Howard had been murdered, my pal searched Horton's house. The first thing that caught his eye was a loose brick in the fireplace. Behind that brick was a gun. A guilty man hiding a gun doesn't do a clumsy job like that. Therefore the gun was put there to be found."

Vanuel started to rise.

"Sit down, Vanuel. After all, this is just a goofy story, and we are the only ones who know it."

"I'll say it is goofy—"

"Shut up! The gun is a .38, and one cartridge in it has been fired. I am sure tests will show it was the gun used to kill Howard. But get this, Vanuel: Horton is a marksman. He knows and appreciates a good gun. Even under ordinary circumstances, he wouldn't put a gun away without cleaning it. This gun hasn't been cleaned. Somebody wanted us to know it had been fired recently."

He pushed the revolver away from him, and over closer to Vanuel.

"You don't like Horton. Horton doesn't like you. I happened to meet Ruth Williams. That supplied the explanation. Her anxiety about Horton, and her explanation of why he was out on the road, showed me who she likes. It isn't you."

TINY DAVID settled back in his chair. His upraised hand halted Vanuel's attempt to speak.

"Now we come to the first goofy theory I worked out. You fired Horton. Miss Williams still stuck to him. You worked out a plan to eliminate Horton. But— Shut up, Vanuel, or I'll knock you quiet!

"But as I was saying, that theory was too goofy. You need money desperately. Even for revenge, you couldn't afford to burn up the only asset you have. But Jakes said something that made me realize the land was more valuable to you after the fire. Then I got my second goofy theory. If you want to stay healthy, you keep quiet while I tell you about it:

"You knew where Horton kept his gun, and you stole it. You killed Howard, because you wanted the fire to gain headway. When the alarm sounded, you waited for Horton to leave his home. You planted the gun for us to find. Then you came to the firehouse, and made an indirect accusation against Horton."

VANUEL'S face was white. He gazed at the trooper through narrowed eyes.

"Prove it!" he challenged.

Tiny David grinned.

"That's the hell of it," he admitted. "So far, it is just a goofy theory. It is so goofy I didn't even dare tell anybody else about it. You and I are the only ones who know it. Of course, sooner or later, we will have to let them in on it."

He paused, and his glance rested upon the revolver lying beside Vanuel's hand. Then he relaxed, leaning back in his chair.

Vanuel grasped the revolver. His face was contorted with hate. His finger moved. There was the click of metal upon metal.

Tiny David grinned.

"Try it again, Vanuel."

Again came the hollow click.

Tiny David stood up.

"That was what I wanted, Vanuel. That makes the goofy theory hold water. . . . You fool, I knew you never would confess. I baited you by telling you only you and I knew this. I put the revolver there for you, but I took good care to unload the shells."

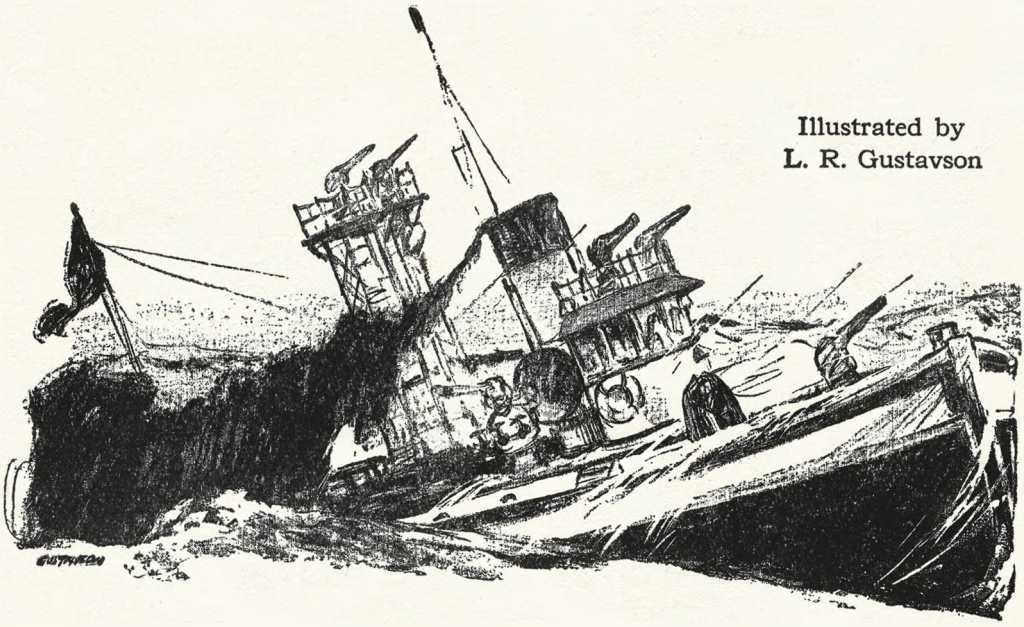
Vanuel rushed forward. Tiny David grappled with him, and threw him into a chair. Handcuffs clicked on his wrists.

Tiny David stepped away from the fallen man, and picked up the telephone. When the operator answered, he said:

"Get me the Mountain Lumber Company, Miss Loy."

He sat on the desk, waiting. This was good. The best part of police work. Better than praise from superiors, promotion, or any of that hooey. You got a real kick out of making innocent people happy. He grinned as he heard Ruth Williams say: "Hello." . . . . Why, this was almost like playing God!

Another story by Robert Mill will appear in an early issue.



Illustrated by
L. R. Gustavson

They eat smoke and drink flame and handle an excursion-boat fire at sea—all in fireboat style.

KANE sat in the boathouse galley that morning, eying the men around over his pipe and listening to their profane grousing. The crew of the fireboat *Typhoon* were mugging up while awaiting the presentation of their new captain, and there was trouble in the air. They were, undeniably, a bad lot.

Kane was the only man aboard who was here by reason of merits, not of demerits. Uptown he was Cap'n Kane; he signed himself *Ed. Kane, Master,* or *Edward Kane, Lieutenant, U.S.N.R.*, according with whom he did business. But here at his job aboard the fireboat, he was Pilot Ed Kane, pilots being picked only from the ranks of ship's masters.

As Kane could see with half an eye, Bill Magill was going to be a storm-center when the new fireboat captain showed up. Senior Pipeman Magill was tall, angular, ungainly, and the homeliest man in the department; also the ablest trouble-maker, between fires.

"Cap'n Whalen, the boy wonder!" he sneered. "Eight years from clodhopping to skipper in a metropolitan fire-department! Eight years. Now he's cap'n of the *Typhoon* and all the other rigs at this here Back Channel station. Aint it lovely!"

"It's great news, if you ask me," said Tom Connell, chief of the engine-room gang. "You swabs have been needing some one with a prod."

Kane chuckled. "Yeah?" he cut in, cocking an eye at the chief engineer's red corncob nose. "He'll have his work cut out to wean our prize bottle-baby!"

Connell glared, but with a twinkle in his eye. He and Kane knew how to give and take and still remain fast friends.

"Is that so?" he retorted. "Next time a certain pilot raids my locker, I'll wean him with a spanner! Deck-swabs better stay out of my engine-room."

The crew, all misfits culled from uptown truck and engine companies, took sides, some for Magill, some for Connell and his Irish whisky. Actual battle impended, as it did all too frequently—until three sharp, sudden rings came on the alarm extension.

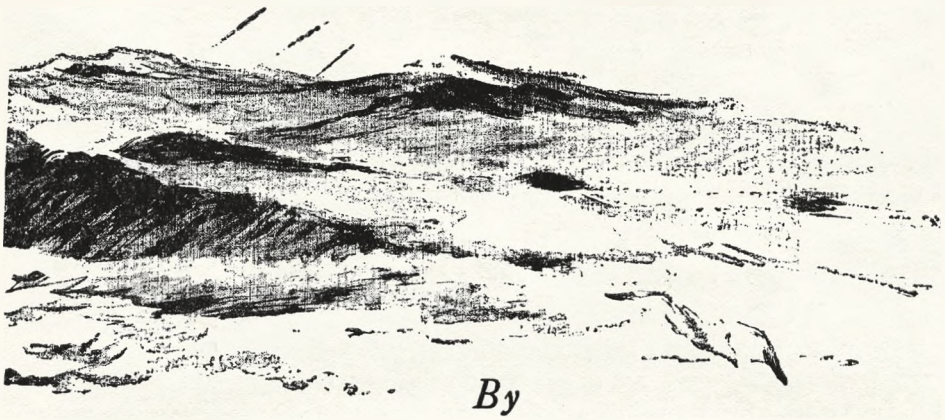
The fifteen staring, glowering, sulky men lined up on the apparatus floor. Old Battalion Chief Coyne introduced the new captain in his cracked voice.

"Boys, this is Cap'n Bob Whalen, your new commanding officer. I want you to get in and hit the bell for him same as you always do. And I don't want any reports from him about any of you. The first man he turns in to me, goes straight to the main office."

That was Joe Coyne's stock warning, and no one heeded it. The Chief stalked out, got stiffly into his red coupé, and was whisked away, with Whalen seeing him off. The crew waited for the coming fireworks. They had already taken Whalen's measure, and he had taken theirs at a glance; and both of them were very largely correct.

Kane, who could make allowances for both sides, waited uneasily for Whalen's

Fireboat Style



By

Captain Michael Gallister

return. By virtue of his position and character, he was safely out of the war; but he resolved to risk trouble by trying to make Whalen see some light of reason.

Engine Sixteen, the official designation of this fireboat and its hose-tender, foamite and combination rig, was located in an abandoned fish-cannery in the oily deadwater at the head of the Channel, where the smelly shrimpers and Sound oyster-pungeys berthed. Men were hard to handle at Engine Sixteen; it was a post of tough citizens.

Captain Whalen strode briskly in. With a nod to Pilot Kane, who was in the crew but not of it, he faced his hard-bitten outfit. He was no angel himself. A trifle above middle height, massive-jawed, black of eye and brow, he looked assured and arrogant in his neat uniform. He fingered a notebook, scanned the unhandsome faces, and spoke in quietly imperative tones.

"Men, the *Typhoon* faces a new deal. It may be painful. I'm familiar with the service records and the personal peculiarities of every one of you. I know why you're here. But I know my duty and responsibility. In future, we turn to at eight sharp. Come on duty shaved and breakfasted. Be in dungarees at eight o'clock line-up; from line-up, go directly aboard the boat.

"No mugging-up in the galley after eight; and no Kaffee Klatches at ten, as you've been accustomed in the past. Meals at regular hours; no man will absent himself from the boat or station except by my permission. I call your attention to Headquarters Bulletin No. 47, December second, 1937, about drinking on duty. If a man shows up drunk for muster, or even with the smell of liquor on his breath, he goes at once to the Chief at local headquarters."

Whalen drove a significant glance at Marine Engineer Connell. Some one down the file snickered. Whalen's sharp eyes went straight to the culprit.

"No more of that. You, third from the end—what's your name?"

"Magill," sneered the lanky trouble-maker. "George Magill,—Bill usually,—senior pipeman, fire-tug *Typhoon,* Berth Eight."

"Senior pipeman no longer." Whalen's voice was razor-edged. "Senior janitor in quarters till you learn to say 'sir' when replying to a superior officer."

Magill's gray eyes blazed; the others stood aghast. A new deal with teeth in it! Magill had nineteen years on the job; for ten years he had been acting captain when the regular skipper took his days off. Longer than Whalen had been in the department!

Magill had superior knowledge of the hazardous waterfront, an uncanny ability for sizing up a fire and going into action without lost motion, and reckless courage; but he was an incurable ribber, and bitterly quarrelsome.

He remained ominously silent; a glance at the sullen faces of the others, and Whalen dismissed them curtly. Slowly the crew broke ranks and shuffled

"I warn you," burst out Magill, "that you're riding to the hardest fall anyone ever got!"

away. Magill, Pilot Kane and Chief Connell were called to the Captain's office; and there Whalen eyed them, before addressing Magill crisply.

"I regret that you chose to be antagonistic. For your behavior in ranks you get two months as houseman. I warn you that your station must be in first-class shape for ten-o'clock inspection each morning."

"And I warn you," burst out Magill, "that you're riding to the hardest fall anyone ever got!"

"As I remember my notes on the crew," Whalen said without emotion, "you have fifty demerits. Another thirty will automatically let you out. If you utter one insubordinate word in the future, out you go. That's all."

Magill shambled out. Kane started to speak, but checked himself. He was a rough-hewn man, harsh of feature and voice, with twenty years in the coastwise lumber trade.

Whalen turned to the Chief.

"Your record as an efficient engineer is A-1, but your reputation as a secret drinker while on duty, is bad. The attitude of my predecessor toward your faults was disgraceful. I'll report you the first time I find you under the influence of liquor."

Under this broadside, Connell scratched the end of his red corncob nose.

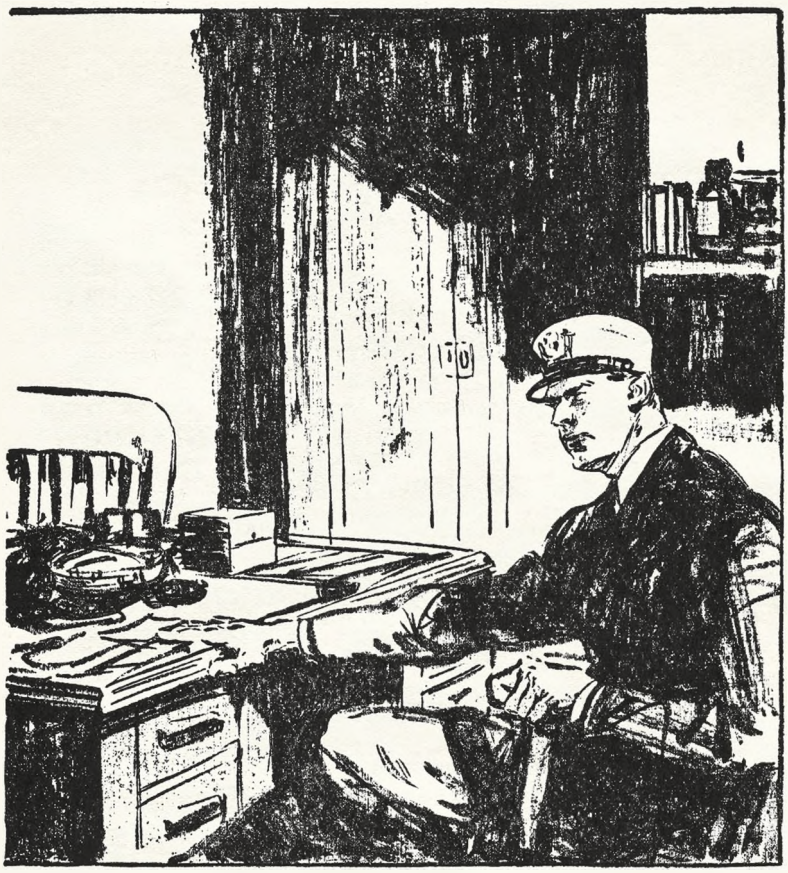
"And I warn you, Cap'n," he said in his whisky-husky voice, "that you've bit off more'n you can chew. When you get in a bad jam, you'll learn what it means to have the crew ag'in' you."

"Meaning they'll lay down on me and cause me to lose a fire?" barked Whalen. "If I catch any man shirking, I'll file charges of cowardice and see him on the street minus his badge!"

"You'll likely go with him, sir." Connell grimaced. "I've been thirty years right on this old boat. I've seen cap'ns and crews come and go. Them that go ahead o' time, go because they don't realize one fact: Waterfront fire-fighting is like nothing else on earth. There's a lot to learn that drill-towers or engine-work uptown won't teach a man."

"It's no secret that this crew are the most shiftless gang who ever slipped by an examiner," said Whalen with contempt. "Not one of them got higher than C rating when I had them as drill-master. They'd not last a single shift in any uptown company."

"Throttle down, Cap'n," advised Connell, still rubbing his battered nose. "If you're bound to give 'em the works, taper it off with easy doses."



"If you utter one insubordinate word in the future, out you go. That's all."

"I'll be the judge as to that," said Whalen. "I have a free hand; the Big Chief uptown will back me up."

"Yeah; I knew the Big Chief when he was a rookie," observed Connell. "He's had some fine fires uptown, but down here among the canneries and fishboats and sulphur plants and fish-net storehouses—"

"Old stuff." Whalen rose abruptly. "A fire's a fire."

"But there's different kinds o' smoke," said Connell shrewdly. "We can eat as much smoke as any fancy uptown truck- or engine-man, but between fires we take it easy. When we work, we take extra risks. It's no joke, fighting ship fires.

"The worst fires, Cap'n, are the ones in ships, outside the breakwater. It gets rough out in the Sound; and when a ship's engine-room has been gutted by fire, the ship can't maneuver to help the fireboats."

Whalen was interested, but too stubborn to admit it. He did not intend to invite this notorious old souse to sit down and offer advice.

"We don't get called to fight fires outside the harbor," he said. "We have two new boats, faster and better equipped—" He broke off, at Connell's grin. "Well? What's the joke?"

"Nothing much, sir. Nothing except them new boats are gas-boats—the devil's own invention. All right when they run, but give me a good triple-expansion engine with Scotch boilers, for a long haul and hard work!"

"And a bottle of Scotch to keep yourself oiled?" snapped Whalen.

"No sir! A bottle o' prime Irish."

"That'll do for today," Whalen broke in. "Remember what I said at line-up! Leave liquor alone while on duty."

"Aye, sir. And remember we'll have ship fires like we've always had—and when the new gas-boats are laid up, most likely!"

Connell departed, taking his thirty-year-old distillery aura with him. Whalen turned to Kane, with a nod.

"Glad to have you with me at least, Kane."

"Thanks. I'm afraid you're off to a bad start," said Kane, regardless of the hard stare his words evoked.

Whalen bristled. "Sorry you've taken that attitude, Pilot Kane. When I want your advice, I'll ask for it. That's all."

TWO mornings later the old chief showed up for duty under the influence of his favorite tipple. One minute after line-up and muster, Whalen had

the battalion chief on the wire. Chief Coyne heard him with dismay.

"But, Whalen, we can't turn old Connell in! He's been thirty years on the job, with never a mark against his record. Never on the sick-list, even!"

"Right now, he's under the influence," Whalen pointed out crisply. "I warned him particularly. If he gets away with this, I'll never have any discipline. I'll make out the report now and send it over by the assistant chief, who's on his way here. It's my right, and I request you to send the report in to Headquarters through proper channels."

Coyne could only curse under his breath, and assent.

Two days later Connell came down to the fireboat and sorrowfully removed his gear. He shook hands with the scowling crew, the ominously silent pilot, even with Captain Whalen, and departed without a word. Thus began the new deal on the *Typhoon*.

MAGILL, erstwhile acting captain and senior pipeman, was next to feel discipline. A fish-net fire was carefully set by a fish-boat crew who had enjoyed a poor season and needed the insurance-money on their expensive nets. The *Typhoon* responded. Being first in, by all the rules of the business she was expected to cover exposures, then lead in to the fire. Magill, to whom this was an old story, expertly sized up the fire as the boat drew in alongside the wharf and the shed of fish-nets. Quite forgetting the new captain, in the heat of excitement, Magill gave his orders before Whalen could catch his breath.

He sent two men ashore with a two-and-a-half-inch hose to cover other small buildings near the burning shed. Four more firemen he sent ashore—two with another hose line, two with a twenty-foot extension ladder. The last pair placed their ladder, mounted to the shed roof and began to chop a hole for ventilation. Magill himself was on the business end of the hose with the first pair, leading the way with helmet reversed into the shed.

Another captain might have stood aside, kept his mouth shut, and watched. The fire would have been out in two minutes. But Whalen, feeling himself purposely ignored and humiliated, sharply recalled the men from the roof before they could chop the essential ventilating hole. He also pulled Magill and his two men out with their hose.

"What the hell's the big idea?" snarled Magill, his face streaming sweat and blackened by smoke. "Going to let the works burn?"

"I'm in charge here," Whalen said sharply. "Take that nozzle, go to the east side and break in a window or door. Take your line in from there as you should have done. I'll hit it from this side." He turned to the other men. "Lead in with the CO2 nozzles, one man to the nozzle!"

At his shout, a man on the CO2 platform amidships cracked the first three of the carbon-dioxide bottles in the series. Men unreeled the copper hose, now flooded with the gas, and four returned to the smoke-filled shed.

"You priceless sap!" yelled Magill. "It takes water to put out net fires, water and overhauling!"

Whalen swung around. "Pick up that nozzle and get around to the east side!"

"Pick it up yourself and go to hell!" rasped Magill.

The Captain went white.

"You refuse to obey a lawful order at a fire?"

Magill glared at him. "I'll work for no numskull. You're no fireman. Any rookie would know this is a job for lots of water and overhauling. You send men in there to be overcome by their own CO2 gas as well as smoke. And you've lost the fire; it's the first three minutes that count."

Magill was right. The storeroom was gutted, and ten thousand dollars in nets destroyed. Battalion Chief Coyne came storming up and blared at Whalen to haul out the CO2 lines and hit the fire with water. Magill, standing idly by, grinned sardonically; but his grin faded when Whalen reported him for insubordination and refusal to obey orders. The Chief suspended him on the spot, and the suspension was later verified at Headquarters; Magill, awaiting trial, joined Chief Engineer Connell on the bench.

THE rest of the crew, anticipating that their turn would come, gave the new captain plenty to worry about.

They never shirked; instead, they moved faster and apparently worked harder than ever before; but when they reached a fire, everything they attempted was bungled. Ladders went up swiftly, but something always happened when men started to take up the lines. A twenty-foot extension would collapse; hose would fall from firemen's hands;

axes and other equipment were lost; hose burst under excess pressure or became hopelessly entangled, was often burned.

In a word, when the *Typhoon* arrived at a fire and was first in, she created such confusion that the action of the other boats and the land companies was hampered, and valuable time was lost. This was sabotage; Whalen and the harbor chiefs knew it, but at fires accidents may happen to the best-drilled companies. Also, the crew of the *Typhoon* carefully had their accidents when Captain Whalen's attention was elsewhere.

The skipper was baffled; he was totally unable to pin anything on any one of his men. Here was a case where the advice and regulations in the Rule Book were worthless. He retaliated by putting on pressure and living up to the rules by letter. The men responded as men will. They did their work, but only when he was watching, and then poorly. He worked them from eight to six. Chores were usually caught up by noon in the department, but he kept them at tasks when the other crews were at cards or handball.

Conditions grew worse. Whalen became morose and kept to his office. He was jittery; when an alarm came rapping in, he would jump a foot. Behind his back the crew jeered silently. No one spoke to him unless addressed; they were giving him the silent cure. When he came upon groups talking or smoking, they dispersed.

Too late, Whalen changed his tactics. The men were fighting among themselves now; old feuds were rekindled, hatreds burst into flame. None the less, when he became affable or took sides, they dropped everything and gave him the cold shoulder. One dark night they let him pump a burning fish-boat full of salt water and sink her, when he could have saved her with a few pounds of carbon-dioxide dry extinguisher.

Events in all fire departments have the habit of shaping themselves up swiftly and unexpectedly, long periods of idleness varying with prolonged and sustained effort almost superhuman. Whalen could not smell the future as Pilot Kane did. Kane felt sorry for the man, who meant well. He saw that Whalen was bewildered, dared not ask for a transfer, could not ask that any of his crew be transferred. Kane said nothing; but inwardly felt that a showdown was coming. A sense of desperation grew upon him.

"Sally is on the old hooker," Foster said, "in charge of a lot of orphans."

He learned that old Connell was laid up, too old to get a job. Magill got one, but promptly lost it for fighting. They never came near the boat, but the news did. Kane boiled—it was all so useless!

AT precisely two o'clock one afternoon the fire-phone rang. Captain Whalen, working over time reports, scooped up the phone with no premonition that fate had struck.

"Fireboat *Typhoon,* Cap'n Whalen—yes sir! What's that?"

For twenty seconds Whalen frantically jotted down instructions from the battalion chief; then he kicked his chair back and punched the relay button overhead, sending the long, shrill alarm through the old building. Grabbing hat and turn-out clothes, in another twenty seconds he was joining the crew on the fireboat.

Everything happened now, not in minutes, but in split seconds.

While boiler furnaces roared under forced draft to build up a capacity head of steam, Pilot Kane, in the wheelhouse, scanned a large-scale chart of the Sound. He laid dividers on the chart, tapped the barometer above the chart table, and swore under his breath. A falling glass, westerly winds hauling to the north, storm-warnings flying from the breakwater pilot station—and the ancient excursion steamer *Saxby City* afire, fourteen miles to the north!

Aboard the steamer were two hundred excursionists returning from the Island after the last picnic of the season. Kane knew the picture. Fourteen miles the *Typhoon* must fight her way through heavy seas against a growing gale. And aboard her were fifteen malcontents, unable properly to extinguish a fire on a forty-foot yacht in a quiet harbor. Bitter need now of old Connell at the engines!

For an instant Kane felt fearful tension; he had the mad, blind impulse to kick Whalen overboard and do what must be done. Two hundred lives at stake—good God! What mattered his own record, pension or anything else, in such a gamble? Then he suppressed a groan as he saw Assistant Chief Roy Bright, of the Marine Division, come stamping aboard the boat. Bright had been driving close by when his car radio picked up the alarm. He was another landsman, and this was sea business. Bright, too, was the wrong kind. Kane saw Captain Whalen meet Bright, and bring the latter to the wheelhouse with him. In barged the first mate, gangling Jim Foster, like Kane an ex-coaster in the lumber trade. He came close to Kane and spoke under his breath.

"Hey, Ed! Got a grapevine from Bill Magill. Some one passed him the word about the *Saxby.* His niece Sally is on the old hooker, in charge of a lot of orphans. Bill and old Connell will be at the end of Pier Six about the time we pass."

Kane nodded. With this, the die was cast; he knew it, accepted it.

"Get going!" roared Captain Whalen. "The *Saxby City,* afire off the Bay!"

"Take it easy," advised Kane calmly. "Nothing to be alarmed about." He sounded a long blast on his whistle, put the engine telegraph on half-speed ahead, and the *Typhoon* shot out from her slip.

"Hell of it is, that we have to send this old tub on such a run!" said Chief Bright disgustedly. "Two new boats able to make eighteen knots; and that damned pilot on the *Deluge* would have to pick up a wire hawser in his propellers, while the *Monsoon* would naturally be in drydock. *Arrgh!"*

PILOT KANE smiled grimly, his eyes intent on the Channel entrance ahead. He swung the annunciators to full speed and gave an extra jingle. The *Typhoon* trembled and surged as the engineer who had replaced Connell fed steam to the ancient engines.

Both new boats laid up! Captain Whalen thought of old Connell's prediction, but did not mention it; to practical, seasoned firemen, the expected rarely occurs, the unexpected is always around the corner.

The fireboat, her siren warning all small craft to keep clear of her wash, plowed down-channel. Abruptly, Kane swung the annunciators to *Stop;* the mate twisted his wheel to port. *Full Astern! Stop*—again. Four bells and a jingle ahead, and they resumed their course.

It all happened so swiftly, was done so deftly, without a word between pilot and mate, that the assistant chief and the Captain were taken completely by surprise. They did not know why the abrupt stop had been made, until suspended fireman Magill and suspended engineer Connell came to the wheelhouse. Magill ignored the officer and spoke to the pilot, briskly.

"Engineer Connell and Fireman Magill reporting to the master for duty!"

Kane glanced over his shoulder. "Aye," he said, as though it were all regular. "Find a B Division man's gear in the nozzle-room, and get ready for tough going. You know all about the construction of the *Saxby City*. Get the gang together and dope out what you'll do if the fire's for'ard, amidships, aft or in the engine-room. Connell! Take your old place below. Tell Squires I sent you, and get two more knots out of those engines."

"Aye, Skipper!"

THE two men grinned, and climbed down the ladder as though unaware of the officers standing speechless. Chief Bright suddenly came to life with a bellow.

"You can't pick up suspended men and put 'em to work! Kane, have you gone crazy? Turn in at Pier 22 by the pilot station and land those two men. Quick!"

Kane turned a beaming face to them.

"This is the greatest piece of luck that ever was! With those two fellows aboard, now we have an even chance—"

"Do you hear me?" roared Chief Bright. "Land those two men at Pier 22!"

Kane, with a grin, kissed berth and record and pension good-by.

"Gentlemen," he said politely, "step inside my room; find seats and take it easy. I'm master here, subject to U. S. Department of Commerce rules. You may wear a dozen badges, but you've nothing to say aboard this boat."

"Another insubordinate, eh?" burst out Whalen. "I've been expecting this; you've just been waiting for the moment to start something. This will finish you, Kane!"

"Maybe not," Kane rejoined. "Suppose you read Section 27 of your ever-ready Rule Book. Captains usually skip that section. It's about fireboats and pilots."

"Stop this nonsense!" erupted Chief Bright, purple in the face. "Kane, will you obey my orders?"

"I will not; it'd be a criminal waste of time, sir." Kane calmly faced forward. "Jim, port a little! Cut inside that day-mark and head straight for Number Three bell-buoy—there! Steady on."

"By heavens, I'll file charges! I'm in command here!" stormed the assistant chief. "You're a subordinate, subject to my orders, Kane. I'll have you suspended for this!"

Kane flung him a grin. "Look in my room, sir. There's a red book on the shelf called 'Law of the Sea;' it'll instruct you. Once we cast off moorings, I'm master of this ship, with absolute authority. I'm out to save the people aboard the *Saxby City*, and I don't give a damn what you do tomorrow; but if I have any interference from you today, I'll chuck you over the rail—so chew on that. You'll find it more comfortable in my room, by the way. We're going to have it rough."

The Assistant Chief and the Captain turned into the bunk-room abaft the wheelhouse. Kane exchanged a grin with Jim Foster, and then looked outside the breakwater, where mountainous seas were building up. Already the fireboat was lifting and rolling to the swell, and taking spray over her blunt bows.

Well, it was done; and Kane felt better about it. For good or ill, he had the bit in his teeth now. It had been forced on him. Department discipline had gone to blazes, and his future with it—but he was glad.

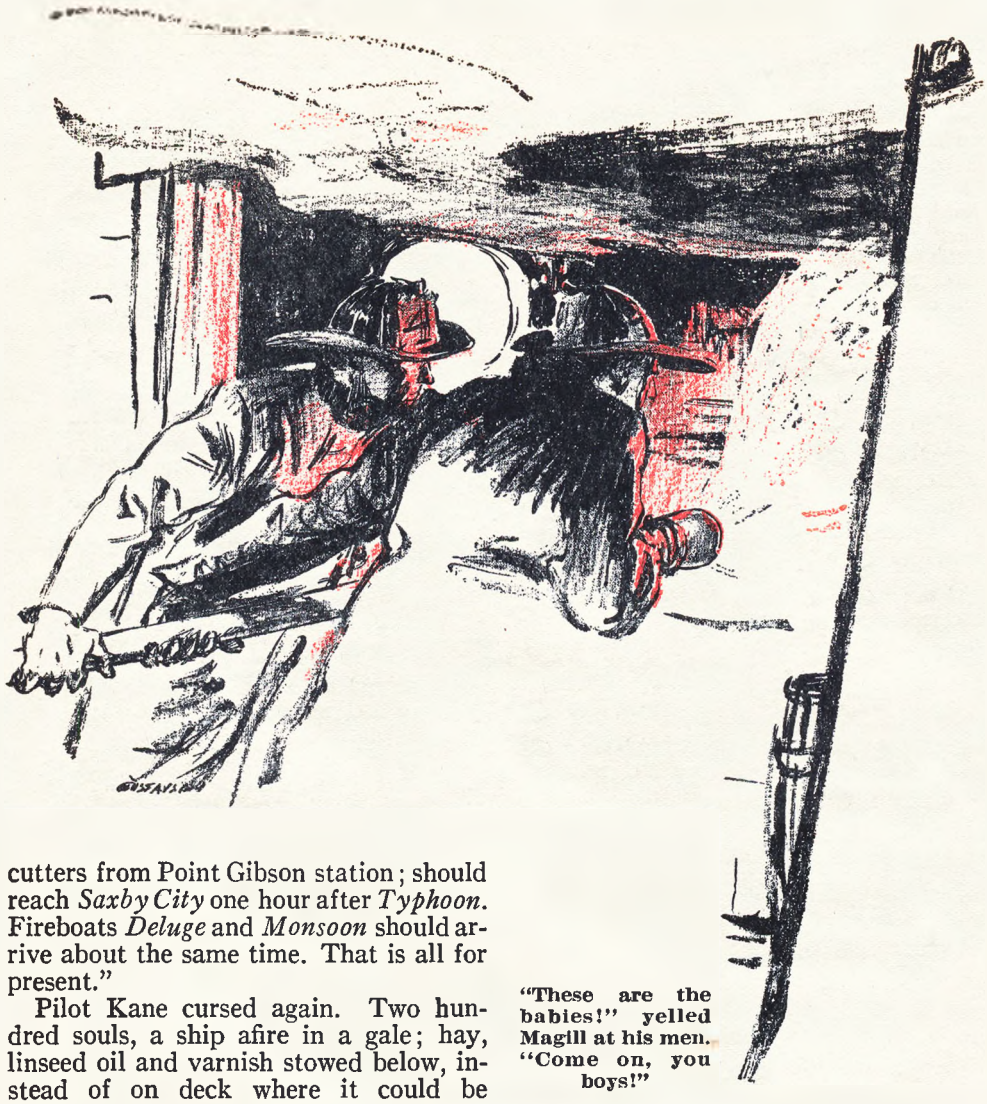
ONCE outside, the boat made heavy work of it. Kane, beside the annunciators, watched the dripping bows rising and plunging again. Black smoke poured from the funnel, to be snatched to shreds by the whipping wind. A blast of sleet rattled viciously against the windows.

Kane cursed the operators of the *Saxby City*, who should have laid up the old steamer for the winter long ago. Some of the City Fathers had persuaded them to give an excursion to orphans and wives; to make the trip pay, the operators had loaded the old ship with cargo, against all regulations. As though answering his thoughts, the ship-to-shore radio, silent since the departure, burst into action.

"Calling fireboat *Typhoon*, fireboat *Typhoon!* Radio operator on *Saxby City* has his dynamo running again. Fire in fore part, in the mail room, under temporary control. Two hundred bales of hay from Port Lambert; drums of varnish and raw linseed oil from West Hanlon refinery. All forward, forehold and lower passenger-deck, temporarily housed in. One hundred eighty-two passengers, women and children, quiet and orderly; crew under good discipline—"

Followed a repeat, a break, and more information.

"Navy sending two destroyers from north Nimrod Sound, two Coast Guard



"These are the babies!" yelled Magill at his men. "Come on, you boys!"

cutters from Point Gibson station; should reach *Saxby City* one hour after *Typhoon*. Fireboats *Deluge* and *Monsoon* should arrive about the same time. That is all for present."

Pilot Kane cursed again. Two hundred souls, a ship afire in a gale; hay, linseed oil and varnish stowed below, instead of on deck where it could be jettisoned! Some one would lose his ticket, but the owners as usual would go scot-free.

Captain Whalen and Bright, hearing the radio, had returned to listen. Their features were the color of whey, and they were swallowing hard. Foster, the mate, had lighted a rank pipe and was puffing furiously. The two officers sniffed the acrid smoke, and gagged; abruptly they jerked open the wheelhouse door, and unmindful of the cold and drenching spray, staggered out on deck. Foster and Kane exchanged a look and a grin.

"Better take a glance aft," said Kane. With a nod, Foster departed, and after a moment was back, shivering.

"All O. K. Magill brought a quart of rum aboard; just enough for a hearty nip all around. Tom Connell's happy as a clam at high water, and drunk. He's got the safety valve screwed down two-blocks and his mills turning to capacity. Them babies are sure singing a lullaby for the old boy. Superior officers are jammed between the chemical bottles over the engine-room cuddy, looking into the bottoms of two fire-buckets and praying. I told Magill to cover 'em with salvage tarps when they were through pumping out their lunch."

THE *Typhoon* pounded down the gale-lashed sound. She was taking the seas like a duck, even though spray was going over her funnel. The wind increased each moment; sleet and snow beat against the windows, and Kane held her steadily to her course. Darkness, coming early with the storm, was upon her already.

Down below, old Tom Connell fed live steam to his clanking, whirring pets, making his rounds with grease-swab and long-necked oiler. Squires tended the

furnaces and kept the burners free of carbon. Above all the bedlam of noise, the husky voice of Connell could be heard, roaring out a familiar chantey:

Eight bells and all's well,
Cap'n and Chief can go to hell!

The fireboat charged past Gull Inlet and Kane verified her speed by a bearing on the light. The ten-knot fireboat was making a good thirteen; she would reach the burning ship in a trifle over an hour. Kane relaxed and called Foster to the wheel.

"Flashing red light on the port bow." Foster handed over his binoculars. "Must be Oyster Pond bell-buoy."

Kane focused the glasses. "It's Pond light," he said with a nod. "I raise Placid Bay beacon a point on the starboard bow. Put her on nor' by east, nothing to the east. I hope old Sandstrom got into Placid Bay. It'll make our work easier."

PLACID BAY was reached, but old Sandstrom had not got the *Saxby* inside. The rockets were going up now; they were close to their destination, and Kane swore feelingly with crisis at hand. Another rocket. Kane opened the port door and blew a blast on his pocket whistle. Presently Magill came lurching up the ladder.

"Work's cut out for us," said Kane tersely. "The *Saxby's* had to anchor outside, and we might as well be smack on the high seas."

Magill grunted and wiped salt spindrift from his eyes.

"Put us within jumping distance, and we'll get lines aboard her."

"I'll run up under her lee, if she has one. You give yourself plenty of scope on the lines so you won't part 'em." He broke off abruptly and lifted his glasses. "There! The air's cleared—there she is! Good God, look at her! It's broke out on 'em; probably reached the hay and linseed oil. Damn old Sandstrom for a careless fool! He should ha' refused that cargo in spite of orders—"

The *Typhoon* changed course a bit and plunged on.

Magill roused the firemen out of the nozzle-room; they began unreeling hoses, and preparing tips and nozzles and heaving-lines; then they held on to anything handy and stared at the spectacle ahead.

To any seaman, it was terrifying. The *Saxby City,* with her twin smoke-pipes and ridiculous paddle-wheels, lay just outside the Placid Bay whistle-buoy. Captain Sandstrom had put over a stern kedge, and the steamer lay stern to the thundering seas; good judgment there, for had he anchored with his bowers, the fire forward would have swept aft and consumed the ship. The steamer was now a flaming beacon, with the fire obviously beyond control.

"Must have carried away his wheel-ropes," muttered Kane, as he switched on the powerful carbon searchlight. "They couldn't stand the whipping of the rudders in a following sea. Too bad the mate didn't think to put on relieving tackles before they started home!"

Wreathed in flame and black smoke which the wind tore into long streamers, the old ship wallowed at the end of her kedge-cable; the glare brought into mad relief the yeasty crests of the seas pounding at her.

Suddenly new flames, fed by burning hay, began eating farther aft with visible speed, aft toward the crowded gingerbread upper decks. The fire-tug seemed pitifully small and weak in the downwind welter. Kane put the engine on *Slow Ahead,* thrust his head from the wheelhouse door, and emitted a roar at Bill Magill.

"Hey, Bill! I'm going to chance putting her in alongside, for'ard. I may crash, but it's the only thing to do."

"Go to it!" shouted Magill lustily.

Cupping horny hands, Kane sent a shout at the two firemen in the top of the reeling, swaying water-tower thirty feet above the after-deck.

"You guys give it the works the minute we get grapnels into her!"

The towermen waved assent and limbered up the elevating and training gear.

Foot by foot the *Typhoon* crept under the lee bows of the flaming ruin. Wan as two anemic ghosts, Assistant Chief Bright and Captain Whalen emerged into sight. Too weak to do more than hang on to the chemical-bottle rack, they watched the *Typhoon* and her hard-case crew go to work. Rolling, taking green water over her bows, the fireboat edged up beneath the bows of the steamer.

KANE, his hard features dripping spray, his slicker long since torn to shreds, jockeyed the telegraphs and barked orders to Foster, wrestling with the kicking wheel as the wind whistled through the open windows. The bows, with their ragged rope fender scooping and shouldering aside the seas, at last

touched the side of the steamer. As the fireboat lifted on a crest, a fireman on the slippery roof of the wheelhouse flung a grapnel with ten-foot chain leader attached. The iron gripped, held, and another man snubbed the hawser.

"All fast!" went up the yell, and the tower-men loosed their deluge.

THE uproaring flames, hit by two hundred and fifty pounds of pressure, subsided as by a miracle. The tower-men at the controls heroically kept the monitor's long brass pipe trained on the fire; with the mad plunging of the two craft, it was a task. One minute the stream would be beating down from an acute angle, next it would be shooting upward.

The fire was checked, but not beaten. It ravenously attacked the lower decks and began to eat its way aft beneath the main deck. A sudden roaring explosion rocked the steamer, and new flame flared up. The linseed oil had been reached.

"Skipper!" Magill was swaying from the brass hand-holds, two steps below the wheelhouse. "We gotta get aboard! Can you put us flush alongside?"

"I'll try anything you crazy galoots will!" Kane shouted.

"Then it's alongside." Magill let go and reeled forward. His voice rasped out like a fog-horn. "Hi, you lardos, stand by to board! Two men each on the fog-nozzles, and never mind the metros. Stand by to jump when we close. And watch yourselves, you club-foots!"

Kane put the telegraphs on *Stop,* ordered the helm from hard astarboard to 'midships, and the seething waters flattened the *Typhoon* flush alongside the burning ship. The double-bow-lines with their steel grapnels held; Kane, to offset the tremendous scend of the seas, put the engines back on half speed.

Magill led off. When the plunging tug rose on the crest of a comber, he leaped and landed over the top-deck taffrail. He had bent a heaving-line around his wrist; with this he pulled up the chromium ten-foot fog nozzle and its trailing hose.

"Gimme plenty of slack!" he yelled back at the tenders. "And charge the lines when I get inside with two lengths!"

The heavy hardwood vertical fenders of the tug rasped the steamer's side. She rose on another wild sea; two more men with heaving-lines were safely over. Once more the *Typhoon* lifted on a hissing sea, and two more men jumped. Kane came out to the rail.

"Five's enough!" crackled out his voice. "Rest of you stay aboard and tend the hoses. Don't let 'em get pinched, either. Charge all lines! Hundred and fifty pounds!"

Magill was off with a wild yell, two men backing him up; they disappeared down a hatchway, straight into the smoke. Captain Sandstrom and some of his men worked forward and helped pull up hose. The other two firemen followed. Two ten-foot nozzles went wide open for the fire's heart.

Captain Whalen coughed and retched, and looked, from his place on the chemical platform. He cursed himself and his seasickness, as his eyes went to the two men in the plunging tower monitor, keeping that stream steady. He looked forward along the canting, water-spouting decks. Kane was first on one side of the tiny bridge, then on the other, jockeying the telegraphs and yelling commands at Foster, who worked at the wheel. Directly below him was the main engine-room hatch. Whalen looked down and saw old Connell, smeared with grease and sweat, keeping gaunt face and bloodshot eyes on the lettered disks of the telegraph. Signal bells clanged incessantly; the pointers jumped from one speed to another on a split second, as the pilot rocketed down his mechanical commands; unmindful of the sickening sway of the greasy floor-plates, of the wild tossing, of the stench of burned oil, Connell never made a false move, never bobbled a signal.

WHALEN looked forward at the men lightening hose, bending connections, tending lines and fenders, while thunderous seas came tumbling over the bows. He turned and looked at Chief Bright, clinging beside him; the eyes of the two met and held.

"Tired of bein' sick, Bright?" demanded Whalen. "Up-and-coming officers, aint we—fine-looking men alongside of them misfits and incorrigibles!"

The biting sarcasm of his voice went home, brought the red to Bright's pale cheeks.

"Well?" he went on savagely. "Want to get your uniform dirty or not?"

"You crazy larrigan!" Bright straightened up. "I'm with you if it kills me."

Whalen coughed again, and plunged away toward the starboard gangway. Bright came staggering after. Two

drenched firemen tending lines forward of the wheelhouse saw the two officers and stared. Kane, appearing at the starboard wing of the bridge, let out a yell.

"Hey, you boneheads, you can't do that! Don't jump, I tell you—"

"Go to hell," gasped Captain Whalen, and jumped.

MAGILL, meantime, was up against dense smoke and sheeted flame; when the fog-nozzles opened, the smoke thinned and the flame retreated.

"These are the babies!" yelled Magill at his men, thrusting the ten-foot nozzle ahead. "Come on, you boys, give it hell!"

The fog-nozzles, recently designed by some land fireman, had just come aboard, had been used at drills, but never at real work. Now they showed their worth. Foot by foot, Magill and his four men battled their way into the blazing compartment.

Through the six holes in the shower-bath-like end, the water stream at a hundred and fifty pounds pressure was discharged like a heavy fog that lent a weird halo to the flames; the firemen felt little heat, as that flying mist penetrated and smothered the fire ahead. There was no whip or squirm to the hose, either.

"Hurray! This is something like! We got her licked!"

After twenty minutes of intensive work, Magill yelled exultantly. In the thick fog, his men were mere vague shapes. This lower deck, ordinarily used for passengers in summer, had been housed in to protect the cargo of hay from the sea. Water cascaded down from above, mingling with the spray and fog.

Magill trained his nozzle on a pile of smoldering baled hay, and let out another and wilder yell. The bales had actually been used to check off drums of paint and oil!

"Keep them drums wet down!" rasped his voice. "Bring over that two-and-a-half inch—spot that corner! Here, you, get in there—you with the yeller slicker, go topside and get cargo-hooks to overhaul this mess. Good job! Hit 'er again!"

A fireman who had been handling the floodlight, hauled over from the fireboat, came up and punched Magill in the ribs.

"What is it?" Magill turned furiously. "Gone nuts, have you?"

The man grinned and swung the bright glare of his light. Magill forgot the heat and smoke and stench; there, laboring over tangled hoses, were Captain Whalen and Chief Bright. Both of them were sick and staggering, but they never slacked; they gave no orders, worked like common hosemen, and worked hard.

"Hurray!" Magill went to them, slapped them on the back. "You got what it takes, you two guys—you got what it takes!"

And surprisingly, the two grinned back at him. . . .

An hour later, when the job was completed, the two officers were still at work. They sweated and labored, spat soot and coughed blood, choked and retched and obeyed the barked orders of Senior Pipeman Magill until they could barely put one foot before the other.

With six searchlights converging on the *Saxby City*, a coastguard cutter edged in and demanded to know what help was needed.

"None," sang out Pilot Kane. "We're casting off and going home. The fireboat *Typhoon* doesn't need help."

"You're damned right," added Bright, gripping the rail. "Send in that message and sign it Assistant Chief Bright, in charge."

Kane gave the wheel to Jim Foster, took Bright's arm, and headed him below. They halted before turning into the galley. Captain Whalen, blackened and grimy, was just accepting a cup of black coffee from Connell and Magill.

"It's ag'in' all the rules," said old Connell, wagging his head.

"Yeah," assented Magill. "No mugging up in the galley, says the book. No meals except at regular hours."

CAPTAIN WHALEN looked at the two of them.

"Hereafter," he said, "Engine Sixteen goes by the Book of Rules—fireboat style. I'd not be surprised if you two mugs found yourselves reinstated with merits, and all your demerits wiped out. And that pilot of yours—by the Lord, he's a man!"

Captain Bright nudged Pilot Kane violently.

"That goes for me, Kane," he said in a hoarse voice. "Damn your eyes, you salute me ashore—and afloat I'll salute you, every time! Fireboat style, you bet; shake! And rules be damned. We're all men together, and that's the whole story."

The extraordinary story of a young man who undertook to make a great fortune in one year through the exercise of "personal mystery."

A Million for

The story thus far:

"YOU'RE through, Dewert," growled old Hartswell, the city editor. "You'll never make a reporter. Good luck, son."

It was tough going for Bentley Dewert after that—until that fateful day of the two letters. The first was from his landlady, giving him one week to pay up—or else. The second was from Ephraim Brood, president of a well-known soap company, stating that Hartswell had recommended him for a job.

Fierce little fat man, the soap magnate proved to be.

"You," Brood said to him, "are a failure. I'm a success. Know why?"

"I wouldn't," said Bentley bitterly, "be here if I did."

"Right. I'll tell you why: Because I own the secret of success, and you don't. Read 'The Count of Monte Cristo?'"

Bentley nodded.

"Then you've seen it work. Personal mystery made the sailor *Edmond Dantes* over into the magnificent *Monte Cristo*. Let people *imagine* things about him, that's what. Didn't talk about himself. Personal mystery, boy! Greatest force in the world!"

"Very interesting, Mr. Brood. But—well, just how does it concern me?"

"Ever hear of a ghost-writer?" Brood demanded. "Well, you're going to be a ghost-*actor*. I'm going to write a book. Going to give my formula to the world. Need a stooge—somebody to *live* that book. While I write it! That's your job. Pay you money to be my stooge.

By FULTON THATCHER GRANT

Illustrated by Austin Briggs

You'll make a million dollars. That's the proof of the formula. How's that for a job? Want it?"

Dewert took the fantastic job. With the five hundred dollars capital Brood provided, he bought new clothes, put up at the fashionable Washington Towers—and bribed a bellboy to give him a list of important people registered there. He chose a name at random—that of Camille Archambault, a French airplane-buyer. Then he bribed the hotel clerk *not* to let Archambault know that he, John Destiny (that was the stage name he had chosen) was in residence. The hotel-clerk promptly tipped off the newspaper men—and those overeager young men as promptly jumped to conclusions and printed a story about Archambault and the mysterious Mr. Destiny. As a result of *that*, the airplane-manufacturer Julius Hartlow suspected that "Mr. Destiny" was the agent of a rival concern—and paid him six thousand dollars to keep away—though he made Dewert forge his (Hartlow's) signature on a check, which he retained as a threat in case Dewert didn't keep his word.

Meanwhile one night at dinner Dewert was greatly taken by a pretty girl dining with an old gentleman in the Towers restaurant, and was wondering what sort of personal mystery he could employ to make her acquaintance, when fate took a hand: the old gentleman choked on a fishbone and collapsed. Bentley at once offered help—took them to his rooms and called a doctor. Afterward he politely left them alone there a few moments; but when he returned, they had vanished—leaving her ermine wrap, but no message.

The newspapers presently supplied the answer: Lorraine Graymaster had aided her wealthy aged uncle to escape from the asylum in which, she believed, he had been unjustly confined; and the two had disappeared. Seeking to connect the mysterious Mr. Destiny with the case, the reporters badgered him until he knocked one of them down—and more headlines followed. Lorraine then arranged a meeting with Bentley and begged him to sue the papers for libel. And when he refused, she did a surprising thing: gave herself up as an accomplice in Buntsman Graymaster's escape.

There was a mixing and mingling which was scarcely social. Bentley saw Watcherley's face near him—and hit it, hard.

John J. Destiny

That was that—a fantastic puzzle. Trying to forget it, Dewert reported to Brood, and under his direction, undertook to further the Personal Mystery business by renting an office downtown. He found one promptly—and more trouble, for he innocently took a sublease from a phony Southern colonel who had just gypped a man from Texas out of five thousand dollars. *(The story continues in detail:)*

WITH morning, however, came grave doubts to Bentley Dewert. He had, it appeared, written a check for

one thousand dollars, payable to "bearer," against a stub so scratched and scrawled as to show him only too clearly what his state of mind had been when he wrote it. More facts incontrovertible—specifically, a bunch of keys in his pocket and a rambling lease-form over which a fly seemed to have walked after a visit to an inkwell—confirmed his recollection of having rented an office somewhere downtown from a terrible old frost of a Southern colonel who insisted that he was the son of an intimate friend. The address of the place appeared to be at 555 Pine Street, and Bentley hastened to inspect the place, fearing the worst, suffering sharp pangs of hang-over in his throbbing head, and fervently hoping for the best.

"Good Lord," he told himself, "what a fool thing to do! Still, a thousand dollars for a decent office isn't much to pay for a year's rent."

IN the broad daylight of ten o'clock it was a decent building of old-fashioned brownstone, a little dingy, but gifted with that solid, conservative air which so many of our downtown structures of the last century seem to radiate. The office of E. Witherby Jossop, Personal Services, was on the fifth-floor corner, with a window on the street. Slowly recognition came to Bentley: the leather chair, the glass-top desk, the portrait of Theodore Roosevelt grinning toothily at another of Thomas Edison, who in turn cast his inventive eye across the room at a panorama of early Southern statesmen whose names might have made larger history had it not been for the incident of a civil war. But the glamour which had seemed to be present during the previous hazy evening was totally gone.

"It might," he told himself, "be worse, but I don't quite see how. Gosh, what'll Brood think of this! I guess I was pretty tight—and pretty much of a fool. Well, we'll have to make the best of it."

Fresh air and a walk out-of-doors, he decided, would be better for the future of his Personal Mystery business.

"Anyhow," he reasoned, "I've got my head clear of—of that darned girl and her problems. Now I can start to think of my own for a while."

And he started toward his door.

His hand had scarcely touched the doorknob, however, when the portal was opened slowly from without, and a queer, out-of-place figure insinuated itself into the front office.

It was a wiry, gnarled, tanned, bow-legged little man in a seedy old-fashioned suit and a cheap leather windbreaker. He wore a two-gallon hat, very weather-beaten, and had a pair of handle-bar mustaches of the soup-strainer variety. He had a timid but defiant look about him, and he stared at Bentley with a sad, setter-dog expression as he stood there, removing his hat and showing his thin, sun-faded nondescript matting of hair.

"Harya, Mistuh," he said in almost a whisper. "Say, I want for to talk with the Cunnel."

"Sorry," Bentley said. "The Colonel's not here."

The man apparently did not believe it or did not understand it. He said, ignoring Bentley's information:

"I done send one o' them telygrams to Ma, an' she says I done wrong; she says I gotta get that money back. Ma, she says—"

"I'm afraid I can't help you," Bentley told him politely. "If you're looking for Colonel Jossop, he is gone. I mean, he's not coming back—for a year. If there's anything I can do, however—"

"Gone?" The little man looked frightened. "Yo' all aint tellin' me the Cunnel's gone?"

Bentley assured him of the fact.

"But he's got my money!" mourned the other. "Most five thousand dollars, he's got. An' Ma, she says—"

"Suppose you come in and sit down, Mr.—"

"Watcherley, that's the name, suh. . . . I'm Jason Watcherley. Mebbe the Cunnel, he tol' you 'bout me."

"I'm afraid not, Mr. Watcherley. Suppose you tell me yourself."

TIMIDLY, pathetically, the little man sat. He was quite willing to tell. It was quite a simple story: He was a cattle-man in the difficult grazing country of northwest Texas, and had a little ranch along Rabbit Ear Creek which had gone slowly into a decline until one of the oil companies had dropped an unexpected windfall into his lap in the shape of a check for five thousand dollars for the lease, *ad perpetuum*, of a strip of his grazing land for a pipe-line to a near-by railroad.

Heavily mortgaged, he had thought to increase this small sum (enormous to him, but still insufficient) by some smart investment. He had come, like the fools rushing where angels fear, to New York. Just how he had met the Colonel was not

clear, but Bentley gathered that Jossop's name was quick to come to the ears of such new arrivals in New York. And so the Colonel had traded Jason Watcherley's greenbacks against a handful of railroad stocks.

But when the cow-man had telegraphed his wife of his "success," that plain-thinking woman had wired back for him to call off the deal. And so the innocent lamb had returned to demand his money from the now vanished Colonel. Not a pretty story; a tragic one, but the kind of thing which is all too common in the vast stew-pot of New York's financial district. And although it touched the humane note in Bentley, he knew that he could be of no aid to the little man.

"It looks pretty bad, Mr. Watcherley," Bentley said. "But I just rented these offices last night. As to the Colonel—well, I wouldn't want to say. Let me take a good look at those stock-certificates."

The little man, plainly alarmed and worried, quickly produced the gold-and-green printed documents from a cheap brief-case. There were four of them, each showing five thousand shares.

"Where's this Southways railroad?"

"Dunno, exactly," said Watcherley. "I heard tell of a road like that had a spur runnin' through Boone County, Texas, somewheres. That's how-come I—wal, you know how things is. The Cunnel bein' who he is, an' the road bein' a Texas road— But I aint heard of it for a spell."

Bentley knew—or guessed only too well—how it was.

"I'm afraid I can't help you," he said. "I'm not a stock-and-bond man, you know. I just rented—"

"You mean you aint gonna get me my money back, suh?" demanded the other, suddenly alarmed. A hard note had crept into his voice. Evidently he had not comprehended anything at all about the Colonel or his absence. This, to Watcherley, was the Colonel's place, where his money ought to be; and anybody he found there was responsible.

"SORRY," Bentley said gently. "But I haven't got your money. And as to the Colonel—he's gone. He's quit, left, not here any more. I don't know where he is. I—"

"You go git him!" That was a sharp command. The air of timidity had fallen away from the little cow-man. He was suddenly bristling.

"No can do, Mister," said Bentley. "If I were you, I believe I'd go to the authorities—"

"I got plenty authority, Mistuh," said the other. "If the Cunnel aint here, you're here. You gimme my money."

"I just told you I haven't your money, Mr. Watcherley. I simply can't do anything about it."

"No?" drawled the cow-man queerly. "Reckon we'll see 'bout that." Whereupon he stamped out of the office, leaving his packet of stock-certificates behind him in his choking anger.

Bentley shrugged.

"That lad's sore. That sounded like a threat," he muttered. "Not a very auspicious beginning for me."

"NO sir," said the statistician at Ryster & Company. "I'm afraid it's pretty hopeless. There never was rightly a Southways Railroad. It was a little speculation started by a fly-by-night bunch who had ideas of getting their road absorbed by some big line. It never came off. They did build some track to keep their franchise, but it was—ah—what we call a floater. Sorry, but that's the way it was. Wouldn't be surprised if you'd find grass and cattle all over their rusty tracks right now. The road was supposed to take the shortest line from Oklahoma to the Rio Grande, just about cutting the oil region in half, but it never really got finished. They defaulted their bonds two years ago. And as for their stocks—well, you might sell 'em to some crank of a collector for a few dollars, but that's all. I hate to tell you this, but we make a practice of telling the truth in this company."

Bentley thanked him and walked out.

"That's what I get for butting into other people's business," he told himself. "A wild-goose chase. It's not going to be easy to tell that mad cowboy that his stocks are no good and his money is just gone—"

But it never came quite to that point.

A day passed, however; and there was no further sign of Mr. Watcherley. Meanwhile, Bentley had established himself in his new quarters in a manner which, in his opinion, was suitable. A few purchases in the way of chairs, a bit of linoleum to replace the worn-out rug, a new desk and fresh equipment for the cubbyhole next his own room which lacked only a secretary, had freshened the atmosphere and given it a modern tang.

"Safe and sane," he mused, surveying the effect. "Can't say it looks like any special kind of an office—which is what the Personal Mystery business needs."

More than that, he had hung out his sign. It was a good sign. It was an inspired sign in bright cold letters, on a glass panel bolted to his door. It read:

DESTINY, P. M.

"Just let them," he reflected, "figure that one out!"

"Hang out your shingle," Ephraim Brood had said, "and they'll come. They always do."

Thus far, however, barring a few itinerant canvassers, no one had heeded his Personally Mysterious sign. All that morning he had sat alone, reading the newspapers, fumbling through magazines, keeping himself occupied to thwart any further recurrence of the intrusion of Miss Graymaster and her problems into his life.

At noon, however, the Colonel himself called by telephone.

"I'm—ah—talking from long distance, my friend," he said in his throaty voice. "Matter of a little unfinished business. Occurred to me that one of my—ah—clients might have dropped in looking for me. Name of Watcherley—quite humble sort of a fellow, but solid gold. Have you seen him, my dear boy?"

"I've been in and out, sir," Bentley said evasively. "Changing things here a little, you know. Any message, in case he comes in? What does he look like?"

"Oh—ah—no message, really. Might tell him I advise him to hang—to keep our little—ah—transaction quiet. Matter of fact, my dear fellow, I did the man a bit of a favor, and I don't want the—ah—facts known in my—ah—circle. You understand, of course."

"Yes," said Bentley, "I believe I do. If he comes in I'll convey your message. Now, where can I reach you, Colonel?"

But the line had gone dead in his ear.

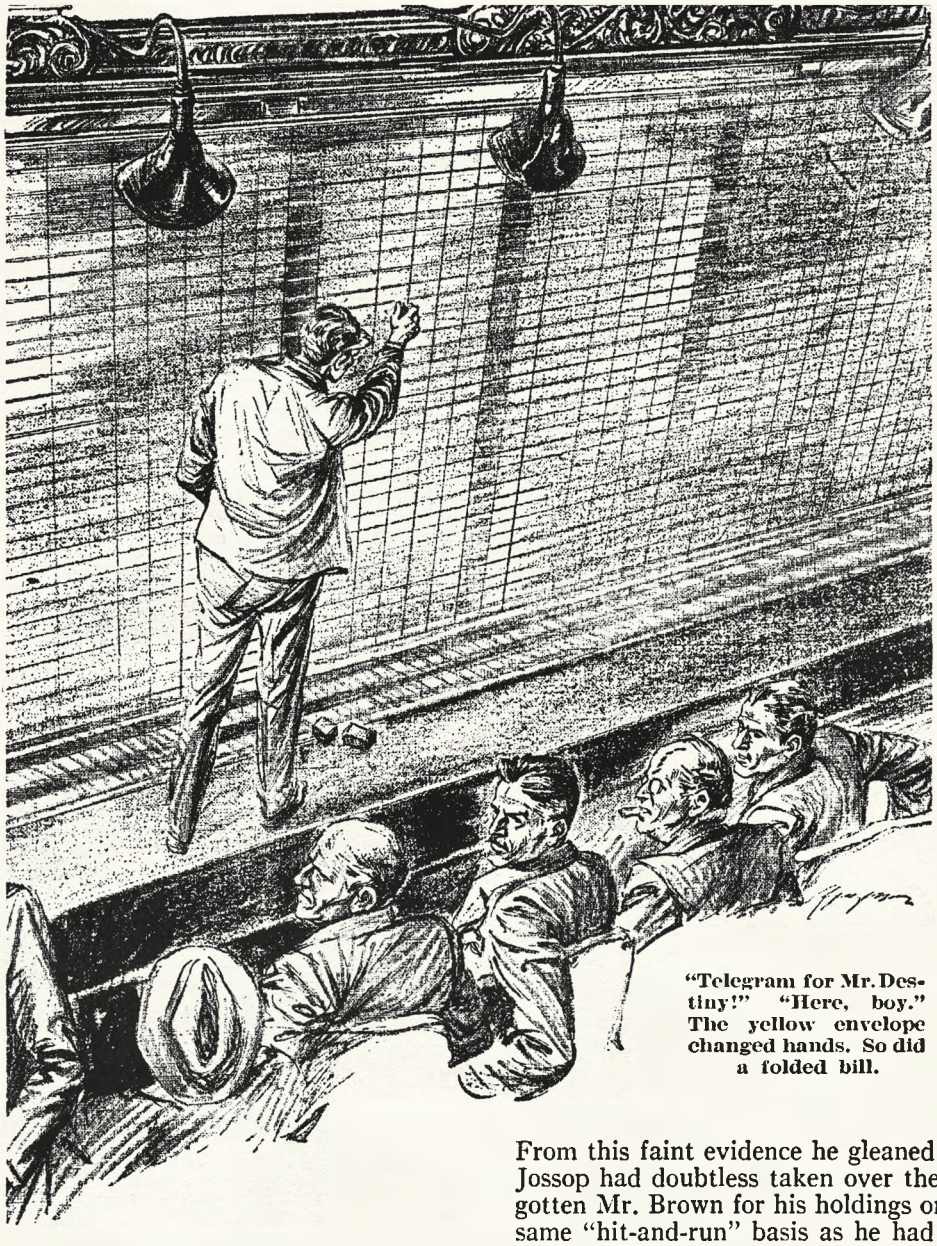
He rang the central operator and asked her where the call had come from.

"Long-distance, sir—Turnford, Texas. Shall I get the party back for you?"

Bentley declined with thanks.

"That's queer," he mused, puzzled a little. "It costs money to telephone from Texas. That old fake wouldn't have done it for nothing. He wanted information—something about Watcherley. Probably about those stocks. Now, why? What would he do that for?"

Long and hard, he puzzled. It was fairly clear that Colonel Jossop was one of those many individuals on the darker fringe of Wall Street known in the idiom of their profession as "Hit-and-run wizards." They prey upon the innocent and the unknowing. They maintain small offices,—precisely like this one,—and they have an ear to the ground which brings lambs to their place to be shorn. They are known as "agents," "investment counsel" and divers other plausible titles. But when they "hit," they invariably "run." And the Colonel had done both. But why would he now be apparently showing himself—even by



"Telegram for Mr. Destiny!" "Here, boy." The yellow envelope changed hands. So did a folded bill.

telephone? What did it mean? It had to mean something.

Two different times before sixty minutes passed, Bentley had taken from his drawer, where they had been safely treasured, the cheap brief-case with Watcherley's stock-certificates, and had spread the still crisp papers on the desk. They revealed nothing—practically nothing. They told him that Southways was incorporated in Texas in 1933, a fact which he knew. He saw that the form of assignment, printed on the reverse with power of attorney, had been signed in transfer to E. Witherby Jossop by an individual named Brown, and the date of transfer was 1934, during the still hopeful days of that abortive little road. From this faint evidence he gleaned that Jossop had doubtless taken over the forgotten Mr. Brown for his holdings on the same "hit-and-run" basis as he had sold them, when worthless, to poor Watcherley. But such speculation availed him nothing.

It was after two when the flash came. He leaped suddenly to his feet, pushing the certificates scattered over the floor and shouting to the walls of his office:

"By golly, I believe I've got it! That's got to be it. Now, maybe, if I'm smart, I can use a little personal mystery and catch that old faker, and at the same time give Watcherley back his—"

He snatched the telephone from its cradle and shouted for Western Union.

"Send me a boy—hurry—555 Pine Street, and the name is Destiny."

Then he began frantically scribbling his telegram with a pencil.

"It's just got to be that," he assured himself as he wrote and crossed out. "And if they don't answer, I can check completion of the message delivery with the telegraph company. If they didn't deliver, I guess wrong. If they did—well, we'll see."

And what he handed the messenger boy read:

SOUTHWAYS TURNFORD TEXAS ADVISE STATUS FIRST PREFERRED STOCK STOP WIRE CARE RYSTER COMPANY N.Y. JOHN J. DESTINY

And when the boy had gone, he gravely saluted his reflection in the shiny glass-top desk, and addressed it with formality:

"Dewert, my boy, cross your fingers. With a little smart guessing and a lot of Personal Mystery, we may be in the money yet—in spite of E. Witherby Jossop, Esquire."

Then he tilted his chair and began his most pleasant day-dreams, continuing them until the unwelcome visitor came.

HE did not ring. He did not knock. For a man of so awkward an appearance, he insinuated himself into the room from the outer lobby with an astonishing silence. He may have just stood there for long minutes, his two-gallon hat tilted fiercely over one squinting eye, his bowed legs wide apart, his face twisted with indignation. Bentley did not know just when he did come in. He merely looked up, sensing some presence in the room.

"Set still," said Jason Watcherley. "Jest set still. Don't try nothin'."

Bentley's spirits were not dampened.

"Relax, Mr. Watcherley," he said. "Just relax and sit down yourself. I've got about fifteen minutes before—well, before I may have to leave you."

"You aint leavin'," stated Watcherley.

"Really?"

"Where's the Cunnel? You git him."

"Colonel Jossop seems to be in Texas—a place called Turnford," Bentley said quietly. "I can hardly get him, but he did telephone me just now. He mentioned you."

"Huh?"

"He urged me to advise you not to discuss some transaction you made with him. Possibly he means your stocks and your five thousand dollars, Mr. Watcherley. I wouldn't know."

"That's what I come fer. I want that money back."

"Sorry. I haven't your money, Mr. Watcherley."

"You lie, Mister. Ma, she says the Cunnel's a crook. I say you're both crooks. Gimme that money."

"Your stocks are here, Mr. Watcherley. I kept them for you. You forgot them—in your hurry."

"Don't want no stocks. I want my bills."

"If you can be calm long enough for me to try a little idea I have, I may be able to get you your money. I might even buy back your stocks."

"I aint waitin' for nuthin'. You git me that money."

He was trembling now. Evidently he had been working himself carefully up to a high pitch—with a purpose. Bentley wondered what he would do. He was faintly amused at the little man's impotent anger, and at the same time deeply sorry for him. It was only fair, he felt, to pull the brief-case from his drawer and toss it to Watcherley.

"Here's your property, Mr. Watcherley," he said. "Better go home with it—and cool off. . . . *Hey!*

His cry corresponded to a split second with a movement of Jason Watcherley's wrist which produced a new element in this queer interview—a large, incredibly large and ponderous revolver, the snout of which was leveled steadily at Bentley's waist-line.

"Hey!" cried Bentley, surprised and alarmed. "Don't do that! Put that damned thing away."

"I'm claimin' my money." The gun's nose moved significantly in punctuation of this statement, and the furious little man kicked the brief-case across the floor, scorning entirely its contents.

Bentley tried reasoning.

"Maybe you could get away with this in Texas," he said. "But they electrocute people for shooting up here. Better put that cannon away. I can only say that I haven't your money. It's probably with the Colonel—somewhere in Texas, right now."

The man was not listening. "I'm a deputy down in Danforth County," he said. "I got a permit to tote this gun, an' if I hafta shoot you, Mister, it's on account of you're resistin' arrest. I'm fixin' to get that money." Bentley saw with consternation the whitening of the man's hands under nervous and muscular strain. Watcherly was a little mad, of course. Monomania. Dangerous, too. He was slowly coming nearer. The gun

looked bigger, gigantic. Bentley thought fast, but no adequate device occurred to him.

Then a woman's voice behind Watcherley said: "Oh! Oh, my! Why, it's Mr. Watcherley."

The cow-man's head turned a fraction in surprise; his hand wavered. Bentley sprang from his chair and made an awkward, sprawling tackle which was none the less effective. His flying shoulder hit the little man at his knees and swept him from his feet. The gun crashed heavily to the floor and slid along the linoleum. And the momentum of Bentley's charge sent both men hurtling into the prim, pale, deftly tailored woman who had stepped in through the lobby door during their tense moment, and whose cry of surprise had turned the tables. Both men hit her in one huge rolling bulk. She screamed and went down. There was a mixing and mingling which was scarcely social. A fox-fur entangled itself around Bentley's face. A fist glanced from his forehead. A thumb gouged for his eyes. He reached blindly and grasped, to his dismay, a pair of silk stockings, legs inside, which he let go in alarm as the grabbing produced a scream. Then somehow the fur vanished, and he could see Watcherley's flushed leathery face straining near him. He hit it—hard. He felt the man's body go limp. He pulled himself to his feet just in time to avoid a vigorous kick—and an indignant one—from the flying shoes of the mysterious and timely woman visitor.

Then, with a sudden thought, he snatched the brief-case of securities from the floor and hurried out the door.

"That," he said to himself, "made a good time to exit. I wonder who that lady was? I sensed she wasn't pleased with her reception. But she knew Watcherley. . . . Now, what the devil?"

CHAPTER VI

IT was two-thirty. The board at Ryster's was full of figures. The boardroom at Ryster's was full of eager, tense, hopeful faces. Is there anywhere anything more generously optimistic than the atmosphere of a stockbroker's boardroom? The market would close in thirty minutes, and it had got, as they say, quite "hot."

"Mr. Destiny? Mr. Destiny? Calling Mr. John Destiny!"

That was a neatly uniformed boy, wending through the rapt sitters before the board. . . . "Telegram for Mr. Destiny!"

People notice such things. Even in board-rooms where odd things happen in a most commonplace manner, paging a man for telegrams is irregular. Well-known customers do, on occasion, receive messages at their brokers; but there is no need to page them. Transients, however, rarely presume upon investment houses to handle their private affairs and messages, and so the incident drew some little attention.

"Mr. Destiny! Telegram for Mr. Destiny!"

"Here, boy."

The yellow envelope changed hands. So did a folded bill. And when the astonished page opened it, his eyes bulged with pleased surprise, for it was five dollars. "Gee, Mister—aw, gee, Mister, thanks!" he exclaimed reverently, and walked away as in a dream.

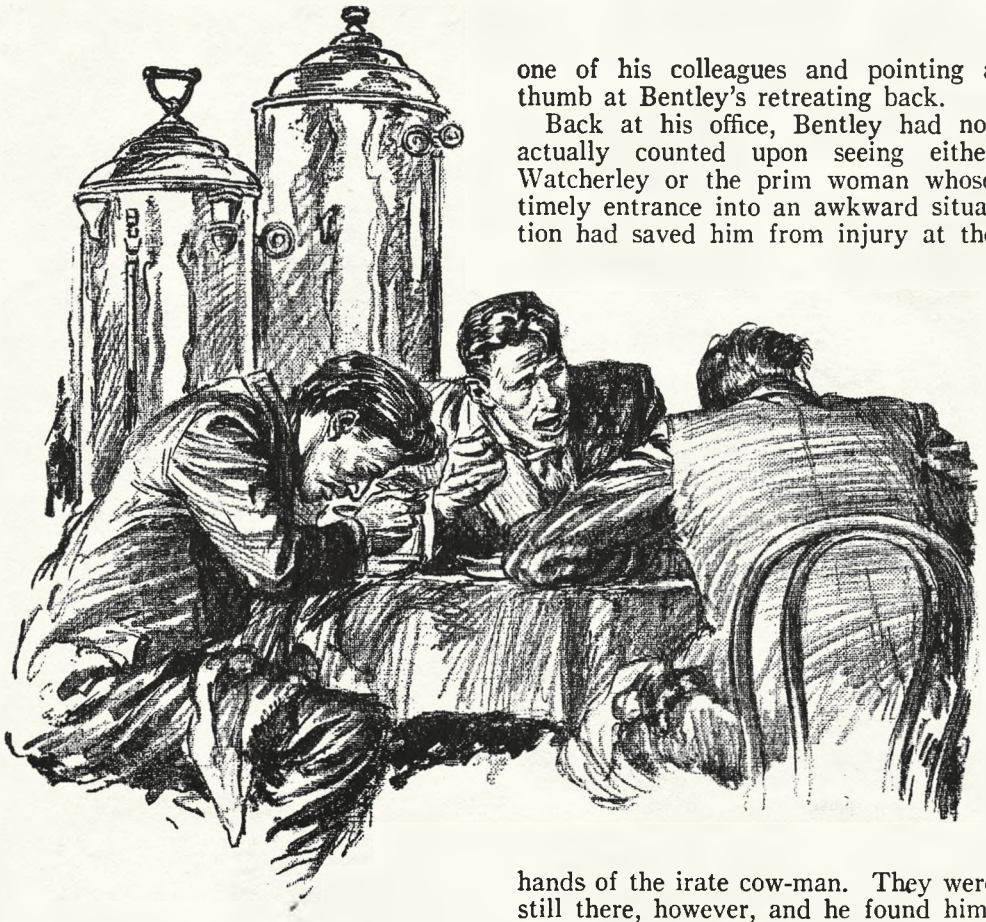
The grapevine telegraph which functions in the tense atmosphere of board-rooms brought strange whispers running through the crowded room: Who is this young lad who gets messages and tosses five-spots around? He doesn't look like a millionaire playboy dabbling in the Street. But you can never tell. Maybe he's— *Whisper, whisper, whisper.*

Bentley's face assumed a bewildered and even angered expression as he perused the wire, for it read:

DESTINY CARE RYSTER N.Y. REPLY YOUR WIRE KEEP YOUR NOSE OUT OF THIS.
E. WITHERBY JOSSOP

"Now that," murmured Bentley in a sort of daze, "is a little too thick. That'll take some thinking out. Anyhow, it's pretty clear that something is happening to Southways. It's also pretty clear that Colonel Jossop didn't know about it when he left New York but he found out about it down in Texas. Also it's certain that that old weasel is either mixed up in the Southways promotion, or else he's close to somebody who is. If he phoned me just to find out about Watcherley and the stock he sold him for a gold-brick, it means he suddenly found it wasn't a gold-brick at all, and so he wants it back. Anyhow, I wired the company. The Colonel saw my wire and warns me to lay off. Declaration of war, I'd call that!"

He sat a long time in his chair ignoring the efforts of an alert customers'



man to engage him in a conversation, and slowly a grin spread over his face. The customers' man was saying:

"Very sluggish today, isn't it, sir? Barring a little flurry in rails, almost no action at all."

Bentley nodded absently.

"Have you any special interest, sir? Utilities? Industrials? Oil? Glad to offer you my services—"

Bentley had not even heard him. And presently the fellow got up and soft-shoed away. You can't sell a man who doesn't even listen. Who was this lad, anyhow? Damned impolite. Or maybe—

But Bentley heeded him not. To himself he was saying:

"That's just about the size of it, a declaration of war. Warning me off. He wants those Southways shares back—which means they're worth more than five thousand. A lot more, too. Well, if they're worth it to him, maybe they are to me. Maybe a little Personal Mystery will produce something in Wall Street. Anyhow, I can't lose."

And so he got quietly out of his seat and went out the door, ignoring the customers' man, who was whispering to one of his colleagues and pointing a thumb at Bentley's retreating back.

Back at his office, Bentley had not actually counted upon seeing either Watcherley or the prim woman whose timely entrance into an awkward situation had saved him from injury at the hands of the irate cow-man. They were still there, however, and he found himself in sudden trouble.

The prim lady was no longer prim. On the contrary, she stood at his door, hands on hips, eyes glittering angrily.

"Give," she said bluntly. "Give, you cheap tin-horn! You can't get away with it."

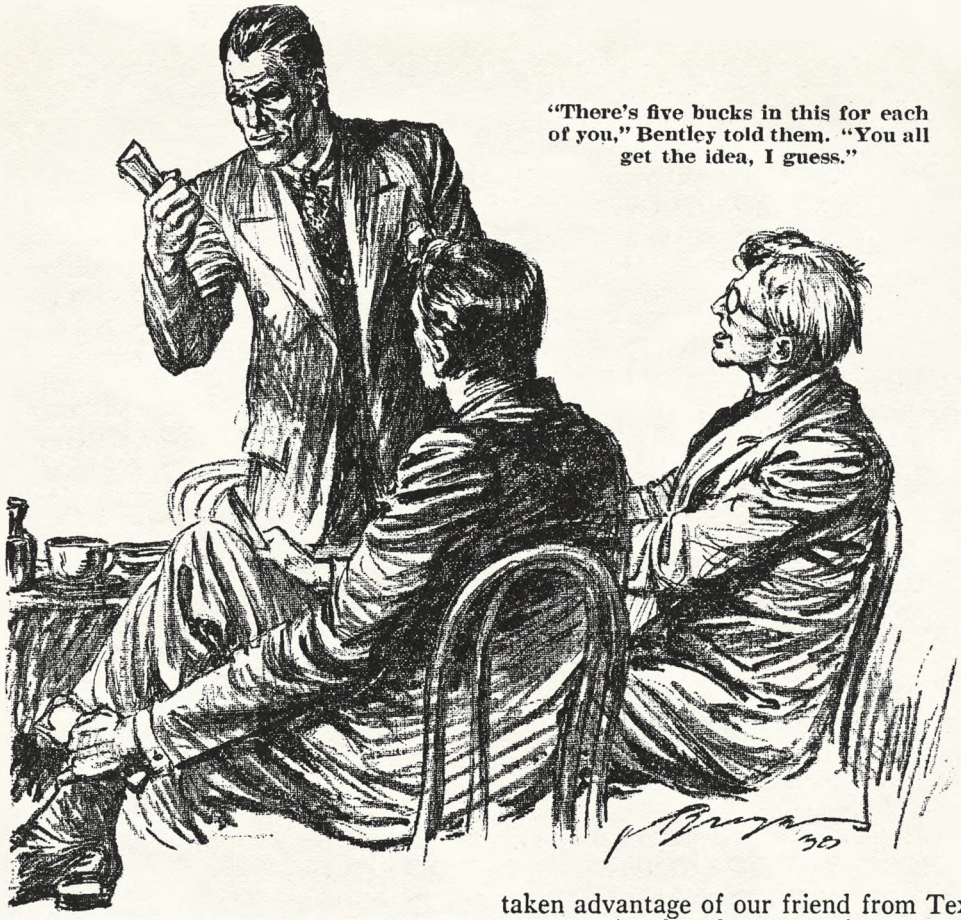
"Sorry, madam, but I don't quite get it," Bentley averred, albeit he had some inkling of her meaning. Behind her stood Watcherley, a little shrunken, his face wearing a completely bewildered expression, his enormous pistol, which he had picked up from the floor, dangling at his side. He was not menacing, however. Rather, he was crestfallen. The woman snapped:

"You know very well what I want. Those Southways securities. I'm Colonel Jossop's secretary."

"How," asked Bentley, "do I know that?"

But it was Watcherley who answered.

"That's right, Mister," he said from within the lobby. "That there's Miss Stebbins, suh. She was always here when the Cunnel was here, suh. An' I'm beggin' yore pardon, suh, for gettin' so mad. The Cunnel, he sent her up here to give me back my money, suh. Reck-



"There's five bucks in this for each of you," Bentley told them. "You all get the idea, I guess."

on you didn't know, suh. I guess I was a bit hasty—"

"I see," said Bentley. "Now suppose we all sit down and talk this over, Miss Stebbins."

"What for? This isn't your business."

"I feel that it is. When a man starts pulling a gun on me about something, I feel that I'm somewhat initiated into the matter. And since the securities are now in my possession, madam, I'm afraid you'll have to admit me. Do sit down. And you too, Mr. Watcherley."

THEY sat. Bentley took his place at his own desk and opened the briefcase containing the stock. He spread the certificates out on the glass top, using a most professional manner. Then he said:

"Mr. Watcherley has told me his story, Miss Stebbins. But what I don't quite understand is why the Colonel suddenly has taken such a protective interest in his—er—client. I have ascertained that these securities are—well, no good. Southways is a speculation of the worst sort. Now the Colonel, being a human, has exchanged them for Mr. Watcherley's five thousand dollars; and yet, still being human, he regrets having taken advantage of our friend from Texas, and offers him his money back again. It may be true, but it doesn't make much sense."

"It was all a mistake in the first place," said Miss Stebbins. "Anyhow, it's none of your business. The Colonel sent me up with his check. Give me the stock, and I'll pay Mr. Watcherley."

The Texan nodded. That much, at least, he understood. But Bentley said:

"Since Mr. Watcherley has come to my office,—it *is* mine, I believe,—I consider him in the light of a client of mine. Merely returning his money does not adequately pay him for his inconvenience and mental suffering. I think the Colonel should pay him more than five thousand dollars for the securities."

The no-longer-prim Miss Stebbins flared, at that.

"What's your game? You can't chisel in on this."

"I resent the word *'game,'* Miss Stebbins," said Bentley quietly. "I assure you I am only protecting Mr. Watcherley's interests."

"That's all right, Mister," said Watcherley. "I jest want my money back. The Cunnel, he—"

"But you'd be glad to make a thousand dollars, Mr. Watcherley? Now, if

the Colonel should offer you six thousand—having your interests at heart—"

Miss Stebbins slapped a check on the desk.

"You can't work it," she snapped. "I don't know what you're after, but you can't work it. There's the Colonel's check, and that's all he gets. Now you lay off this thing, or—"

"*Ts, ts, ts,* Miss Stebbins," said Bentley. "You don't quite understand the situation. You are dealing with a man quite as sensitive to fairness as the Colonel—oh, quite! I shall never let it be said that a man came to my office and did not get his due. In fact, Miss Stebbins, you may tear up the Colonel's check. Because I am going to give Mr. Watcherley a check for five hundred dollars extra. I shall buy the Southways stock, and if the Colonel still feels in duty bound to take it back, he may buy it from me—at my price."

MISS STEBBINS was red-faced and volatile. She jumped to her feet and fairly screamed:

"You crook, you—"

Bentley snatched the certificates back as her hand reached for them. The woman had almost lost control now, and was using language which, for one so prim and feminine, was no less than surprising. Watcherley, too, was talking, but the general din was too great for mere words to carry. Bentley just sat and waited. Watcherley's voice finally broke through as Miss Stebbins ran out of vocabulary and breath, saying:

"Don't want no more'n's right, Mistuh. I allus figured the Cunnel was a fine feller; only Ma, she says—"

"But it would be nice to go back to Texas with an extra five hundred in your pocket, Mr. Watcherley," Bentley suggested. "It would be a way of showing Ma—Mrs. Watcherley, I suppose—that you could make a profit here in the North. Besides, it would pay off part of your interest. It would pay back your traveling expenses, anyhow. I feel you ought to take my check, Mr. Watcherley—fifty-five hundred dollars. That will let you out of it, and let me deal with Colonel Watcherley—or—" Here he made a deep inclination of his head toward the staring woman. "—Or with Miss Stebbins."

"Don't you do it," she howled. "He's a crook. He's—"

Bentley had been writing the check, and now cut in with:

"Obviously, Mr. Watcherley, if I were a crook, I wouldn't give you the check. Take it and show Mrs. Watcherley how you can make money."

"Wal, I reckon—I reckon I oughter—" Watcherley began; but Miss Stebbins tried to snatch the paper from his hand, and in doing so succeeded in knocking the pistol out of the other hand. Watcherley got red in the face, picked up his weapon and made it disappear somewhere inside his jacket. Then he said: "Thanks, Mister. —'Scuse me, Miss, I reckon Ma'll be mighty pleased. I'm only aimin' to do the right thing."

And he backed awkwardly out of the room and fled through the door, a man embarrassed and conscious of it.

Bentley smiled slowly at the woman.

"Now, Miss Stebbins," he said, "you will probably telephone the Colonel. And when you do, you might tell him for me that every young whippersnapper isn't to be bilked and bamboozled so easily. Just a bit of friendly advice. So good afternoon. Miss Stebbins. And thank you for arriving just in time to spare me a bad moment with friend Watcherley."

But Miss Stebbins was unable to articulate her reply just then. She had all but lost the power of speech, and stood there gasping like a fish out of water until she finally turned and stalked away, stopping only at the door to say in a choking voice:

"Smart guy, I wouldn't be in your shoes. You don't know the Colonel."

"That," said Bentley, "makes it mutual. My regards to the fine old Southern gentleman."

She still lingered—and said at last:

"You could save yourself a lot of trouble, wise-guy, by selling me those certificates. Six thousand—cash, tomorrow."

"You might," said Bentley, "try me tomorrow. But don't count on it."

She slammed the door and walked heavily down the outer hall.

BENTLEY whistled as he entered a telegraph office and pretended to be composing a wire while he helped himself to a dozen or so yellow message-forms. He hummed a bright tune as he paused in the lobby in front of the screened-in entrance to the office marked "Public Stenographer," and then entered with sudden decision. When he appeared again, he marched straight to the telephone-booth, consulted the commercial directory, and wrote down a list of names

which included many of the more important stockbrokers in New York. Then, walking brightly still, his toes barely touching the marbled floor, he went up to his room.

IN the morning, Bentley arose with the birds. It was a fairly simple matter to find one of the long queues of eager men waiting in front of a metropolitan employment-agency. It was less simple but quite possible to select from the line five plausibly well-dressed young fellows and to whisper confidentially in their ears. He met no refusals. They nodded, one by one, and followed him. In the near-by restaurant where he bought them breakfast, he unfolded his simple plan.

"There's five bucks in this for each of you," he told them. "You all get the idea, I guess. You take two of these addresses and you go there. You pull the same act in each place. And don't forget to drop that telegram. Then you come and collect your bill from me. . . . I'll be waiting in my office. All clear?"

It appeared to be all clear. The young men were a little dazed, but the job seemed simple, and it isn't often you can earn a five-spot so easily. And so, when the youths had left him, Bentley paid his check and walked leisurely to his office.

There are possibly many men who were present that morning in the board-rooms of Ryster's, of Cocker & Dahl, of Melestis Brothers, Coln, Nachman & Coln, and the sumptuous halls of Bullener or of Crump & Shriven, when that strange incident occurred. The echo of it found its way into the newspapers, days afterward. The memory of it still haunts several individuals who saw but did not heed. And in the recollection of the employees of those venerable firms, the thing is still spoken of in hushed, half-mysterious tones.

At Ryster's, for instance, it happened shortly after the first quotations of the day were marked up. The market opened heavily. Bid-and-asked quotations were still far apart. Plainly to the tense gentlemen who watched the columns of figures grow, it would not be an exciting day.

Suddenly there came the sound of disturbance in the outer hallway where a sober-faced, uniformed old man sits guard at a little gate and wards undesirables away from the office. His thin, shrill voice was heard crying out:

"Hi, there, stop it! You can't go in there. Stop, I say! There aint nobody by that name here, I tell you. Hey, come back here!"

Then a small cyclone burst into the board-room. A young man came running in, waving a paper, and shouting:

"Mr. Destiny—Mr. John Destiny! Message for Mr. Destiny!"

An official, jealous of the deportment of his room, collared the young fellow, saying gruffly:

"Hey, you can't come shouting into this place. What do you think this is?"

"Get outa my way. I gotta find Mr. Destiny. I gotta, I just gotta—"

"Who's he?"

"My boss. Say, you aint tellin' me you don't know John J. Destiny? You aint kiddin' me, Mister? He oughta be here. He said he was comin' here. I gotta find him. It's a telegram. It's maybe millions—millions, Mister!"

The floor man was duly impressed. Millions speak loudly in financial houses.

"Well, there's nobody by that name here, son. Sorry."

"It's after ten o'clock, aint it? Gee, he *said* he was comin' here. Gee, I dunno what I oughta do."

"Perhaps I could give him your message."

"I got no right to leave a telegram for the boss around. I'd get fired, sure."

"I think it would be all right, son. I'm sure you can trust us to take care of it. If you expect your boss to come here, you can either wait or—"

But the phone had rung in the little booth, and a customers' man had answered. He called out from the booth:

"Anybody here named Destiny? Melestis is calling him."

Nobody claimed the name. The excited lad said:

"There—you see? He said he was going to Melestis, too. Maybe I oughta try to get him on the phone some place."

"Well, you can use the phone. But don't come crashing into a board-room like that again, son. We're busy here."

THE boy went into the booth and telephoned Coln, Nachman & Coln, still paging Mr. John Destiny. He was not there. The boy then telephoned Crump & Shriven, with no more success. He seemed troubled and worried.

"Gee," he said, "that's queer. He's gotta be *some* place! Maybe somepin's happened. Listen, Mister—I gotta hurry. I gotta find him. If he comes in,

you tell him I was here. Tell him to phone his office, will yuh, Mister?"

The floor man agreed.

It was quite a natural thing, after the young man had left, that a customers' man, using the room telephone and finding a sealed telegraph-envelope lying where the excited young man had dropped it, should carry it to the floor manager, saying in a hushed undertone:

"Say, that kid forgot his telegram. Where does this Destiny hang out?"

The manager didn't know. "Never heard of him," he confessed. "Sounds as if he must be a big shot, hey? Let's see that wire."

It was not especially ethical, of course. But human curiosity often is stronger than human ethics; and presently the floor manager betook himself into the comparative solitude of the ticker-room and ran his finger idly under the badly sealed flap of the envelope. Curiosity could not stop there. Out came the folded yellow blank. The floor man stared at it. Stared and ejaculated:

"Gosh almighty! Now, what d'yuh know about that?"

The message read:

DESTINY N.Y. PICK UP HUNDRED THOUSAND SHARES SOUTHWAYS RAILROAD PREFERRED UNLISTED STOP ACT QUICK CAN GET FOR SONG BEFORE NEWSPAPERS GET STORY STOP JOHN DOE

The manager hurried down the hall to the little glass-framed office of Mr. Dow, statistician.

"Hey," he greeted that gentleman. "What in blazes is Southways Railroad?"

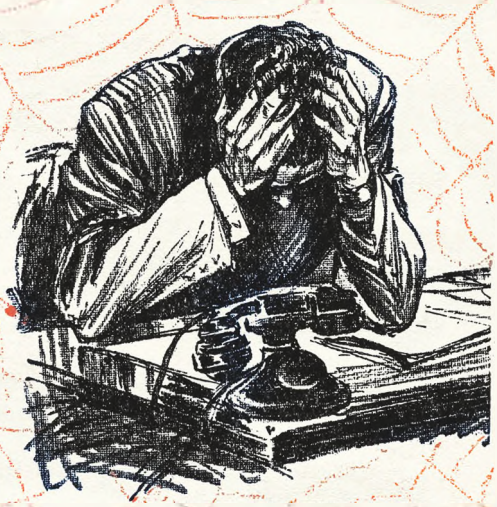
Dow glared at him.

"Is this a gag?" he demanded. "Because if it isn't, it ought to be. I thought everybody on the Street knew about that cheap-john would-be railroad that Jo Caddis tried to promote for a bunch of down-South fast boys. Anyhow, it's no good. It never was anything and never will be. They defaulted their bonds two years ago, and they've been dodging the Commission ever since. It's a fake, and a rotten one too. Now—what the hell! There was a young feller in here the other day with a handful of their preferred stock, and I told him to give it to a museum. Why, that little road doesn't own a handcar."

"That's what you think, wise boy!" cut in the other. "Never mind all that. Something's happened to that stock."

"Probably the Supreme Court."

"No, listen. Ever hear of an operator named Destiny?"



"No."

"Me neither. But there is one. Big shot, I think. Look at this wire. Feller from his office came tearing in here with it and then dropped it in the phone-booth."

Dow picked up the telegram and pondered over it.

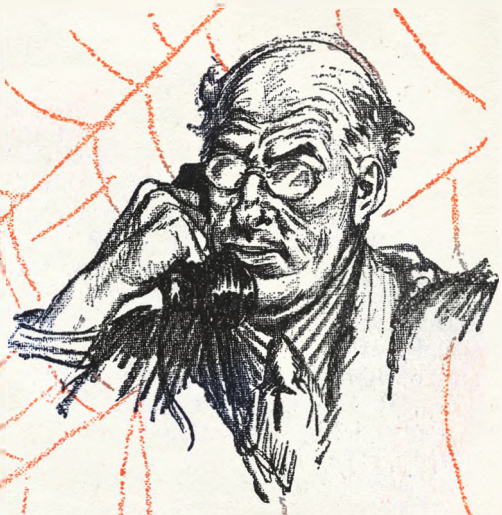
"Destiny, huh? Say—well, that's the name of the lad who was in here with Southways stock. I thought he was just another youngster somebody had sold a gold-brick to. Maybe I was dumb. Maybe he was trying to sound me out and get a line on how we felt about Southways. Of course it's just possible he had something up his sleeve. Southways has been trying to sell their jerk-water railroad for years, and maybe they've done it. Say, we better go see Mr. Ryster. This might be something."

"Pyramid" Jo Caddis was not the man to let his past trouble his present. He had never yet been a guest at the State penitentiary, so it may be assumed that he was honest. Certainly he did not go about slinking in corners, but was able to (and did) afford a costly yacht, a swanky uptown apartment, as well as a downtown office no less than palatial.

And among the more successful promotions which Jo Caddis had undertaken was one which, subsequently, left an evil odor at his door—namely, Southways Railroad. For Jo had undertaken to unload six hundred thousand shares of Southways stock at ten dollars a share, upon an unsuspecting public of schoolteachers, librarians, State functionaries and country doctors, at the considerable net profit to himself of twenty per cent, over and above expenses—a neat, cool million, plus. If the miniature railroad proved, later, to be the rawest kind of a venture conducted by a couple of high-powered swindlers, it was none of Pyramid Jo's business; nor could any law hold him responsible. And later, when the Federal authorities had pounced upon the malpractices of the Southways direction with penalties which forced the fly-by-night road into involuntary bankruptcy, reorganization and defaulting of bonds, Pyramid Jo had shrugged his shoulders.

Bitterly he recalled the old copy-book maxim: "Oh, what a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive!"

But all that was long ago. Today Mr. Caddis had soared above such ingenuous swindles. Fortune had come to him in other ways, and the Southways business was forgotten.



And so it was a little startling to him when his telephone rang toward eleven that morning, and a harsh voice said:

"Caddis? This is E. D. Ryster. I want to know what in hell is going on with that dirty little railroad swindle called Southways that you floated awhile ago. There's something doing, and I want the dope. Come on, now, let's have it. You've got nothing to lose—"

And Caddis, recovering from his initial surprise, replied:

"Ryster—oh yes, Ryster. Seems like I've heard of you. Weren't you one of the stuffed shirts that tried to bring the D.A's office down on my shop awhile back? And if there was anything new in Southways, do you think I'd let you in on it, you flat-faced hypocrite? You can go to hell."

But having clapped the receiver back onto its cradle, Pyramid Jo wore a very puzzled expression indeed. He called his chief customers' man, asking:

"What's happening in Southways, Frank? Big Shot Ryster just phoned me, all twittering. I pinned his ears back, but maybe there is something going on. Know anything?"

"Not unless they've caught up with that Pole who calls himself Merrivale Brown and clapped him in Atlanta. Last time I heard they'd hardly the money to run a switch engine over the line once a week. What's Ryster say, anyhow?"

"Didn't give him time to talk," admitted Jo Caddis. "But he seemed to have a line on something, and wanted to pump me. Now you get busy and dig up whatever there is. Get going!"

More phone-calls came that morning. Melestis Brothers, Cocker & Dahl and some of the other big houses which would, under ordinary circumstances, have been loath even to admit the existence of men like Jo Caddis, telephoned him urgently, some pleading, some demanding arrogantly, some using subtle devices, but all wanting information on Southways.

Pyramid Jo gave no information, because he had none. His answers were guarded and vague. Better not to kill any interest before he knew what was going on himself. And as the calls multiplied, Jo Caddis' temper grew frayed. He damned his staff for not being informed. He ranted and he roared. He sent burning telegrams to Turnford, Texas, the corporate seat of Southways, asking pointed questions. He got no answers at all. And in a final burst of frantic indignation mingled with a desire to be "in" on any good thing, he dispatched five of his more trusted employees out with instructions to beg, buy or steal what Southways shares could be picked up anywhere in the Street—just in case, as he phrased it himself. . . .

The Number Two runner at Ryster's was a smart lad and knew well enough what kind of things put extra bills in his pay-envelope. The boss, he knew, was talking about that young Mr. Destiny, the one who had slipped him a five-spot the other day, when a dime would have done nicely. Not likely he'd forget that chap! And when he saw him slip quietly into the board-room and take a seat, he was quick to act on it. He dropped his basket of sell- and buy-orders, an unpardonable offense under most circumstances, and ran down the hall to the boss' private office.

"He's here, Mr. Ryster," he chirruped. "I jest seen him come in. I knew—"

"Who's here? What the—"

"Destiny, sir. That feller they was all lookin' for. You was askin' about him, sir, and I thought—"

"Never mind what you thought; you've got your job. Get busy."

NOTWITHSTANDING his show of indifference, however, it was four minutes later that Mr. Ed Ryster, cigar and all, steamed into the customers' room, nodded here and there among the old reliables, and slowly insinuated his way to the aisle which passed the seat where the strange young man called Destiny had sprawled and was languidly staring at the blackboard where the tiny columns of quotation figures were rapidly lengthening under the chalk of the marker.

"Nice day, sir," he said, puffing smoke. "Haven't seen you here before, eh? I'm Ryster. Don't believe I know your name."

"No," said the strange young man, "I don't believe you do. It's Destiny. How do you do, Mr. Ryster?"

THE young man spoke as from a great distance. Plainly he was not overly impressed by the great name.

"Destiny, eh?" Ed Ryster made it seem quite casual. "Say, that's where I heard it. A boy from your office was here looking for you. Had a message—telegram—something—I forget just what. Important, maybe?"

"Possibly," said Mr. Destiny.

"Wait a minute. . . . Charley—oh, Charley Meers!" As a customers' man came hurriedly at his employer's call: "What was that about a wire or something for Mr. Destiny? I had an idea—"

"Yes sir. A boy came in here, used our phone, left a telegram in the booth. Just a minute, sir. I think I can find it."

He did find it and brought it over. There was nothing about the formal envelope to suggest it had already been opened and read. Mr. Destiny took it absently and shoved it into a pocket, unopened. The broker's eyes showed a brief disappointment.

"Nothing important, then?"

"I don't know," said Mr. Destiny. "Not having read it."

Surely this was a baffling young man, not at all given to chattiness. Mr. Ryster tried again.

"New in the city, Mr. Destiny?"

"No."

"Don't get around the Street much?"

"Enough," said the laconic one.

"Slow market, eh? Week-end, of course. Not over half a million shares traded today."

"Uh-huh," said Mr. Destiny.

"Anything special interest you? Glad to have you consider us if you're thinking of opening an account down here."

"Rails," said the monosyllabic Destiny. "Thank you."

"Rails are interesting," said Ryster. "Public is coming in a little. Quite a flurry in C.O. yesterday. C.P. is strong. Pennsy went up three points over the week. Technical position suggests time for a decline, but heavy car-loadings keep buying up."

"Excuse me," said Mr. Destiny, and squarely turned his shoulder on the broker while he pulled out a notebook and proceeded to make hieroglyphic notations therein. Ryster smoked and watched him covertly. This young lad had something—something strong. Odd sort of a chap. Uncommunicative. Queer about that telegram. . . .

Presently Mr. Destiny pulled out the telegram and said once more:

"Excuse me." Then he tore it open and read it. He showed no excitement, but he stood up in his seat and said:

"Sorry, sir, but I'll have to be going. Or could I use your phone?"

"Certainly—booth over there."

"You wouldn't know the number of Coln, Nachman & Coln?"

"Trinity 3-0008. I hope you're not giving Coln a chance before us, Mr. Destiny?"

"Not exactly," said Mr. Destiny. Then he nodded pleasantly but distantly, and walked toward the booth. He was closeted there for fully five minutes. When he came out, he walked down another aisle and out of the room without another word, like a man deeply concentrated. Ryster sat puzzled. Suddenly he got up, pushed through his customers and went into the door marked *"Unlisted Department."* The man in charge sat alone. There is little unlisted business in the big Exchange houses.

"You know people over at Coln, Nachman, I understand," Mr. Ryster snapped at him. "Get on the phone right away and find out if anybody has done anything this morning with any Southways railroad stock. You remember that little fake road? Get busy."

The man nodded and obeyed. After some minutes of conversation with an invisible party who answered to the name of Sammy, he hung up and said:

"Yes sir. There's been bids for it all the way up to ten dollars a share, and somebody just offered two hundred shares at thirty dollars. He says it's crazy. Says there isn't any of it around at all. Says it's a dud and a fake and—"

"That," said the broker, "is all I want to know."

MONDAY morning's Wall Street *Courier* broke the news in a brief paragraph headed SOUTHERN RAIL MERGER. It was a syndicated story picked up out of rumor by a press association and carried as a filler at the end of a front-page column, but its effect that day was something which no one could have predicted. It read:

> Turnford, Texas, September 20: There is considerable speculation among railroad men and banking circles as to the report, as yet not confirmed officially, that the Oklahoma-Rio Grande Railroad has undertaken a program of expansion which will bring a new competitor into the freight situation as concerns service from the wheat and mining areas to the Gulf, consequently affecting South American export trade facilities.
>
> Among other purchases, the big Texas road is said to have absorbed a small road known as Southways R.R., linking by straight line the Oklahoma region with the Gulf via the Rio Grande.
>
> What effect this merger will have upon the securities of the roads involved cannot be estimated until the reports have been officially confirmed. . . . The Southways deal is said to be a stock transaction, totally or in part. . . .

IT sometimes requires very little beyond a well-stimulated imagination to set the wheels of public interest awhirl in New York's financial district. Certainly on that day there was plenty of evidence that "something was going on." There was Jo Caddis, quite plainly and openly in the market for large quantities of Southways.

There was Coln, Nachman & Coln offering an odd lot of the stuff at the clearly fanciful figure of 30. There was Melestis bidding 25 for a hundred shares of it. There was the great Ed Ryster, whose conservative firm would ordinarily have spurned such stocks, phoning around the city and asking cryptic questions. Smaller orders, sell or buy, were registered at Bulleners. Cocker & Dahl and Crump & Shriven, all equally conservative houses who merely carried an unlisted security department out of courtesy to some of their older clients, also showed transactions in Southways. And when buyers and sellers got together, albeit the bid and asked sums were queerly mismatched, the curious name of John Destiny did not fail to be mentioned.

Southways, Southways, Southways—Destiny, Destiny, Destiny! A susurrus issued from five great board-rooms. Its whispering echo floated out to the Street.

Hurrying workward in the avenues, John Doe nodded to passing Richard Roe with a morning salute, then paused to murmur:

"Hi, there. Say, what's this Southways stock I hear about?"

"Who the devil is this feller Destiny that bought a million shares of some crazy swindle?"

"Say, there's gotta be some fire somewhere if there's all that smoke. Looks like some big operator is loading up."

YOU take an unlisted security and you've got either something or just nothing in your hands. Maybe you can't find it quoted anywhere except in cheap houses and promotion joints. There isn't any way to find out immediately that reports of million-share buys are hundredfold exaggerations, and that the only actual orders for Southways began with a sale of two hundred shares which Jo Caddis snapped up at 30 because he wasn't going to take any chances, and then sold again to a Melestis man for 25 and glad to get it, and then getting worried and buying some more of it at 33, and losing courage and selling it again to a man from Coln, Nachman for 31. There isn't any way of finding out that the only actual Southways shares on the street before Monday noon were two hundred shares which were bought and sold so many times that the edges were wearing out. Nobody can ever learn why it is that a tempest will grow out of a teapot, or Pike's Peaks out of baby molehills; but they do; you can't stop the whisper from going on and getting bigger. And so when the Wall Street *Courier* came out with that news of a merger which wouldn't have been looked at, any other time, people began to notice and to pull out the forgotten stocks from the cigar-boxes where they had stuffed them. More Southways appeared in the Street. It was a slow day in the regular market, because people were wondering about Southways. Most of them laughed at it. People who had been victims of Southways said:

"What the devil—I can't lose if I sell it, can I?"

So they sold it.

Then they read that paragraph again, and they bought it in again.

And so on, and so on, and so on, because the Public is like that: it can't make up its mind. It's filled with greed and fear, and more greed and then more fear. And if the public was not like that, there wouldn't be any securities market anywhere, nor any bulls nor bears, nor any of the picturesque hocus-pocus which makes Wall Street something more than a cold-blooded machine for handling frigid exchanges of your money for mine—makes it a warm, human thing, full of foibles and idiosyncrasies and comedy and tragedy; where Comedy may wear Tragedy's mask, and Tragedy might bring laughter if it didn't happen to you and me. . . .

One thing about Jo Caddis no one, not even the proverbial "worst enemy," could deny, and that was his precipitate courage. It takes courage to run a business like Jo's. It takes courage to earn the title "Pyramid Jo," with its plunging significance. And it took courage for Caddis to keep on buying Southways.

Not that he had expended a vast fortune. When the momentum got under way and the "little people" began to pull the certificates out of the old sock and bring them to their brokers', the first two hundred shares of Southways which had been traded and sold and bought and sold again, had multiplied until there was actually what is called a "floating supply" of the stock in the unlisted securities market, a rare thing in Wall Street. Which, of course, made it possible for Jo Caddis to accumulate a small line of the stock amounting to ten thousand shares at an average price of 40, for which Jo had only laid out a normal margin of about twelve dollars a share—a neat sum, all told, but small compared to the liquid wealth which Pyramid Jo could command.

AND there he was, at four o'clock, sitting impatiently at his desk, holding more than a hundred thousand dollars actual cash investment in a security which he knew (better, perhaps, than any other man in New York) to be quick without substance or worth. But he was Pyramid Jo, and he had played his hunch.

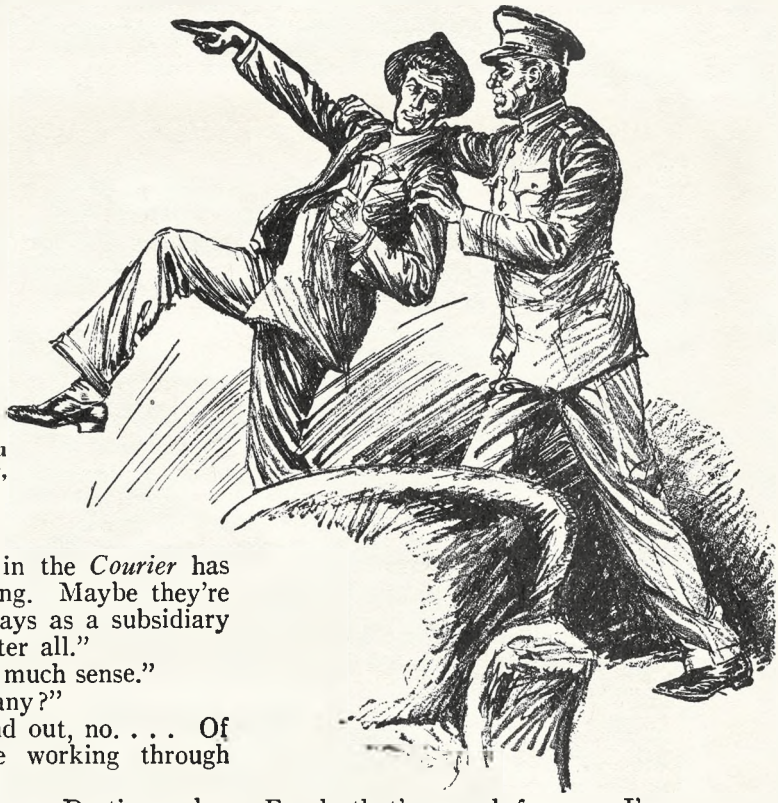
"I feel," said Jo Caddis to his trusted aide, "like an accident looking for a place to happen. Maybe I'm just a little screwy, Frank. It's a long time since old Jo Caddis has done any plunging on hunches. And now, after we pulled all this stuff in, I wonder what I did it for."

The man called Frank was discourteous enough to say:

"That's what we've all been wondering, Mr. Caddis. It's the first time I ever saw you buy a hundred grand worth of nothing."

"No answer to my Texas telegrams?"

"Nope. Guess they don't like you down there."



"Hi, there, stop it! You can't go in there. Hey, come back here!"

"Well, that story in the *Courier* has got to mean something. Maybe they're going to run Southways as a subsidiary and list the stock after all."

"It wouldn't make much sense."

"Did Ryster buy any?"

"Near as I can find out, no. . . . Of course he might be working through another broker."

"Yeah. And this guy Destiny, whoever he is—"

"That's another funny one. As far as I can see, he never bought or sold more than two hundred shares. I think he's a myth. I think somebody's pulling a phony, and you—"

"And I got stuck with it, huh? Well, we'll see. . . . But a lot of people say they've actually seen this Destiny—young feller. He popped up in Melestis' and Coln, Nachman's, and other places. He exists, all right. And I want to see him, hear? You find him and get him over here."

"If he's anybody at all, he wouldn't come here. He's got an office, I hear."

"Where?"

"Jossop's old digs."

"You mean the phony Colonel?"

"Yeah."

Jo Caddis whistled softly. A great light seemed to dawn for him. He said,

"Now, that's a horse from another garage. Jossop used to be in business with Merrivale Brown before Brown and his crowd promoted Southways. Two of a kind, those two. They could both hide behind the same corkscrew, they're so crooked. They had some kind of a row and they split, but I seem to remember that Brown paid the Colonel off in Southways stock—lousy way of getting out of a debt—when we were pushing the stuff at ten dollars a share and keeping seven of it. Don't remember all the details, but if this Destiny guy is in Jossop's office and playing with Southways, Frank, that's enough for me. I'm gonna take a look at this feller Destiny."

And he reached for his hat. . . .

He did not get straight to Destiny's office, however. Among other resources Caddis had a queer kind of personal charm which won him a few close friends. And one of these friends was the city editor of the Wall Street *Courier*.

And so, before his visit to the legendary Mr. Destiny, it was almost natural that Caddis should stop at a tobacco-store telephone-booth, call the *Courier*, demand the city-room, and say to the man in the slot:

"Mack? This is Jo Caddis. Listen, Mack, have you got a follow-up story on that Oklahoma-Rio Grande railroad expansion program? You have? Got any details? Well, listen, Mack, I wish you'd give me the dope on the acquisition of Southways. I'm interested. Remember, I floated that issue awhile back. . . . Yeah, I know. I'm not proud of it, but it's all over now. Who pays what for which, and who gets stuck"

He listened attentively for a full five minutes to the calm, precise voice at the other end. Then he whistled.

"One for two, hey? Well, thanks, Mack. Now I'll give you a lead for a hot story. Somebody's trying to make a grab of that O.R.G. new issue before it's even listed on the Exchange. Yeah, that's right. I wouldn't know just who it is, but I'd bet that stuffed-shirt Ryster is mixed up in it. If that's any good to you, you're welcome. So long."

But Jo Caddis was not quite prepared for what he found in the office of Mr. Destiny. He was not prepared for the extreme youth of the young man who looked up from his desk when he tapped discreetly on the outer door and peered through the lobby into the private office beyond. It was, moreover, a strange kind of an office for lower New York. The comforting sound of the ticker was absent. Missing were the ponderous tomes of Wall Street lore, such as "Moody's Service" and the "Standard Statistics" volumes and cards. No charts, no analyses, nothing which was the common symbol of financial-minded men in the world's most financial-minded district, was evident in that small, almost barren suite. Even the door sign, reading DESTINY, P. M., was disturbing.

"Come right in," Destiny called.

Jo Caddis did come in, in his most impressive manner. But the young man was impressed not at all, and Jo Caddis found himself mildly disconcerted.

"You're Destiny?" he inquired, setting his gold-headed stick against the desk and reaching for the only unoccupied chair in the room. The young man nodded.

"I'm J. Caddis." He said it as a Napoleon might have announced his title, but the name of Caddis had no commanding sound in the ears of young Mr. Destiny. He merely said:

"Yes? What can I do for you?"

AND it was then that Jo Caddis made his plunge.

"Listen, Destiny," he said throatily. "You're a new hand in the Street. I'm an old one. You've got the right stuff. You've wangled something in that Southways deal of yours. . . . I'm not sure just what, but I can guess. . . . And it was smart. Damned smart! But you aren't experienced enough to handle the rest of it. That's why I'm here. . . . No, wait—hear me out."

Jo held up his hand as Mr. Destiny was about to cut into his discourse, and the young man subsided, albeit with a somewhat puzzled frown.

"It just happens that I'm the only man in the city right now who is wise to you. I mean I'm the only man who knows one thing, and one of the only two who knows two things. Get it?"

"Frankly, no," said Destiny.

"I'm the only man who knows you're acting for that cheap four-flusher Jossop. That's Number One. And the only other person who knows what is happening to Southways stock in the O.R.G. purchase deal, is a newspaper man who can't use it. That makes us buddies, Destiny, or doesn't it?"

THE young man did not reply for some time. He sat contemplating first the ceiling, then the tip of his unfinancial nose; then he produced from his desk-drawer a much-handled telegram which Caddis could not quite see but which the young Destiny continued to study with great care. Finally he said:

"You seem to want to be buddies with me, Mr. Caddis. You cooked up the idea, not I. It isn't very profound, as psychology goes, to suspect that you would stand to gain something by it—not I. You don't look much like a philanthropist. Now listen carefully to what I say, Mr. Caddis. I've just heard you make a couple of assertions—pretty blunt assertions. And—get this clearly—I haven't the faintest idea of what you're talking about." Then he smiled boyishly, adding:

"So we aren't buddies, after all, are we?"

Caddis was puzzled. This wasn't going according to Hoyle.

"Don't," he said, "play dumb with me, Destiny."

"Sorry," said the smiling young man. "Nothing personal in it."

Caddis snapped at him: "Okay, if you want plain language. You can't deny that you're in old Witherby Jossop's offices, can you?"

"I can, of course, but I shall not."

"Then you know damned well that old Jossop had a flock of Southways, that Merrivale Brown is president of Southways—or was—and is the bright number who cooked up the idea of forcing Santa Fe into buying that little jerkwater road in the first place, and that Brown and Jossop were partners when the idea was hatched. So what? So Brown and Jossop are together again. And because Brown is in a jam in N.Y., they send you up here to be the white-haired boy who plays stooge for them. Now, let's hear you deny that."

"All right, I deny that."

His denial was so genial, so easy, that Jo Caddis could not detect any surprise at all under it, and again he was at a loss for a new opening for a new attack.

"Okay," he said. "You won't come clean. Let it pass. Only, you probably know that I'm the boy who handled the

selling of all that lousy stock when Brown promoted his road. I did it. I know Jossop. I know Brown. And I'm onto their gag."

"Interesting," commented Destiny.

"I found out today that O.R.G. didn't buy Southways at all. They picked it up out of a bankruptcy auction—by prearrangement. And they're going to satisfy the suckers who hold Southways shares by handing them some brand new O.R.G. common. It's a snap. They've issued what they call Class B common of no par value, and they'll give it to stockholders, one share for two Southways. Which is where you come in, smart boy. You're trying to build a line of O.R.G.-B to force up the price when it goes on the market. You think you can get around the law against holding a corner by just using the transfer trick instead of buying it in the market. Pretty smart, son, but—you've either got to play with me, or lose out."

The young Mr. Destiny did, at last, show some emotion and some surprise.

"You found that out?"

"Just now, in fact. The papers get it—tomorrow."

"And so you think you're going to force me to play ball? Just how, Mr. Caddis?"

Jo Caddis pulled his trump.

"Because I hold a line of ten thousand shares of Southways, son. How do you like them onions?"

"Very nice," said Mr. Destiny. "Only, you're just a little wrong."

"Yeah? Show me."

"Certainly," said Destiny. "Take a look at this wire. It's dated Friday, and it comes from Turnford, Texas, which is the corporate seat of Southways." And he shoved the sheet over the desk. It read, astonishingly:

DESTINY CARE RYSTER N.Y. REPLY YOUR WIRE KEEP YOUR NOSE OUT OF THIS

It was signed, *"E. Witherby Jossop."*

CADDIS was perplexed. His theory had been so perfect, so logical, and he had been so confident of it, that he relinquished it with difficulty.

"That," he said slowly, "could be a fake."

"Could be, but isn't. Check it on the Western Union books, Mr. Caddis. I'm sorry. But I just can't be pigeonholed like that. Still, it was a pretty neat little picture you painted. I almost wish that was the set-up, Mr. Caddis."

The promoter didn't like that much, but he was not to be downed by mere words. The name of Ryster in the telegraph address opened up another possibility and he jumped at it.

"So it's Ed Ryster, not the Colonel, eh?" he snapped. "I thought that smug little tin god was up to something."

"You have a perfect right to think so," said the equivocal Mr. Destiny. "But I'd never admit it. And now, Mr. Caddis, if you have found out what you wanted to know, I'll ask you to excuse me. And thanks for the information. Glad to know that you hold a lot of Southways. Makes it more interesting."

And he stood up, smiling, as he handed the disgruntled promoter his stick, and waved him gracefully toward the door.

CHAPTER VII

IT was being made painfully plain to Bentley that Ephraim Brood was not in a comforting mood.

"Now what in thunder do you want, boy?" he barked. "In trouble, I'll bet my bottom dollar. Not paying attention to business, eh? Getting your name into the papers. Getting mixed up with women instead of playing Personal Mystery. That's what. Don't like it, young man. Don't like it at all. Not what I hired you for. And listen here, I don't care what you've got into—you don't get any more money from me. Get that straight, boy. Now what is it?"

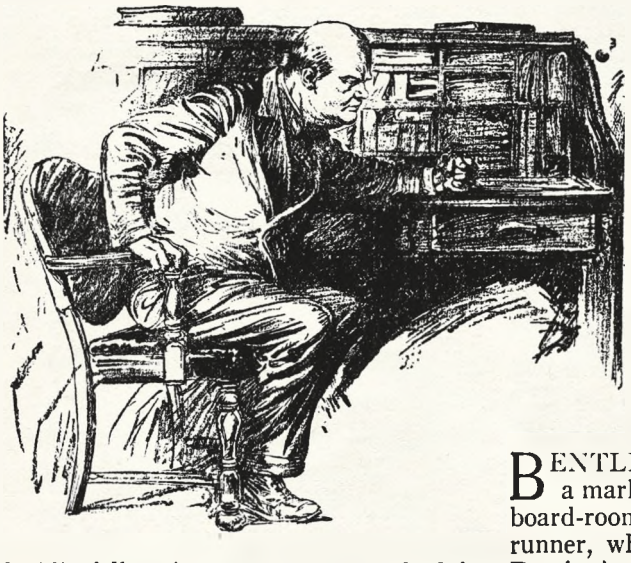
Bentley was a little red-faced, but he persisted.

"I'm not asking for money, Mr. Brood," he said. "And I'm not mixed up with women. That's all a mistake. What I want is some information. I've got my hands on something big, and I don't know how to handle it. You see, I—"

And he plunged into the rapid details of his adventures in the Southways Railroad stock.

Brood listened quietly, punctuating Bentley's recitation with an occasional "Humph!" and a frequent "Bah!" but giving attention none the less.

"And I just learned," Bentley was saying, "that the stock is worth something after all, because the O.R.G. people are taking it up in exchange for a new issue of their own stock of no par value which will be listed sometime this week. That means I actually hold a hundred shares of the new stock. I don't know what it's worth, because nobody does. Only, that



"Stop," said Brood. "Forget about being smart, and play your formula."

Caddis fellow is pretty sure somebody's trying to get a corner on it and peg the price way up. Now, if I could only get on the right side, with the information I have and the Personal Mystery stuff working, I could really clean up."

Brood's voice bellowed, but a softer light had come into his eyes, and a smile trembled on his lips.

"Stop," he said. "Stop right there. You've got this thing all wrong, boy. Maybe I could tell you a trick or two, from what you've said. But I won't. That isn't what I hired you for. Your job is Personal Mystery, not playing the market. All you do is to sit tight. Don't try to be smart. Don't try to play a game when you don't even know the rules. You can't beat those professional operators anyhow, so don't try it. Your job is to let them play into your hands. Get them Personally Mystified. Keep your mouth shut and make them guess about you. That's all. Remember Joan of Arc, boy. Think she won battles because she knew the rules of war? No, she didn't. She won because she was a mystery. Because she didn't play by rule. Now you forget about being smart and play your formula. Stop getting half-baked ideas. Stop trying to lean on me. Now get out of here."

"The old so-and-so!" Bentley said to himself as he regained the street. "Still, maybe he's right after all. What have I got to lose? Okay, Dr. Brood. Here's where your *Frankenstein* begins to do his stuff."

BENTLEY found himself, in a sense, a marked man as he entered Ryster's board-room next morning. The young runner, who had not yet forgotten Mr. Destiny's generous tip, piped a somewhat overbright, "Good morning, Mr. Destiny." Eyes turned at the sound. Elbows nudged elbows. Three customers' men vied with each other a little too actively to take seats beside the young visitor. One made a point of announcing the name a little too loudly. More whisperings followed:

"Destiny . . . . stiny . . . . Dest . . . . Dest . . . . . est . . . st . . . st . . stiny . ."?

It grew worse as the morning went on. Two tedious hours from ten to noon, like slow tramping centuries, making Bentley feel, somehow, like the Living Skeleton or the Fat Lady in a circus side show. Eyes boring at him. Thumbs jerked at him.

Then the telephone.

"Call for Mr. Destiny!"

Bentley took it in the booth, hating that all eyes should follow him. It was Crump & Shriven on the wire. They were talking in language he could not understand. They were talking about something called "rights." Would he commit himself? Would he do this and would he do that? How could rights sell at 28? Whoever heard of selling one's rights? No, he wouldn't place any orders just now. No, not at all, thank you. No, thank you for looking for me and calling me here, but no—not today, thank you.

And then he hung up.

The eyes watched him leave the booth and stabbed into him as he returned to his place. Whispers, like poor relations, haunted him and seemed to pry into

secrets he did not possess. The room, he felt, was a single great listening ear, a great searching eye, and he a squirrel in a cage.

Then the page-boy, coming from Mr. Ryster's inner office, wondered if he, Mr. Destiny, would be good enough to step inside for a moment.

Bentley followed him. Might as well play out the hand, he told himself; but he wanted to run, wanted to cry out, wanted to dash for the door, wanted to quit, to scream to them all that he wasn't what they thought him, *if* they thought him anything, that he was just playing Through the Looking-glass, that he was a marionette and he wasn't responsible for the way others pulled his strings. He sensed a near-hysteria.

Mr. Ed Ryster was a man of substance and looked it, a man of caution, and his firm, punched mouth showed it; a man of money, and he had the odor of it. This fellow, Bentley decided in the haze of his mind, was at least the real thing.

"Sit down, Mr. Destiny."

Bentley did, rather mechanically. He was trying to focus, trying to shake off this narcotic bewilderment and confusion in his mind. He wanted to run out into the fresh air, get away from searching, questioning, suspicious eyes. But the subtle sense of the dramatic penetrated the fog of uncertainty now, and he sat, making a great fight of it to pull his wits together.

"Very smart young man—" He heard Ryster's voice modulating, purringly, as from a great distance. "Take this opportunity of making your acquaintance more specifically—" There was a queer timbre of forced restraint in the man's speaking, as though behind it all something was coming. "Perhaps you would care to take a position, marketwise, aligning your forces, so to speak, with mine. . . ." Evidently the pause indicated that the man expected Bentley to say something. But what?

"I'm not sure that I understand—" he managed to say, and he could hear inward laughter, chortling over his understatement.

Ryster's eyes half closed. He was impatient, this fellow.

"Then I'll put it more bluntly, Mr. Destiny. You have large holdings in the new O.R.G. to be listed tomorrow—that's common knowledge."

That inside laughter wanted to bubble through Bentley's control. Common

knowledge, eh? Not even an ignorant, hopeful young man like Bentley could dignify the hundred shares to which his Southways rights would give him title, by such an expression as "large holdings."

"I don't remember," said Bentley, keeping back the smile, "having made any statement about my holdings."

Ryster's impatience grew.

"Let us not quibble, young man. Let us assume that your holdings will amount to something between twenty and fifty thousand shares—"

Bentley almost choked as the laughter broke through now. Fifty thousand shares! Fifty thousand bluffs, fifty thousand Personal Mysteries! Was the man crazy? Didn't he have any sense of humor? Bentley's grin became a silly chuckle which he fought to banish.

"All right," he managed to say tremulously. "We'll assume anything—anything." Then he couldn't talk, because to talk would be to give himself entirely away. Ryster was talking, though—translating the young man's repressed laughter in his own way.

"I realize the elation of youth," he was saying. "I grant you're in a strong position. But allow my experience and maturity to count, Mr. Destiny." Whatever that might mean. And he was going on and on and on. There was something about the Oklahoma Rio Grande retaining him, Ryster, to prevent something from happening. Somebody had learned about the Southways shares transfer at the wrong time. Somebody had snapped up Southways rights. "Unscrupulous

persons," Ryster was saying. Bentley thought of Colonel Jossop. It seemed to fit. Ryster was explaining something about the effect of those large holdings if dumped on the market when the new O.R.G. shares were listed next morning.

"The directors want that stock to sell around 125," he was saying. "But with that power in the wrong hands, the price can be hammered down or pushed up to a false level—" It was all too involved. Bentley was trying to understand and could not. It must mean something. This man must be after something.

He managed to say: "Just what is it you want me to do, sir?"

RYSTER was quick to shift his words to pointedness.

"We'll need all the counterbalancing stock we can lay our hands on to keep compensating for any move they might make. Must avoid a shortage of stock with the loan crowd—must keep the small shareholders from losses. . . . In other words, we need your holdings, young man. I'm authorized to obtain them from you—"

It was beginning to penetrate. Fantastic and unbelievable, it was beginning to get plainer.

"You mean you want to buy my stock?"

"Your rights to the new O.R.G. issue —at a premium, if need be." Bentley could not shake the picture of his pathetically small "holdings," his widow's mite of a hundred shares.

"Well?" he said. And Ryster's answer flooded him:

"Offer you 125 for them—equivalent of just about what they will open for tomorrow. . . . Can't control it within a few points, of course—willing to make you a bonus."

"Bonus?" Bentley barely murmured this echo.

"Personal check for five thousand. Compensate for your risk that you might get a better price."

"Five thousand—dollars—" Bentley was groping for clarity. It all must have some simple meaning—but what and where? Ryster again mistranslated his hesitation.

"Ten thousand, then. That's equal to twenty per cent of a point's variation on fifty thousand shares. That's good money, young man. What's the answer? Will you accept it?"

"I—I—don't know," stammered Bentley. "I'll have to think it over—"

Ryster snapped at him: "That stock is listed tomorrow morning. I want a decision. I want it now."

Bentley shook his head. "Not now—not now—must think it over."

Ryster was disappointed, but still he tried.

"Nine forty-five tomorrow is the limit. And listen, Mr. Destiny: You're a very young man. You've shown yourself very shrewd. But it is not a simple matter to handle a large amount of active stock in the market. Take my way, and you are sure of a decent profit. Try it on your own, and—frankly, we may be forced to fight you—experienced traders, backed by millions. Remember that. You might lose your fine position. You might lose everything."

But Bentley was already half out of the door.

"I'll—think it—over," he repeated. "Let you know."

And then he fled.

BACK at his office, Bentley sat alone, laboriously thinking. There must be a catch to it somewhere. It wasn't even plausible that a man should offer him ten thousand dollars for a handful of rights—whatever rights were—which were, somehow, worth about one hundred shares of that new stock. No, it wasn't just that way; the man *thought* it was more than that. Kept talking about his "holdings," calling it his "line," saying to him it was "common knowledge." There must be a catch to it. Must be. Strip it bare, and it looked like an old-fashioned battle between "we" and "they," both sides wanting to get theirs.

"Not that I understand what is going to happen," he told himself. "Or how a lot of shares affect the price of anything. But it seems pretty clear that Ryster wants what he thinks I've got pretty bad. Gosh, if he only knew I only have a hundred shares!"

He remembered Brood's voice saying:

"Keep your mouth shut and your eyes open, and they'll always imagine you twice as big as you are—afraid of you, that's what."

You had to hand it to the old boy; he certainly had something there. But—bitterly Dewert recalled the old copy-book maxim: "Oh, what a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive!"

He lifted the telephone and called Crump & Shriven.

"I want to know," he said, "the exact

status of my two hundred shares of Southways you hold—and their rights."

"Impossible to say now, sir, until the O.R.G. new issue is listed tomorrow. The value will be determined by public bidding, of course. You will have a hundred shares, worth whatever the market price is at the time you sell."

Bentley did not hear the door of his outer office open softly. His mind was dazed with figures real and hypothetical. If what Ryster had said was true, then his hundred shares would be worth over twelve thousand dollars at 125. A man could understand that, but—ten thousand dollars! Ten thousand *more!* No, he ought not to think of it that way. Ought to think how really small that sum is compared to what fifty thousand shares might be worth. You couldn't really believe Ryster was just offering ten thousand dollars to protect the dear public. Men aren't like that. Or are they—in Wall Street?

Decision, that's what he needed. Have to make decisions in this world. Nobody to do it for you. Can't do it by remote control or by Personal Mystery. One thing about Personal Mystery—you can't work it on yourself.

But the answer was no, of course. Ryster thought he had a lot of stock. But he really only had a modest little hundred shares. Ryster wasn't a fool; he wouldn't buy those "holdings" sight unseen. Or would he? He wasn't really buying. There was another name for it. He must feel pretty sure of being able to peg the opening price around 125 if he offered to pay that for an indefinite number of shares. Fishy, that. Something wrong. Something queer somewhere—or was it just imagination? Was he, Bentley, being too suspicious?

"HELLO, son." Bentley started in his seat. He knew that voice.

A man stepped into the room, stepped into the circle of light which flooded from Bentley's desk-lamp. It was Mr. Jo Caddis.

"Hello, son. Just dropped in. How about a little chat?"

"Oh," said Bentley faintly, "hello."

Caddis slid into a chair. "Well," he said, biting at a cigar's end and fumbling for a match, "tomorrow tells the story, eh?"

"Story?"

"Yeah, big story—O.R.G. story. You aren't gonna play dumb bunny on me again, son?"

"Oh," said Bentley, "that stock is listed."

"Yeah. That's what the papers say."

There was something odd there. The man had some reason for this visit. His eyes were too bright and watchful. He wanted something. They all wanted something down there on Wall Street.

"That isn't," said Bentley, now recovering from his earlier surprise, "what you came to tell me."

Caddis waited, then said: "Maybe not. You can read the papers."

"Well?"

"Well, son, I kinda like you. I'd hate to see yuh get stuck."

"I'm listening."

Caddis hunched in his seat. He looked more like a prosperous night-club owner than a Wall Street man. Probably a good promoter, at that. Probably sentimental under his hard exterior. Tough boys often are.

"Told you the other day I had a hunch that fellow Ryster was up to something—thought maybe you were playing stooge for him. Well, he was, only you weren't. Get it?"

"Partly," admitted Bentley.

"Well, get this—if you don't already know it. Ryster's playing both ends against the middle. Never mind his sanctimonious pose and his guilt-edged reputation. His father organized that firm, and his dad was okay—hard, but square. But when his son takes over a good sound business and plays with every pool that organizes and still goes around with a gosh-almighty air and a minister's mug, then it makes me sore." Bentley said:

"You must have some reason for all this, Mr. Caddis. Mr. Ryster's shortcomings don't really concern *me.*"

"The hell they don't. Just wait."

"All right, I'll wait."

"Another thing," said Jo, his iron grin getting harder, "I might have had a seat on the Exchange and been a decent citizen, no more of a crook than anybody who gets rich off other people's money, only that Ryster, he blackballed me. He has had his knife out for me all the time. Not that he cared, only it looked good for him to be protesting against a cheap promoter like me, see?"

"I see something," said Bentley. "What, precisely, are you driving at?"

"Well, I found out who is the jinx in this O.R.G. and Southways muddle. It's Ed Ryster. . . . Merrivale Brown and his crowd passed me up and gave Ryster a

call on a plenty big chunk of O.R.G. to help them peg up the price of the new issue so's they could dump their stuff and maybe turn another trick by short-selling against it after. The railroad found out that Brown was roping in all that Southways—him and old Jossop—and they went to a top-flight broker here to back them and operate a counter-pool to keep the price level from going haywire when the new stock is listed. They didn't know Ryster was working for Brown's crowd. They thought he was too respectable. And so the so-and-so is, like I said, playing one against the other. He—"

"You mean Ryster is representing both parties?"

"That's the general idea, son. I've done some fast investigating. I held ten thousand Southways—I told you that. I had to find things out, and I found 'em, plenty."

"But—why tell me? I appreciate it and all that, but—"

"I'm getting to it. I said I *held* ten thousand Southways. The rights are worth five thousand O.R.G. class B. I don't hold 'em any more."

"No?"

"No. I sold 'em to Ryster. He doesn't know where they came from. I got him nailed to the wall. My men got me seventy for the lot, and that's better than the forty I paid for Southways."

"Rather better, I'd say. But—"

"Wait, that aint all. This Ryster is in a jam. I just learned that the Exchange is gonna fire the new O.R.G. out. It won't be listed tomorrow. They've smelt a rat. They know there is some dirty work. Why? On account I fixed it so they'd find out. Little Jo Caddis, the fixer. And that makes Ryster into a nice ripe turnip. Now, laugh that off, son."

Bentley could laugh that off, and did. Then panic hit him.

"Wait, you mean there won't be—you mean my—er—holdings aren't going to be worth—"

"You could paper your room with 'em, son. They just aint. That is, unless you can sell 'em—tonight. That's what I come here for—to tell you maybe you can sell 'em to Ryster. He likes 'em. . . . Hey, wait!"

But Bentley was already half out of the door, his coat and hat trailing in his hands, his feet flying.

In the next installment our disciple of Personal Mystery gets into an even more exciting but wholly different jam. Be sure to read it.

REAL EX-

The Duel

I HAD been sent over to Coblenz on some business between the American and British headquarters. There were four of us in the party, a major, myself, (a captain) and two lieutenants. We were all members of a Highland regiment.

That evening we were guests at one of the regimental messes, and spent a very enjoyable evening. They broke up early, however; and when one of the captains suggested that we adjourn to a beer cellar, we gladly accepted, with the exception of the Major, who pleaded a headache and returned to the hotel. When we got out of the car, the American captain led us down a short flight of steps, opened a heavy wooden door, and we found ourselves in a long low room. The floor was covered with fine white river sand which deadened all footsteps. The paneled walls had small booths built against them. These booths were filled with German civilians.

A vacant booth was found for us, and we ordered lager. A small group of men singers appeared and sang German drinking-songs, in which the majority of the people present joined.

It grew late, and the majority of the patrons went home. Having a good time among ourselves, we were paying very little attention to our neighbors, when suddenly during a pause in our conversation, I heard a voice say in German (which I understood very well): "Those English swine, with their women's skirts, can certainly swill beer."

I looked around to see who had spoken, and saw a tall blond German in civilian garb whose broad erect shoulders, close-cropped hair and scarred cheeks signified the ex-Prussian Guard type of officer, glaring balefully at us. Then he said something to his half-dozen companions; they roared with laughter and pounded their steins on the table.

Our regimental doctor also understood German. He rose to his feet, walked to the civilians' table, and I heard him demand, in German, an apology for the remark that had been made. The tall

PERIENCES

A Highland officer matches his claymore training in a Heidelberg-style combat.

By ERIC STEWERT

scar-faced German sneered. One of his companions pushed the Doctor. I got to my feet just as the Doctor, regaining his balance, smashed in the face of the man who had pushed him. An uproar arose.

As I went to the Doctor's assistance, one of the civilians raised his stein and hit him on the head, knocking him to the floor. I knocked the fellow halfway across the room. At the same moment the big scar-faced German tried to grapple with me. I promptly knocked him down. Then the American captain, seizing two civilians, banged their heads together with such force that I thought he would crack their skulls.

The big man had regained his feet by now. He walked up to me, and produced a card-case. Taking a card from it, he handed it to me with a bow:

"My friends will call upon you tomorrow, Mr. Englishman."

Surprised, I glanced at the card and read the name of "Wilhelm von ——"

"Your name and address, sir," he demanded. I gave both. He bowed stiffly from the waist; and with his friends, left the room.

"What the devil is the matter with that Jerry? He's not challenged you, has he?" the Doctor demanded.

I showed him the card and said I didn't know why he'd given it to me. Then we all laughed, and went home.

But the next morning two formally dressed Germans called on me at the hotel, bearing a challenge from the big German. The Doctor and the Major were present. I told the visitors that I would be delighted to fight their friend with any weapon from pistols to cannon, at any place and any time.

They brightened up at once, and asked who were to be my seconds. Angry still, I indicated the Major and the Doctor. Those two began to protest vigorously, but I would not rescind my decision; and the Major, who in his youth had attended a German university, finally agreed to arrange the details of the affair. I was asked to withdraw.

Half an hour later, the Major and the Doctor came into the room where I waited. They both looked very worried.

Arrangements had been made for a duel between Von —— and myself, that evening. The weapons were to be sabers. The place of meeting was to be the beer-garden.

For the rest of the day I was in a cold sweat. I was no swordsman. The claymore that I carried on service was something like a saber, but though I had had a few hours' practice with it when in training four years before, I'd never used the blooming thing. The Doctor attempted to cheer me up with such remarks as, "Now, don't worry, old man; I'll be right there to sew you up. . . . A clean cut doesn't hurt very much," and so on. I finally locked the door.

At the Major's suggestion, I ate a very small dinner. Then we got into a car driven by the American captain, who had insisted on being present.

We arrived at the beer-garden a few minutes before the time appointed. With the exception of the man who let us in, there was only Von ——, his seconds, who had called on me that morning, and in a corner a chap in a white coat who was laying a lot of shining instruments on a table. A sand-covered carpet was placed on the floor. Then two chairs were set on it about twenty feet apart. Von —— retired to a corner of the room, and the Major led me to another. He told me to strip to the waist; when I had done so, he wound a heavy silk scarf around my throat. It came high, nearly to my chin. Then he put a leather coat on me. It was really only half a coat, for while it covered the right arm, shoulder and side of my body, it left the left side and arm entirely bare. It did however cover my heart, and was heavily padded. There was a sort of blacksmith's apron attached to this coat that was supposed to be tied over each thigh. I was wearing my kilts, however; and in spite of the Major's protests, I would not exchange them for trousers. Though frightened, I recalled the German's remarks about "women's skirts;" and if I died for it, I'd wear them. Then my right arm was bandaged in three places, with heavy tape—on the forearm, elbow and on the muscles of the upper arm. When he had finished, I found I could not bend my arm. The Major had the American captain hold it out for me, so that it would not get tired before the fight started. Then the finish-

ing touches were made—a pair of goggles went over my eyes, and a thick coat of grease on my forehead. This was to stop blood from a head cut from getting under the goggles.

The Major dressed himself in an outfit that looked something like an American baseball catcher's stomach-pad and mask. Another man appeared, a fine-looking old gentleman. He, I guessed, was the referee or umpire.

Then the German and I were placed about two yards apart, and each given a very sharp-looking saber, with a large guard. I noticed that the Major and my antagonist's second each had one as well.

The Major took my left arm and made me grab the back of my kilts. He told me to be sure to keep it there, or I'd get it chopped off.

The old gentleman made a little speech about obeying the fencing rules; as I knew none, I wondered if I'd lose on a foul. Then the old gentleman said something, and my opponent slashed. I managed to meet his saber with my own. Then he slashed again, and again I guarded. This happened twice more, and then the Major and the other second pushed us both back. It was the first round, or the equivalent. The seconds stepped back after about thirty seconds, and my opponent slashed at me again. I threw up my guard but his saber cut me slightly on the forehead; I could feel blood running down over the grease. I managed to parry the next three blows.

The next round, I swung swiftly; and though Von —— managed to guard the stroke, the next one caught him on the side of the head. I saw blood spout as he reeled away; then the seconds rushed in.

My opponent was led to a chair. His surgeon hurried over. The American captain whispered that I'd just cut off one of the German's ears.

A few moments later the judge announced that I had won. He added, however, that the stroke I had used was not recognized, and in a regular duel between swordsmen would disqualify me.

I got dressed again with the Doctor's help. I wanted to go over and shake hands with Von ——, but his seconds said that he did not want to see me.

I left the place. When I undressed that night, I found that besides the cut in my head, I had two smaller ones on my left shoulder, and the next morning I could not use my left arm.

Back at my regiment's barracks, I received a lot of ragging from the rest of the mess. The Colonel, waiting until the bandage had disappeared from my head, called me in and made me tell him all about it unofficially. Then he shook hands with me and said, "We may wear skirts, Captain, but there's nothing womanish about us, eh?" And he winked.

New England Hurricane

(Continued from page 5)

our hands clinging for dear life to the heavy wires. We had been there only a short time when wind and water lifted Eleanor's car over the fence, flattened at that point, and rolled it down into the mad inland sea—out of sight.

We clung to the fence for about an hour and a half, up to our knees in water, at times, while now and then masses of spray would shoot up from the rocky cliffs and fall on our heads.

It was getting to be twilight, with the lowering skies, when the door of a little automobile, perched on the grass about fifty feet to the right, opened, and a man beckoned us. We hooked arms again and staggered to the car. Joy of joys, a man and his daughter were the only occupants, and asked us to get in. It was very tiny, but we all managed to squeeze in, we four on the back seat, and Mr. D— and the two owners in front. The worst was over. It was six-thirty P.M. and we knew the tide was going out. At least we did not have to stand up against that terrible wind, huddled together, straining every muscle to cling to the fence, drenched every few minutes with salt water, sand and seaweed all over us.

Darkness settled; finally, on the Ocean Drive, we distinctly saw headlights, and men walking. Mr. D— and Mr. P— got out and stumbled toward them.

Imagine our joy when they returned with help. By a lucky accident some man with a very grand car had abandoned it up on the road, and he insisted on these wreckers coming out with ropes, chains and a big truck to salvage it that night. There were men and lanterns, and we were loaded in and taken home.

We urged our rescuers to go back for more refugees, and I hope all were saved that night. We had seen dozens of cars rolling down into the inland sea. What became of the people, we do not know.

Shots in the Dark

A young officer in Spanish Morocco fights a strange enemy.

By J. CABRERA DE MOYA

IT was in the year of grace 1912 that I was transferred to the native squadrons of the Command of Larache, in western Spanish Morocco. At that time I was a seventeen-year-old second Lieutenant, just out of the Military Hospital, where I had been confined by some wounds got during the Rio Kert campaign.

Our camp on this particular night was almost perfect, tactically, because it was surrounded by boulders which made a natural breastwork for riflemen; but it was by no means conducive to a good night's sleep, being floored chiefly with spiky weeds and sharp-edged rocks.

So when I went into the tent prepared for me by my orderly, I found that the bedding of cut grass he had provided was no match for the stones beneath; soon I gave up trying to sleep there, and stepped outside. As luck would have it, I immediately spotted the white dot of a square Moorish house on a hill near by.

It was a deserted house, according to the reports of our patrols, and no enemy tribesmen were lurking within a radius of several miles. And so in spite of orders, I decided to take a couple of blankets and have a good night's sleep there.

I pushed the door of the house open, and went in. The interior of the house seemed utterly empty, except for some bundles of firewood left behind by the occupants.

That was all I wanted to know. I spread one of my blankets down in a corner, lay down on it, and wrapped the other one around me. My folded coat acted as a pillow, but I kept my boots and breeches on. I placed my automatic at my side, and fell asleep.

I haven't the slightest idea how long after that it was, for the moon had faded from the sky, that I was awakened by a slight rustling noise. My heart leaped, for it wasn't precisely comforting to think that some big leathery Moor, his two-foot dagger ready for use, might be prowling about with ideas about my destruction.

"Perhaps it's only a rat," I thought.

Then I suddenly heard the rustling noise again—but louder. It definitely wasn't a rat!

My icy hand slid toward the spot where I thought I had put my automatic—and didn't touch it. I had to find that gun! I groped, twisted my body, searched on the other side—and in so doing, one of my spurs grated on the rough flat stones of the floor.

The rustling stopped instantly. But another sound succeeded it: the crashing of twigs.

Then my fears were confirmed that somebody else was in the room, either crawling or walking stealthily. . . . But where? Toward me, or toward the door?

An icy perspiration covered my forehead. My hands moved frantically around my body—still no gun! I thought I'd go insane with the suspense, when a rough voice suddenly growled something in Arabic.

Naturally, I kept my mouth shut.

Then, suddenly, my elbow touched a hard object. I blessed all the saints in the calendar, for it was my automatic.

At that moment, the stranger spoke again. And this time I understood one of his words: it was *"Dib,"* which meant that he was calling me a dog—he evidently meant trouble! I fired a bullet in the direction of the rough voice, and leaped out of my corner. Just in time, too, for a bullet struck stone with a jangling sound on the very spot which my body had just left!

Again I fired in the direction of the gun's flash, which had been swallowed up by the Stygian darkness, and quickly

shifted my own position. But I landed on my knees on some thorny branches which ripped my legs, and couldn't help swearing. A bullet immediately whizzed so close to one of my ears that I felt the rush of air whip my cheek.

Suddenly I noticed that the door was ajar. A quick lunge brought me to it, and I managed to kick it open without exposing myself on the threshold—a move that would have made me too easy a target. But I had barely done so when a bullet from somewhere outside whistled past me, and hit the door-jamb right beside me.

The following minutes were one of the most horrible nightmares imaginable—one of those nightmares where you dash around with lightning speed, and yet feel that you're getting nowhere! I fired rapidly, changing place at every round. And the man or men in the house fired as continually. The fellow in the bushes outside also kept on emptying his gun at us.

Then I heard the quick staccato of a bugle sounding the alarm in the camp. The racket of loud commands drew closer to the hill and the house where I was marooned.

I was painfully aware that I had only two rounds left, and no other fresh cartridge clip, when strong hands suddenly grabbed me and brought me down. My elbow struck the stone floor, and the automatic flew from my grasp. But with a quick heave of my body, and the strength of utter desperation, I succeeded in shaking off my assailant. Mad with fury, convinced that it was a battle to the death, I jumped on him, prepared to kill with my bare hands. My fists dug into a naked torso; then clawing fingers raked my face. Punching, kicking, scratching, trying to get a strangle-hold on each other, we rolled to the ground, cutting ourselves on the piles of splintery wood. For an instant a terrific blow on my jaw nearly knocked me out, but I overcame the fit of dizziness and struck back savagely.

Then the night around us was filled with Spanish voices, ordering the surrender of the Moros in the house. I was under at that moment, but I struck up viciously with one knee, and heard my adversary grunt with pain. Taking advantage of that brief respite, I shouted to the soldiers outside to come in at the double-quick.

As I had expected, my enemy rolled away from me, but I was completely dumfounded when I heard him start cursing in fluent Spanish!

A lighted torch glared on the threshold, throwing its scarlet glow on the wide-eyed faces of a compact row of cavalrymen holding their rifles ready. Those bearded native troopers of the squadron looked to me like angels straight from heaven.

I got up, wiping the blood from a gash in my face, and looked around for the enemy with whom I had fought that nearly fatal duel in the dark—and I saw Peralta, the top sergeant of the troop.

WE both looked and felt like utter fools, when the bearded cavalrymen began laughing uncontrollably.

"A thousand pardons, Teniente!" Peralta exclaimed. "I was freezing, and came up to this house to try and keep warm. I put a blanket down, but peeled off my coat and shirt, so as to sleep comfortably. Then I started to lie down, when I suddenly heard a mumbling sound in the corner—"

"It was probably my snoring!" I interrupted.

"No doubt, sir." Peralta conceded. "But I was so startled, that I sat up with a jerk. In doing that, I upset some of that piled-up wood."

So that had been the noise that had awakened me! Peralta's challenge in Arabic—in the belief that he had to do with a tribesman—precipitated the horrible duel in the night. And my surmise that I was fighting two men was due to Peralta's final ruse of throwing a stick in my direction—hoping that I would fire at it as soon as it fell, so show him my position!

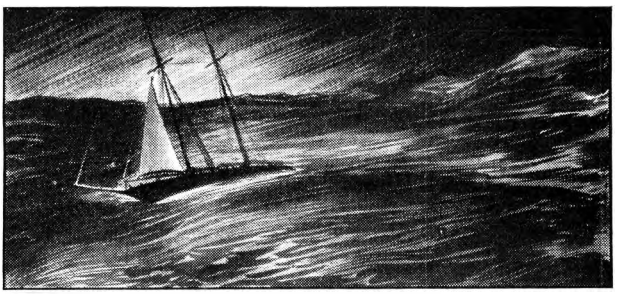
"What I'd like to know," I finally exclaimed, "was who the devil was taking pot-shots at me from the outside?"

A young Moroccan cavalryman—one of the outflung scouts—came forward. He had seen Peralta sneaking into the house, and had come closer, to find out if he was a friend or an enemy. Then he had begun to fire at the house, in the belief that some cornered rebel tribesmen were firing at him from inside.

It was all very simple, and made me feel like a consummate ass. And as long as I was with that particular squadron of native cavalrymen, their sense of humor prevented their ever forgetting it. Every time that we passed some isolated native house, those damned troopers would look, first at it, then at me,—and shake with silent laughter!

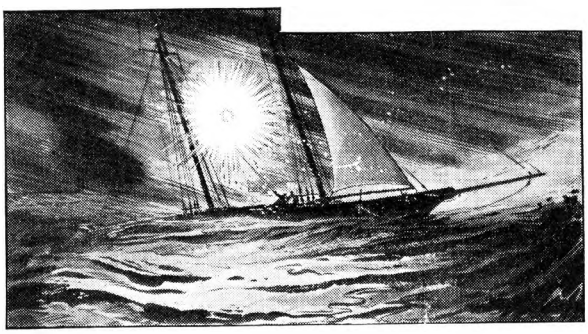
IF I FAILED...WE WERE ALL DEAD MEN

LASHED TO SHROUDS OF SINKING, BURNING SCHOONER, SAILORS SEE HOPE OF RESCUE FADE

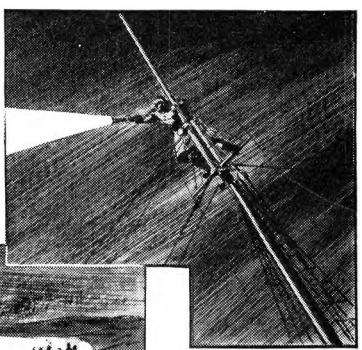


❶ "The dream of my life, for which I had saved since I first went to sea at twelve, had come true!" writes Capt. Hans Milton of 610 West 111th St., New York City. "I was making my first voyage as master and owner of my own vessel, the two-masted topsail schooner 'Pioneer,' when the hurricane of last September caught us 400 miles off Nantucket.

❷ "We were pumping to keep afloat when we passed into the windless vortex of the storm where the waves were leaping and jumping crazily and where they crashed in our companion ways and filled the ship beyond hope of saving her. The five of us and the cat scrambled aloft for our lives. Our deck-load of lumber kept us afloat and without fresh water and with almost no food we lived, lashed to the rigging, for three endless days and nights.



❸ "Once a steamer hove in sight—but failing to see our distress signals, went her way. At 3 a.m. on the fourth morning steamer lights showed momentarily over the wild sea. We rigged a huge ball of sails and blankets, soaked it with gasoline, touched it off and hoisted it aloft.



❹ "But the steamer did not change her course. She thought we were fishing. The wind blew burning fragments back on the ship setting her afire in various places. I could see the stern light of the steamer going away from us. *If I couldn't stop her, we were all dead men!* I climbed to the fore-top and in desperation pulled my flashlight from my back pocket and in Morse code signalled 'Sinking... SOS... Help!'

❺ "Slowly, I saw the ship turn! In her last hour afloat, all of us and the cat were saved from the sinking, burning 'Pioneer' by those fine seamen of the United States Liner 'American Banker' and by the power of two tiny 'Eveready' *fresh* DATED batteries that stood by us in the blackest hour of our lives!"

(*Signed*) Captain Hans Milton

FRESH BATTERIES LAST LONGER... *Look for the* DATE-LINE

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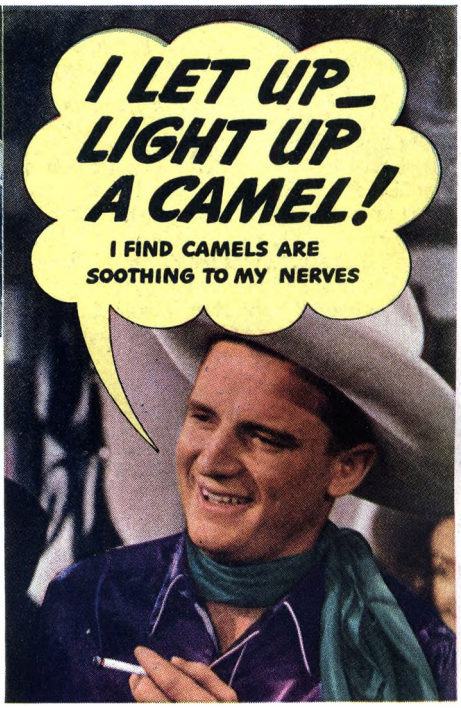
Unit of Union Carbide UCC *and Carbon Corporation*

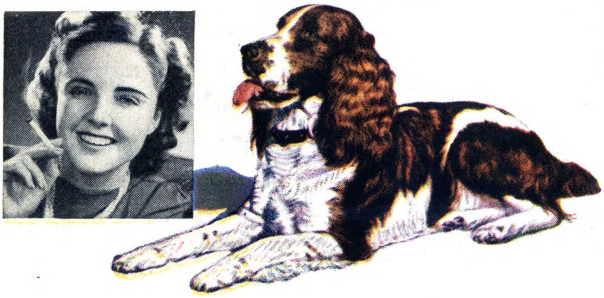
"You bet Stunt Riding is a strain on the Nerves!"

says Carl Dossey, CHAMPIONSHIP COWBOY AND RODEO STAR



"RIDE 'EM, COWBOY!" . . . and Arizona's Carl Dossey *does*—with the brilliant rodeo horsemanship that's won him two bareback championships in California, and a high-point cowboy title at the big Cedar City (Utah) show. He's pictured above in a breath-taking stunt at New York's Madison Square Garden. No room in *this* performance for tense, jittery nerves! Later, over a Camel, Carl explains his way of sidestepping nerve strain . . . a pleasant way you'll want to adopt.

MUCH CAN BE LEARNED ABOUT NERVES BY OBSERVING THE DOG



THE English Springer Spaniel (*above*) is speedy, agile—an especially good gun dog. He has a highly developed nervous system remarkably similar to our own . . . sensitive, high-keyed. But, unlike many humans, this dog doesn't ABUSE his nerves. When a dog feels tired, he rests INSTINCTIVELY! We often let will-power whip us on, deaf to the warning that nerves are getting frayed. Yet how much more pleasant life can be when nerves are rested now and then. Pause frequently . . . LET UP—LIGHT UP A CAMEL! You'll welcome Camel's mildness—rich, ripe flavor. Smokers find Camel's COSTLIER tobaccos are soothing to the nerves.

NO DOUBT about the nerve strain in Dossey's life. But often we don't realize how tense nerves can get in every-day occupations—perhaps in your own. Miss Ferril (*below*) avoids nerve strain as so many smokers do . . . by letting up—lighting up a Camel!

"ACCURACY IS VITAL in my job," says Elsie Ferril, who works all day at an adding machine. "My work requires intense concentration. I can't afford jittery nerves. So, when I feel nerve tension coming on, I let up—light up a Camel. I find this a pleasant way to soothe my nerves."

Smoke 6 packs of Camels and find out why they are the largest-selling cigarette in America

Smokers find Camel's Costlier Tobaccos are SOOTHING TO THE NERVES