Price 25 Cents
30 Cents in Canada

JULY 1928

THE Illustrated BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

N.S.E.

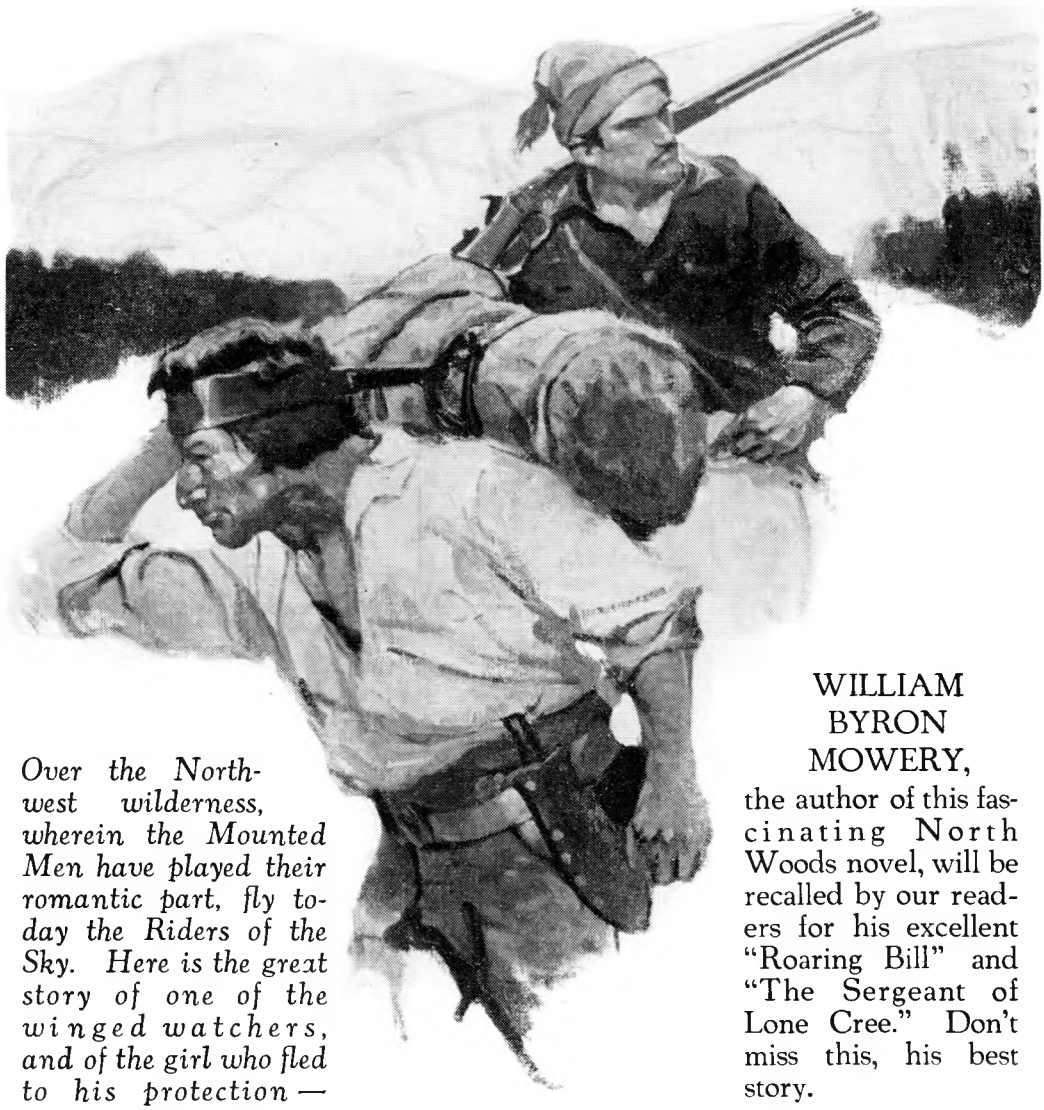
A Fighting Novel of Savage Abyssinia

$500 in Cash for Real Experiences

The FOREST LEGION By Arthur Hawthorne Carhart

Also Beatrice Grimshaw, Clarence Herbert New, E.S. Pladwell & Others

JULY 1928 THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE VOL. 47 No. 3



Over the Northwest wilderness, wherein the Mounted Men have played their romantic part, fly today the Riders of the Sky. Here is the great story of one of the winged watchers, and of the girl who fled to his protection —

WILLIAM BYRON MOWERY, the author of this fascinating North Woods novel, will be recalled by our readers for his excellent "Roaring Bill" and "The Sergeant of Lone Cree." Don't miss this, his best story.

"Hearts Aflight"

With many other attractive contributions by the world's best writers, in the June number of

THE RED BOOK MAGAZINE

Now on Sale at All News-stands

The Consolidated Magazines Corporation, Publisher, 36 So. State St., Chicago

Real-Pay Positions Every Year

For Readers of this Amazing Book

IT MAY sound startling to you, but the fact remains that this institution receives calls for 50,000 salesmen each year. And that means 50,000 real pay jobs in a field where the largest rewards go for a man's efforts—selling.

These calls are for salesmen, sales managers and sales executives; they come from wholesalers, manufacturers and jobbers in all lines all over the American continent. And the sad part about it is we have never been able to half supply the demand for men who have taken our result-securing system of Salesmanship Training—a system described in an amazing little volume which is now being sent free to ambitious men.

Employers everywhere are well aware of the fact that students of our Course in Salesmanship invariably become top-notch producers—hence the demand and also the opportunity for ambitious men who place their futures in our hands.

SALESMEN ARE MADE, NOT "BORN"

There is nothing mysterious about selling—as you may be surprised to discover for yourself by reading the book pictured at the right; it is merely a matter of learning certain rules and principles. The men whose pictures are shown above once thought that salesmen were "born" and not made. Today they are making big incomes selling. Reading from left to right we find F. G. Walsh was a clerk earning only $1,000 a year. He sent for a free copy of "Modern Salesmanship" and last year reported earnings of $7,286. C. D. Oliver jumped from $200 a month to as high as $1,000 in seven days. C. W. Birmingham was a clerk in a shop in Ohio earning $15 a week. He reported his earnings at $7,500 a year as a salesman—and gives the N. S. T. A. full credit for his success. C. V. Champion, at the extreme right, reported earning over $10,000 a year and is president of his company.

And these men once thought selling was a "gift."

YOU CAN QUALIFY QUICKLY

Yes, any man of ordinary intelligence can quickly become a master salesman and enjoy the big rewards that go with it. More than twenty years of experience in training and placing men in real-pay selling jobs proves it. Just as you learned the alphabet, you can master the secrets of selling as taught by the National Salesmen's Training Association. And through the National Demonstration Method—an exclusive feature of our training—you gain the equivalent of actual experience while studying at home in your spare time.

And right now, as you will see in the $10,000 announcement to the left, there is an additional incentive for you to make quick use of the coupon below.

REMARKABLE BOOK FREE

Right now we are offering to send you a copy of the amazing man-building volume called "Modern Salesmanship," absolutely free. This vital book contains hundreds of surprising and little-known facts about salesmanship; blasts dozens of time-worn theories—and outlines a plan that will enable almost any man to realize his ambition for bigger pay. No matter what your opinion may now be "Modern Salesmanship" will open your eyes and give you a new insight into this fascinating and highly-paid profession. Send the coupon in today.

National Salesmen's Training Association
Dept. H-31, N.S.T.A. Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

NOW FREE!

$10,000

It has just been announced throughout the country that Mr. J. E. Greenslade, President of the National Salesmen's Training Association, Chicago, has established what is known as the J. E. GREENSLADE $10,000 BETTER SALESMANSHIP ENDOWMENT. There are 160 National and State cash awards and many leading sales managers, corporation officials and public men are on the Board of Judges. Every ambitious man has a fair chance to win a cash prize irrespective of location or lack of selling experience.

ENORMOUS DEMAND FOR TRAINED SALESMEN

Selling is the one profession in which there is always a big demand for men. Salesmen can always keep busy. There are city and traveling positions open in hundreds of lines everywhere. This is attested to by the requests for even more than 50,000 men annually received by the N. S. T. A. Employment service is free both to our members and employers and the fact that thousands have secured positions through this service is a glowing tribute to the thoroughness and practicability of our Training and Service.

It will not obligate you in any manner to get all the amazing details. See what has happened to thousands of men like yourself after they once had all the facts laid before them.

National Salesmen's Training Assn., Dept. H-31, N.S.T.A. Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

Without obligating me in any way send me a copy of "Modern Salesmanship." Also your brochure giving details of the $10,000 Cash Awards—also full details of your System of Training and Free Employment Service.

Name.....

Address.....

City.....State.....

Age.....Occupation.....

THE BLUE BOOK

EDWIN BALMER, Editor
DONALD KENNICOTT, Associate Editor

Cover Design: Painted by J. Allen St. John to illustrate "Spears in the Sun."
Frontispiece: "Men Who Won the West—William Clark." Drawn by William Molt.

Two Exceptional Serials

Stirring Short Stories

THE CONSOLIDATED MAGAZINES CORPORATION, Publisher, The Blue Book Magazine,
36 South State Street, Chicago, Ill.

LOUIS ECKSTEIN
President

CHARLES M. RICHTER
Vice-President

RALPH K. STRASSMAN
Vice-President

Office of the Advertising Director, 420 Lexington Avenue, New York City, N. Y.
LONDON OFFICES, 6 Henrietta St., Covent Garden, London, W. C.
Entered as second-class matter July 24, 1906, at the post office at Chicago, Illinois, under the Act of Congress of March 3, 1879.

MAGAZINE

JULY, 1928

Special Notice to Writers and Artists:
Manuscripts and art material submitted for publication in The Blue Book Magazine will only be received on the understanding that the publisher and editors shall not be responsible for loss or injury thereto while such manuscripts or art material are in the publisher's possession or in transit.

Photo by U. S. Forest Service

ARTHUR H. CARHART

The author of "The Forest Legion," that fine novel of present-day Colorado which begins on page 7, was himself a Forest Ranger and well knows their life and the battles which he so vividly describes. This picture was taken in the Superior National Forest, but the Rockies are his real habitat—as witness his well-remembered novelette "Bridges Over Purgatory" and this his best story so far:

"The Forest Legion"

SUBSCRIPTION PRICE: $3.00 a year in advance. Canadian postage 50c per year. Foreign postage $1.00 per year. Subscriptions are received by all newsdealers and booksellers, or may be sent direct to the Publisher. Remittances must be made by Draft, Post Office or Express Money Order, by Registered Letter or by Postage Stamps of 2-cent denomination, and not by check, because of exchange charges against the latter.

IMPORTANT NOTICE: Do not subscribe for THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE through an agent unknown to you personally, or you may find yourself defrauded. Many complaints are received from people who have paid cash to some swindler, in which event, of course, the subscription never reaches this office.

THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE is issued on the first of the month preceding its date (July issue out June 1st), and is for sale by all newsdealers after that time. In the event of failure to obtain copies at news-stands or on trains, a notification to the Publisher will be appreciated.

Advertising forms close on the third of second month preceding date of issue. Advertising rates on application.

THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE
Vol. 47 JULY 1928 No. 3

The Important News

IN 1846, when steamships were an experiment and an Atlantic cable a dream, Charles Dickens' "Dombey and Son" was being published in the serial form of its day—not in a magazine, but in pamphlets which were printed from time to time as the author finished an installment. So it happened that once that year, when a ship from England docked at Boston Harbor, a bystander on the quay quite naturally called out to a passenger standing by the rail ready to disembark, inquiring what was the latest news in England—and this is the answer he received:

"Paul Dombey is dead."

In other words, this traveler felt that the most important event of the month was the imaginary death of a person who never even existed! We know of no better illustration of the significance of good fiction to all of us—or of the affection we feel toward the friends an able author creates for us.

The Paul Dombeys of our own day are to be found between the pages of our magazines; and the greatest gift a magazine provides its readers is the acquaintance with interesting characters which it offers. We feel this very strongly here, and it is from this point of view that the stories which follow are chosen. They must have action, of course; and a picturesque background is equally of course an asset; but first of all a story must be peopled with men and women you enjoy knowing —fellows like Angus MacPherson, that gallant far-venturing Scot of James Edwin Baum's remarkable "Spears in the Sun," for instance: that novel is exceptional for its unusual and authentic background, and lively because of its stirring action; but it would be a poor thing if MacPherson and the American girl and the two old Westerners—yes, and the quaint interpreter—did not seem real and likable people to the reader.

So too with Brad Ogden and Tillamook and the other folk of Arthur Carhart's fine novel of present-day Colorado, "The Forest Legion," which begins on page 7. Real people, these—an actual addition to one's circle of friends.

And the Old Guard of Blue Book characters—the Free Lances, Trevor and Lammerford and Sir Abdool; those stalwarts of Warren Miller's Foreign Legion stories, Hortet, Sergeant Ike, Knecht and Anzac Bill; Dr. Galt of Culpeper Zandtt's series—these and their like are the folks that make a magazine not only worth reading but a really important thing in our lives. . . . .

Again next month you may enjoy most of these old friends in these pages, and meet new ones equally rewarding—the courageous hero of H. Bedford-Jones' fine Malay-land novelette, for example. And again next month you may meet your fellow-readers at the most interesting occasions in their lives through their prize-winning stories of real experience. . . . . Again next month, in short, you will find most important news in this magazine.

—*The Editors.*

Drawn by William Molt

MEN WHO WON THE WEST

William Clark

A PIONEER of pioneers, William Clark shared with his chief Meriwether Lewis the myriad adventures of their epic journey up the Missouri, across the unknown Rockies and down the unexplored Columbia. As an example of their almost daily hazards the occasion when Clark—with the young Indian woman guide known as the Bird-Woman and her husband Charboneau—was caught in a cloudburst is typical: "The rain appeared to descend in a body and instantly collected in the rivene and came down in a roling torrent with irresistible force driving rocks, mud and everything before it which opposed its passage. Captain C. fortunately discovered it a moment before it reached them and seizing his gun and shot pouch with his left hand, with his right he assisted himself up the steep bluff, shoving occasionally the Indian woman before him who had her child in her arms; Sharbono had the woman by the hand endeavoring to pull her up the hill but was so much frightened that he remained frequently motionless and but for Captain C. both himself and his woman and child must have perished."

On the return journey Clark separated from Lewis in order to explore the Yellowstone River, and succeeded in mapping an extensive region, though the Crow Indians stole all his horses.

Later Clark became governor of Missouri, and was for some sixteen years superintendent of Indian affairs.

The
FOREST LEGION

By

ARTHUR HAWTHORNE CARHART

A tremendously interesting novel of the real modern West—of the battle of the Forest Service men against old-guard ranchmen who fight against progress and conservation. The author was himself a Forest Ranger—you will remember him for his "Bridges over Purgatory."

Illustrated by Paul Lehman

PEACE brooded over the timberline meadows that mottled the rounded sides of Lodgepole Ridge. Tickled by a faint breeze, the countless starry flowers decorating the edges of the open areas as though for carnival, nodded and twinkled. Tiny winds scurried through the tangles of twisted limbs and twigs cloaking the wizened trunks of high-country spruce. These gnome trees were the outer guards of the sturdy spruce and lodgepole pine which, farther down on the ridge, made thick forest.

Softly, like the echo of some elfin wood-drum, came the *clop-clop* of horses' hoofs on the trail. The sprite of a chipmunk that had been stretched out on a moldering stump sunning himself, snapped alert, frisked nervously, scolded and dived toward cover. The camp-robber jay that had been solemnly strutting about like a gray-robed judge investigating the refuse that garnished an old campfire, sprang from the ash-strewn ground, flapped his way through the clean air to the tip of a spike-topped spruce and sat waiting expectantly.

The disturbance grew louder, reached a soft chorus of slow hoof-beats, was first felt as a vibration in the air and then became a sound. From the thick screen of tangled spruce at the point where the trail emerged from the timber, there came the first saddle horse, a big rangy gray with droopy ears but a large intelligent eye and powerful muscles.

Sitting lazily in the saddle was a man tanned by long living under the blue skies of Colorado's highlands. A big nose, generous mouth, laugh-wrinkles at its corners, sun-wrinkles lacing his countenance, his deep-set eyes that flashed under brows that were slightly bushy and grizzled by the sun, gave life to his browned face. When he smiled, white, shining teeth, strong, even, gleamed in contrast to his weathered cheeks.

A second man, riding a blocky bay, came in sight. Like the first, he had a pack-horse in tow.

"Let 'em blow a little, Tillamook," advised the first rider.

Both dismounted, felt of cinches, threw reins over the heads of the saddle animals, and then stood looking over the far expanse of timber-mantled ridges and draws. The horses waited a moment, then swung down their heads and began to munch half-heartedly at the range grasses.

The man addressed as Tillamook was tall, angular, with big red hands, florid face, a neck that was marked by a prominent Adam's apple and red wrinkled skin. His face was partly hidden by a large wind-seared mustache the color of weathered straw. Tillamook Thompson, Forest Ranger on the Cañon Creek Division of the Pinos Altos National Forest, was no beauty; but he was upstanding, square, likable. The other man, he who had ordered the rest and now stood quietly beside Tillamook, was the ranger's chief, Bradley Ogden, supervisor of the forest.

The report of a high-powered rifle came in the wake of that death-freighted bullet. Silver staggered, sank forward.

FAR down the mountain-side a playing wind-spirit riffled the forest. In its wake came a sound, faint, rhythmic, unmistakable.

"Some one's comin'," observed Tillamook. "Drivin' a car like sin up the road yonder."

Brad Ogden's face clouded as his eyes centered for a moment on the point where a twisty woods road swung into view. Then he turned without comment to the forest panorama breaking away below their high outlook point.

"Sight for tired eyes," said Bradley Ogden as he turned to Tillamook. "Thick timber there. A lot of it is lodgepole pine and will never make anything but ties and telephone poles. But there is other, better, forest coming up under the protection of that weedy growth. Some day it will be big saw-logs where there's nothing but sapling stuff now. Those trees will then tower over the little valleys like pillars of some big cathedral."

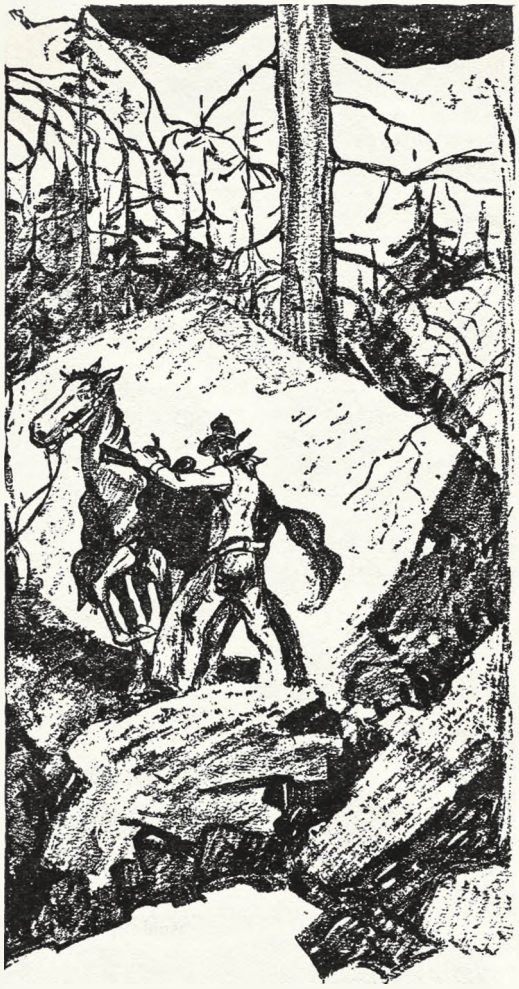
Brad paused, sighed.

"Gosh, that'll be a show for those who follow us. I wonder if they'll think of the fight we've had to protect this army of baby trees."

"Naw," replied Tillamook. "We're just fightin' fer principle, I reckon—me and you and the others. We'll never get credit, pussonally. Why worry about it? Time'll come when the job we're doin' here'll stand out like a white tent in a black night. Real forest comin' on down there. When the time comes, the old forest'll speak fer herself. Why fret about who's did it just so it gets did?"

"Guess that's the truth, Tillamook," mused Brad. "Getting the thing did is the problem. It's the big ideals of Roosevelt and Pinchot that counts. Conservation. Rational use, which *is* conservation."

Silence fell again save for the rising murmur of the approaching motor. And presently a long, powerful car, stripped of all excess equipment, came churning into the opening. Brad spoke.



"That's Ted. Looking for us, I'll bet. Driving that old Trail Blazer roadster of hers like there was a fire somewhere. Something's up. Certain."

"Reckon that's right, Brad. Let's mosey over to where the trail crosses the road at the pass. We can be there by the time that car pulls the grade."

TILLAMOOK ambled loose-jointedly over to his big bay, climbed into the saddle, holding the lead rope of his pack-horse in his big red hand. The Ranger reached down and adjusted the rifle that hung in a scabbard from the saddle.

Brad looked back toward the point at which the drumming motor was filling the forest with its roar, scowled a little more deeply, felt of the cinch of his saddle and then paused a moment to rub the nose of his horse.

"You're some old warhorse, Silver," he said, slapping the hairy cheek. "Some old mountain nag. One of your friends comin' up here hell-bent in that auto to call on us. Ready to travel?"

The horse turned, butted his head against the man in answer to the hearty caress. The forest man again rubbed the soft nose of the horse, then laughed a little and vaulted into the saddle. A good horse is almost a brother of the outdoors to the foresters.

Down the hill to the pass, kicking rocks in the trail, snorting as he took mincing, choppy steps, Silver led the way. They reached the bottom of the steep little pitch. The riders dismounted.

Jumping, bouncing over ruts, clawing with rubber grip at loose rocks in the road, the long, low-strung roadster slewed around the bend of the last switchback. Then it was pulled from the side of the narrow road and with brakes squealing, rolled out on the grassy surface of the gentle slope.

From the low set driver's seat there sprang a trim figure in a weathered range hat, whip-cord breeches, pliable oil tanned moccasin pack boots, and soft buckskin colored wool shirt over which was a light leather sleeveless vest.

Almost as the boot soles hit the gravelly soil, a slim gloved hand shot up and whipped away the big hat. A tangle of sunny bobbed curls puffed around the slim, alert face that had been shaded under the hat brim. The girl left the car and came swinging up the easy slope toward the two foresters with rapid graceful stride.

Brad Ogden felt a queer tug at his heart for an instant as he saw her. She was boyish, vivid, athletic, with the strong full-muscled young body of a woods nymph. Ruddy color was in her cheeks. Wind-fingers playfully caressed the fluffy mass of fine hair. Her every move bespoke an alert mind and healthy muscles.

The quick little stinging feeling that nipped Brad passed almost instantly. He trotted forward to meet her. For this girl, Theodora Hathaway, with all her charm, was Brad's right-hand man, his efficient office manager—forest clerk of the Pinos Altos.

"Gee, I'm lucky. Thought I might not find you," cried Ted breathlessly.

"But where's the fire?" inquired Ogden.

"There's no fire," she said seriously. "There's something up. Real trouble. Hurley Moon was in town last night. He tried to get to see you—couldn't find you and finally came down to Mrs. Bashford's boarding-house and asked to see me. He says the cattlemen are framing up some deviltry for tonight's meeting. They're laying for you. Want to get you into a

fight. Eli Gordon and Jap Banks especially. Hurley intimated that his father, Lucius Moon, was on the warpath, too."

"Humph. Maybe more threats like those in the past."

"Hurley doesn't think so. He's worried."

"Did he say what they plan on doing?"

"He doesn't know definitely. Just something he heard yesterday morning while he was at the Leetsdale post office. He thinks it's some sort of a frame-up to get you into a row and beat you up—scare you."

BRAD shrugged. "I'll try to hang tight to my temper. It takes two to make a fight, Ted."

"But one can start it. You know that this Cañon Creek bunch of cattlemen are just looking for any way to hurt you. They've not succeeded yet. You've kept out of some of their traps."

"I'm not ready to come to grips with that bunch yet. I'll get there some day and when I do, I'll be ready for a showdown. But I don't think it'll come tonight."

"The grazing allotment question comes up tonight, doesn't it, Brad?"

"Yes. They've all been reduced on an equal basis, and only because we had to do it."

"It may all be fair enough in your eyes as supervisor. Those men wont see it, though. They don't want to. They think so long as it's Government land, they should be allowed to graze all they wish."

"And ruin the range doing it. They've done that already. That's one reason for reducing the allotment, this overgrazing in the past."

"You don't have to preach to me, Brad. I know all that. But they don't see it—and they mean trouble. I'd never driven that old bus of mine up here over that mountain turnpike with all its ruts and jolts without thinking that this was serious, Brad. The old hearse can't stand much punishment like that."

Brad chuckled. Ted's old, powerful stripped roadster had pioneered under her guidance over every passable auto trail in the forest.

"Wipe that smile off, Brad!" Ted's voice was sharp. "It may be funny to you. You don't seem to appreciate that I've got up early, wrecked my beauty sleep and driven hard, just to keep you from galloping headlong and blindly into a peck of grief. If you go and they carry out their scheme, they'll gang you, maybe give you a whale of a beating. It doesn't sound so terribly funny to me!"

"Now, old scout, just you don't worry." Brad reached out and patted her shoulder reassuringly. "Tillamook, Hurley Moon and I will be able to handle the situation.

"You know where Hurley expected to be today?"

"He said he was going to drive his car to the Willow Creek Cow Camp last night. I told him that you and Tillamook were up on the north end of the Ridge trail and going south. He said he'd get a horse at the cow-camp and ride the trail north, meet you and warn you. But I was afraid he might miss you. So I came."

"Appreciate that, Ted," said Brad soberly. "Gosh, I wonder how I'd run the Pinos Altos Forest sometimes if I didn't have you on the job along with the rest of the fellows."

It was Ted's turn to smile. There was a hint of wistfulness lurking in the curve of her lips as she did. That Brad Ogden considered her one of his best "men" was a source of tremendous satisfaction to the girl. But sometimes Ted wished with all her heart that the bronze-faced man would look at her as a woman and not simply as one of his staff of foresters.

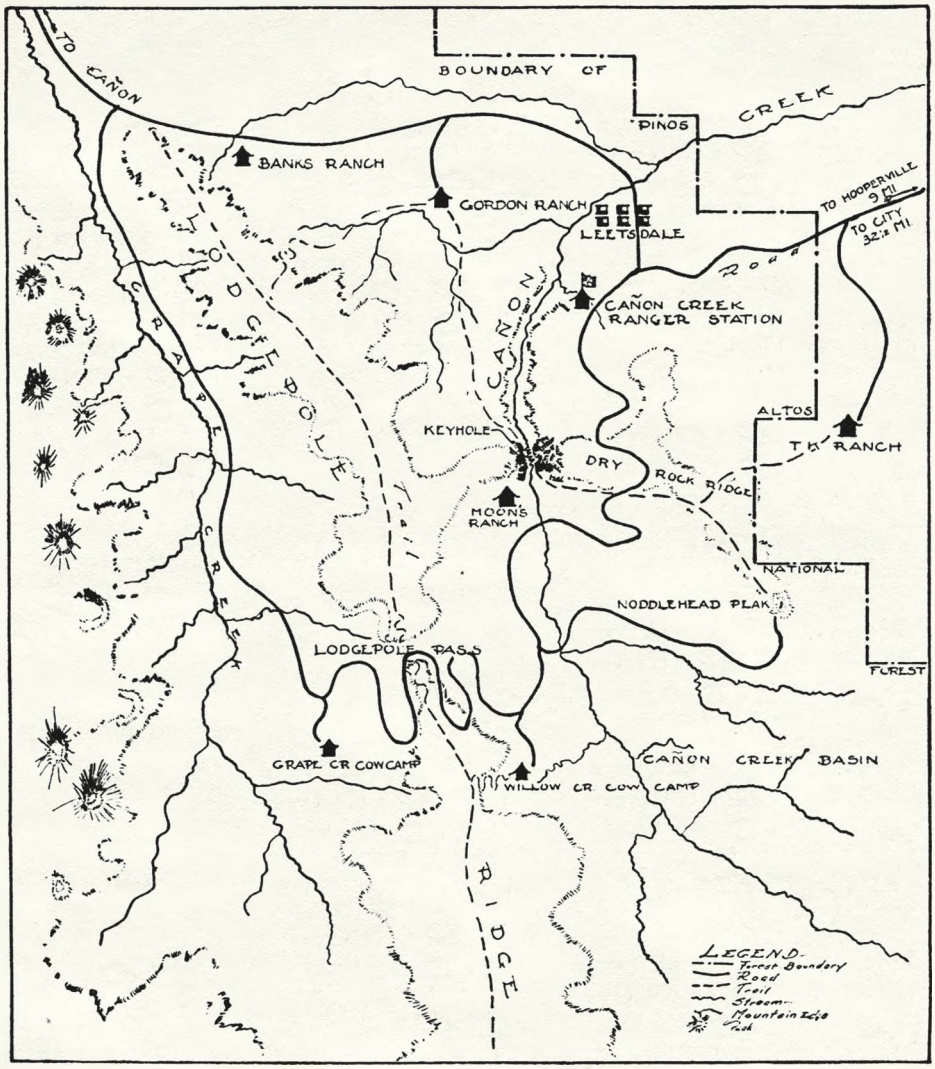
A few slow moments passed while Brad frowned in thought. Then he motioned to Ted to follow.

"Guess we'd better pow-wow with Tillamook," he suggested. "He knows these *hombres* better than I do. Let's see what he says."

TILLAMOOK THOMPSON screwed up his sun-seared tobacco tinted lips and frowned when he heard the warning which Ted had brought.

"It's been stewin' up fer a long time, Brad," he said finally. "These Cañon Creek ranchers have about had their way with the men precedin' yuh. Run all the stock they wanted in this Lodgepole country, even fenced in land that was Forest property without permits. Yuh know that they've done about as they pleased. They're plumb ornery at heart, some of them. Now they've probably chewed it over among themselves and have decided that they would crack down on yuh and make life a misery until yuh resign, or play with them or give in."

There was an ugly twist to Brad's lips when they curved back from his teeth as



he laughed shortly. It was a fighting laugh.

"I've been looking for something like this to happen, too, Tillamook. We'll keep peggin' on with our program. This Lodgepole country is forest land, fit only for forest, even if there are some big meadows in it. Old time fires made those. It's no farm land though. Elevation of eight thousand feet is too doggone high for any farming."

"How about tonight? Should we go?"

"I reckon," replied the lanky ranger. "If they're goin' to start war on us, they might as well rip loose. We know it's comin' anyway, thanks to Ted."

FOR many moments the horse Silver had not had attention from his human friends. And now with impatient toss of his head, he threw the strength of his neck muscles against Brad Ogden, caught the forester squarely.

"You old nuisance," cried Brad as he stumbled down the slope a step. "Here you, boy, you're getting too gosh-awful fresh!"

He reached up with his glove, swished it lightly across Silver's cheek. Silver threw up his head, rolling his eyes. To one looking on from a distance, it might have seemed that Brad was about to mount and was slapping Silver because he would not be still.

Silver snorted as the glove struck him, shied, then, prancing daintily, came sidling back toward Brad as the forester tugged at the rein. It was good play between friends and Silver knew that it was just so much fun. As he came charging back in mincing little steps, Silver's bunchy shoul-

der bumped Brad and the forest man again swayed away slightly from the horse. And—

In that second a whining, singing thing struck the big horse, plowed through muscle and bone. The report of a high-powered rifle, quick, sharp, came in the wake of that death-freighted bullet.

NO one in the group moved for an instant. Only Silver swayed from the powerful impact. Red came gushing from the hole in his shoulder. He nickered softly, inquiringly. Then he staggered, sank forward on his knees, his muscles bunched, his big eyes, terror-filled, looking up at Brad, at Ted, at Tillamook. The next instant Silver was down.

With a quick little cry Ted was kneeling by the horse's head. But the big heart had been in the path of the bullet as it drove through his body. Almost as Ted stooped, Silver gave a quick, frothy gasp, struggled to get up and then stiffened.

The blow had come with stunning quickness. At first Brad had leaped away, caught off balance by the shove of the horse's shoulder. The little tussle with Silver had saved his life. The bullet had hit the horse at a point in line with where Brad had been standing.

Brad caught himself, jumped back toward the horse, turned to look with piercing eyes at the ridge as it lifted beyond the pass.

He crouched. Again came a whining bullet; it struck a rock in the ridge back of Brad, went whirring away into space. The second shot seemed to clear the Forest man's momentary bewilderment. He whirled, to face Tillamook and Ted. Tillamook was jerking his .30-.30 from the scabbard on his shying horse. Ted, face white, eyes wide, was looking terror-stricken at the horrible beauty of the forest-clad ridge to the southward.

"Up the hill," yelled Tillamook, his voice cutting. "They're gunnin' for you, Brad. Get out of sight back of the ridge. Quick. Ted, you run."

With a rush, full significance came flashing over Brad. Tillamook was running over the ridge with rifle in hand. Brad leaped to the side of Ted, yanked her to her feet. She was half sobbing.

Brad looked once at Silver. The horse was lying on his own gun. There was no chance for him to strike back.

"Quick, Ted, get shelter," he ordered.

"But Silver," she sobbed.

"They've got him. Hurry!"

She started running beside Brad for the protection of a rocky ledge that outcropped a hundred feet beyond where they had been standing. Another bullet screamed by.

"In front, Ted. Quick. In the trail in front of me," directed Brad.

Seconds were long intervals. They were still in the open. Not even scrub timber could be reached in less distance than lay between them and the rocky outcrop.

Tillamook was crouching, diving, running over the ridge down toward the first timber.

Brad stumbled, caught his balance, ran on, following the girl, trying to protect her. He shifted over so she would not be in the line of fire if they shot again at him.

They reached the rocks. Ted dropped flat. Brad slid down beside her. A tense moment of waiting followed. Brad could hear Ted's quick sighing breath.

"Is Silver really dead?" asked Ted.

There was something akin to tears in his own voice when he answered back:

"Silver's done for, Ted. They meant to get me. The old horse saved my life."

"Your life," Ted gasped, looked at him, terror whipping over her face.

Brad nodded. Then after a moment:

"Gosh, I hope Tillamook gets the drop on that sniper. It's any one of a dozen ranchers that hate me. If Tillamook don't, I'll find out some time. When I do, I'll get these hands on him. I'll break him with my bare hands. He's killed one of my best friends."

"And mine," said Ted softly, sobbing again.

FALSE quiet blanketed the high country. The horses had stopped farther down the hill. Brad tried to catch sight of Tillamook as the ranger wormed his way through the tangled forest.

"Ted, I'll take back my joshing of a moment ago," said Brad seriously. "Hurley Moon showed how good a friend he is when he came to town last night to warn me. And you're a real fellow to jam that old Trail Blazer out here and get word to me. I guess this really means war with that Cañon Creek outfit. One of them, sure, fired that shot."

A rock rattled on the trail on the opposite slope. Ted and Brad looked quickly.

A horseman was coming. Back of him was the lanky form of Tillamook, his gun covering the man ahead. The newcomer was sitting easily in the creaking saddle.

Brad sensed the quick tension that flashed over Ted as she recognized the rider, heard the quick little catch in her breath. The man who was coming down the trail in front of Tillamook riding a trim black horse with white feet was Hurley Moon.

"You don't suppose it was—"

Brad's glance into her wide blue eyes cut the question that had leaped from Ted's lips.

The Forest Supervisor had always believed Hurley Moon one of his friends. Ted also believed in the young rancher, considered him one of the finest men in the region. For long dragging seconds they looked questioningly into each other's eyes.

Then Brad stood up. He reached down a hand and helped Ted to arise.

"Nope. I can't think it's Hurley," said Brad partly to himself. "It's not like him. He'd fight in the open. That was a coward's trick. Hurley's working with me. Not against me."

AS they moved forward, toward the white body of Silver, Hurley started to rein in his horse.

"Go on," bawled Tillamook, slightly raising the point of his gun. "Them's a couple of yore friends down there. They'll be glad to see you."

Hurley glanced back, then spurred the horse and came on a trot across the open space to Ted and Brad. Hurley leaped from his saddle.

"Say, what's all the row?" he asked hotly. "What is that crazy piute of a ranger howlin' around about? He came chargin' out of the brush up there with his gun pointed at me. Told me to get in the trail ahead of him and come down here, *pronto*. Wouldn't talk after that."

Tillamook had come up and was standing glowering at Hurley. Brad pointed to Silver.

"See that?" he asked.

"My gosh, yes!" exclaimed Hurley. "How did it happen?"

"Some one shot at me from up on the ridge yonder and hit the horse."

"Why, I heard a shot or two. Was scoutin' around on foot when this crazy ranger came up behind me and made me come on down here."

"You *heard* a shot," said Tillamook cuttingly.

Hurley whirled on him angrily. "That's what I said."

"Yore ears are fine," said Tillamook sarcastically.

"You don't mean that you think I fired that shot!"

Tillamook shrugged. "I didn't see anyone else up yonder. Looked careful, all over."

Hurley moved forward toward Tillamook.

"You'll take that back—"

"Here, cut that," interposed Brad. "Silver was my horse and I've got something to say about this."

"Why, that old rapscallion insinuates that I shot your horse, Brad." Hurley whirled on his friend. "I'm not going to let him get away with that!"

"Well, we can soon find out," said Brad evenly. "Let's see your rifle."

"You don't think, Brad—"

"Don't be a fool, Hurley. I'm only tryin' the easiest way to show Tillamook that you didn't. Now let's see the gun."

Hurley turned to his saddle-horse, yanked at the gun angrily, strode over to Tillamook and jammed it into his hands.

"Have a look," he snapped.

TILLAMOOK took the gun slowly—a .30-.30 of the same make and model as his own. The ranger threw open the chamber, picked out the cartridge that slipped into the opening, stuck his thumbnail at the butt end of the barrel as a light-reflector and squinted down the muzzle. A long minute dragged by. Then Tillamook handed the gun back to Hurley.

"Satisfied?" snapped Hurley.

"Not so darned satisfied," replied Tillamook.

"What's in the gun-barrel, Tillamook?" demanded Brad sharply, turning on the ranger.

"Not a darned thing. Clear as day. Not even a speck in it."

"Well, then, what do you mean, not satisfied?" asked Brad.

"Nothin' I guess. But it's funny. I looked all over up there and didn't see a soul except Hurley Moon."

"Well, I looked too," countered Hurley. "That doesn't prove anything. Maybe we better look at the barrel of your gun, too."

"Quit it," snapped Brad. "Tillamook, you round up the horses. If you've got a

shovel, you can bury Silver. Hurley will help me take off the saddle while you're getting the horses."

"All you got to do is to give some people all the rope and confidence you can muster, and they'll hog-tie themselves eventually," growled Tillamook.

"Shut up," commanded Brad. That these two hot-headed friends of his had tangled over the question of who had shot from ambush angered Brad. They were the only men on the Cañon District that he could depend on, and now this incident had broken the slight friendship that had existed between them.

Tillamook turned and strode down the hill. Hurley stood looking after him, his jaw muscles were moving as if he were chewing something.

"Don't mind him, Hurley," said Brad soothingly. "The old man's upset about the shooting. He didn't mean anything. I'm just a little bit nervous and jumpy myself, I'll admit. Tillamook just wants to slash out at some one, and is probably thinking about your dad when he ties into you."

"My dad!" flared Hurley. "Do I necessarily have to eat, sleep, think like my old man? Can't I have a mind of my own? How do these people on this forest get that stuff!"

"Now, keep your shirt on, my boy," admonished Brad. "What actually happened and what Tillamook thought aren't necessarily the same."

"Brad, you don't think I was responsible for that shot from up there?"

Brad Ogden turned and looked squarely into the eyes of Hurley Moon.

"No, Hurley, I don't."

"Sure?"

"Dead sure," said Brad earnestly.

Their hands met in man clasp. Ted, looking on, blinked rapidly. She bit her lip and looked off over the ridges below the pass. She was angry with herself for having cried when she lay back of the ridge of rocks. Now she was furious because this quick expression of friendship between these two men could start tears to her eyes again.

"Now, darn you," shouted Tillamook across the tiny meadow, "darn you for a pie-eyed fool! Come on here." He was tugging at the end of the lead-rope of the pack-horse. The laden animal shuffled along with grudging obedience.

"Come, help me, Hurley," requested Brad. "Got to get my saddle. Goin' back to town with Ted."

The two walked over the few paces to where Silver lay. Tugging, lifting, exerting their strength, they worked at loosening the cinch. Ted walked back to the Trail Blazer, climbed into the driver's seat. As she waited she watched Brad and Hurley straining at their task of freeing the saddle.

Ted liked both of these men. She did not know which she liked the more. Hurley was handsome, quick-tempered, generous beyond the limit of good judgment at times, unforgiving to enemies, stanch to his friends. Brad had blue-gray eyes that twinkled as brightly when he was amused as Hurley's flashed when he was angry. Each had the heart of a boy, ready to plan a prank and execute it; yet both were men capable of an upstanding man's steady loyalty.

She jammed her foot on the starter, threw in the low gear as the engine caught, and jerked the old car around as it plowed up to where Brad and Hurley were standing. She stopped the car as she came close to them.

"Throw the plunder in the rear," she ordered Brad. "Plenty of room."

"I'm going where I can talk to Hamman in the District Office at Denver—I want to phone him," said Brad to Tillamook and Hurley. "Tillamook, you go back to the station after you bury Silver. You've got plenty of leeway to get there before supper-time. I'll come out there tonight on the way to the meeting. We'll meet you at the schoolhouse, Hurley."

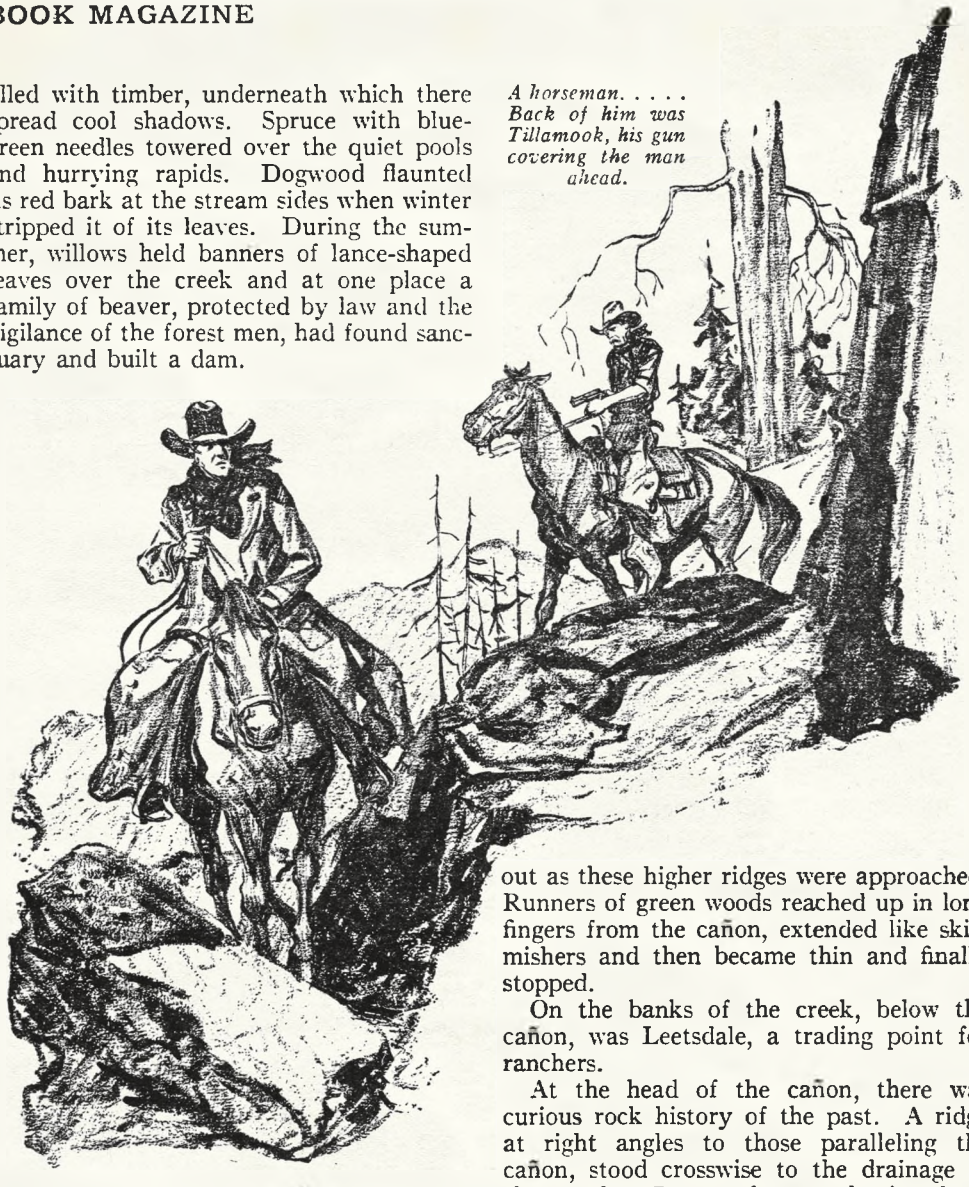
"All right," agreed Tillamook, turning toward his task of making a grave in the stony ground of the pass.

CHAPTER II

THE Cañon Creek District of the Pinos Altos National Forest extended for a distance of forty miles north and south. At the widest point it was not more than fifteen miles in an air-line from the east side of the District to the west boundary. About the middle, a bit north of the exact center, and at one of the wider parts of this Ranger District occurred the cañon of Cañon Creek, a gash cut out in the rock after centuries of effort by the rushing waters of the stream.

The lower cañon was pinnacled, craggy,

filled with timber, underneath which there spread cool shadows. Spruce with blue-green needles towered over the quiet pools and hurrying rapids. Dogwood flaunted its red bark at the stream sides when winter stripped it of its leaves. During the summer, willows held banners of lance-shaped leaves over the creek and at one place a family of beaver, protected by law and the vigilance of the forest men, had found sanctuary and built a dam.



A horseman. . . . . Back of him was Tillamook, his gun covering the man ahead.

On either side of the cañon there were bench lands that lifted step after step above the depths of the stream's pathway, and finally broke into high shattered red rock cliffs. Above these there were ridges, one on either side of the cañon. These had been burned and reburned until there was no timber left, not even the fire-resistant seed of the lodgepole pine remaining after the fires of years before. Scattered patches of mountain mahogany, raspberries and stunted sage had found lodgment at scattered points on these barren slopes, but no continuous growth covered the fire-baked ground.

The forest that was so thick and green and cool in the grottoes of the cañon frayed out as these higher ridges were approached. Runners of green woods reached up in long fingers from the cañon, extended like skirmishers and then became thin and finally stopped.

On the banks of the creek, below the cañon, was Leetsdale, a trading point for ranchers.

At the head of the cañon, there was curious rock history of the past. A ridge at right angles to those paralleling the cañon, stood crosswise to the drainage of the creek. It was barren, having been burned over in those fires that had denuded the ridges flanking the cañon below. Formerly there had been a lake back of this rocky dam that had stood solidly across the course of the creek. The waters of the creek spilled over the top. A process of cutting and gouging that had gone on for many, many seasons began. Ice, frost, sun and water had formed a powerful quiet alliance against this stubborn rock wall in a struggle that had lasted for centuries. A cleft showed; the water seeped through at first, then came a bit faster. Rocks cracked out of the solid ledges. The creek slowly slashed down through the ridge until on either side of the creek there stood rocky

pillars. They rose above the new bed of the creek for several hundred feet almost perpendicular. At the base they were not more than a hundred feet apart, and the cleft formed what the residents of the region called the Cañon Creek Keyhole, or simply referred to it as the Keyhole. In it grew thick young timber. Upstream from the Keyhole spread lodgepole forests. Below were the forests in the cañon. This stand of saplings in the Keyhole was a thick resinous isthmus between the two larger bodies of timber.

When the lake waters had drained away, the old muddy bottom had become a meadow through which Cañon Creek twisted and meandered. Beaver families had come to this bit of sluggish stream, and had made a whole series of dams that stood like water-topped terraces, one above the other, from the outlet of the creek at the Keyhole, all the way up to where the pine forests began. They had eaten of the alder and willow that had lined the banks of the creek, had used the twigs and limbs for the dams. Sinking powerful teeth in chunks of aspen cut on higher slopes, they had dragged them to the ponds. Silt had come in from the freshets of spring and filled back of the dams. Food finally had become scarce and the beaver moved up- or downstream. The old dams broke down and rotted. And then in this rich soil came a meadow of natural grasses that was one of the most frequented places of graceful deer, stalking mountain lion or snuffing, waddling porcupine.

Lucius Moon, father of Hurley Moon, had come to this place of quiet beauty. Here he had found the end of a quest and he had stopped to acquire squatter's rights first and then a homestead. The meadow had become his hay-land. Some potatoes had been grown each year on the gentle slopes that fanned out from the foot of the ridges surrounding the meadow.

Above the Moon ranch, the drainage of Cañon Creek spread in a great fan. On the west was Lodgepole Ridge, along which ran the forest trail. This was the boundary of the west side of Tillamook's district. At one point only did a road cross the ridge and this was the twisty road over which Ted had driven the Trail Blazer. Beyond this western valley, or rather series of valleys that extended for fully ten miles, there arose a craggy, pinnacled range of mountains where snow hung in the high *cirques* of extinct glaciers, where clear lakes lay at the foot of beetling cliffs, where chill winds of high-country midsummer whistled through the stunted timberline spruce clinging in ragged disarray around the sides of the peaks. It was a mighty majestic congregation of mountains that stood to the westward of the rolling ground that lay beyond Lodgepole Ridge.

BRAD OGDEN and Ted Hathaway faced the eastward as the Trail Blazer started its descent from the top of Lodgepole Ridge. They were just about to dip below the ridge on the first dizzy swing of the topmost switchback when Ted stopped the car and looked back. Brad turned in his seat.

The gigantic majesty of the mountains across the intervening valleys to the west held them a moment. Their eyes strayed back to where Tillamook was scooping earth out of a shallow grave, and Hurley Moon, silent, straight, was standing looking on.

Ted turned, threw in the gears and the big car started to grind down the long grade on its own compression. For a long stretch they rode in silence. Both were thinking of the big white horse that Tillamook would give decent burial, and back of that were thoughts of what clashes might come as aftermath.

The road ahead could be seen from almost every point on the upper switchback. The big stretch of forest in the wide basin forming the drainage to the creek was spread before them. Rounded, rolling ridges lifted above little draws. In the draws were tiny meadows where sleek whitefaces grazed, many bearing the TK brand of Hurley Moon. Brownish open places showed where recent forest-fires had burned. None of these had reached the magnitude of older burns that were called the lodgepole meadows. There had been no forest organization to stamp them out when these greater fires had blazed.

Lodgepole Meadows were grassy stretches bordered with prim forests. At the edges the advance guards of the trees were gradually closing in, cutting down the grazing acreage a little each year, slowly winning back for the tree army that land lost when the old fires had repeatedly killed new growth decades past. It would not be many years until there would have to be another reduction in range allotments on these meadows because they would have less acreage in grass and more in young trees. As growing timber for the nation is the

primary reason for the forests being established, the trees would have first consideration.

Tiny, clear streams were born at the edge of the timber in the small meadows. Early each season, around the springy places marsh marigolds lifted creamy faces to the blue sky. Later came the little rose-colored, foot-high, elephant plant, bearing on its stem curious blooms, each a miniature elephant head, trunk, eyes, ears and bulbous forehead. Indian paint-brush, too, crept up into the meadows and splashed them with crimson. In the fall, white asters flecked the brown, sear, neutral tinted range. And blue erigerons lifted dainty faces with their gold centers where partial shade gave them opportunity to hide their delicate tints in half shadow.

FOR several miles Ted and Brad rode with only the cough of the motor in their ears. Ted was occupied with the necessity of getting the Trail Blazer over the back country road without crumpling a wheel in some half-concealed rut.

Rock strewn, corded with roots at some places, twisty as a trail of an angle worm, the dun-colored road ribbon wound down the side of the higher ridge.

It was difficult driving, and Brad let his eyes swing toward the girl as she negotiated it. Ted tugged, held the wheel in firm grip, gave it a little twist to dodge a rut, swung it back to catch a smooth place, then yanked the old car around with the buoyant strength that lurked in her slim hands and rounded arms.

"Good girl!" said Brad approvingly. "Sometimes I'm afraid to have you driving this old wreck over the back country roads the way you do. But not when I am watching you do it." Ted gave him a smile in answer.

Finally the car was flying along over the straight, level plains road between the foothills and Hooperville, headquarters of the Pinos Altos National Forest. Straight road, with no ruts, level, visible for several miles, was a dare to Ted. The big roadster snorted and roared as it hurtled over this stretch. Brad caught at his hat. His eyes squinted, he stole sidelong glances at the girl. She looked steadily at the road ahead and pulled the throttle wide.

The faded buildings of the town, the glittering church cross, the scattered dwellings seemed to spurt up from the ground as they flew forward. Bumping over a culvert, jiggling over the rusty railroad tracks that carried one train a day each way, they rolled into the main street, and Ted brought the car to a stop before a white painted store building. Its dullish gold lettered sign over the doorway designated it as the Supervisor's office of the Pinos Altos.

Brad was in the act of unlimbering his legs and dropping them over the side of the seat, preliminary to disembarking from the Trail Blazer, when Ted touched his arm. He turned inquiringly.

"Darn it," exploded Ted. "Don't look at me that way, Brad. You make me feel as if I were a chicken-thief when you put on that queer questioning look. I know I've not got any authority to go advising you what to do or any right to ask you to do or not to do things. But I'm afraid of what's going to happen tonight out there at Leetsdale. That shot that killed Silver got my goat! Please don't go out there tonight, Brad!"

"Why, old-timer, I can't very well get out of it. Regulations, you know—cooperate with cattlemen."

"Well, maybe, those that are shooting square. But the Cañon Creek bunch are not. You know it."

"I'll be on my guard."

"For once, Brad, can't you do something for *me*. It's the first time I've ever asked you this way. Please, for my sake don't go!"

Brad looked at her steadily.

"Sorry, old kid," he said briskly. "Wish I could do as you ask. But I can't very well. They might think I was yellow."

Ted bit her lip. Slow color flooded up under her fair skin until her forehead was pink from the flush.

"Well, go ahead then," she said shortly, vaulted out of the Trail Blazer and hurried in through the squeaking screen door that banged shut behind her.

CHAPTER III

THE car that Brad drove on official business was a wheezy complaining flivver truck, but it had a habit of getting there. That evening he drove it to the Leetsdale meeting.

The sun had dived behind the serrated high range that lifted its crest beyond the rolling lodgepole hills. These high mountains were austere, beautiful, friendly, or sometimes cruel and unyielding, as the light

of day varied or seasons changed. Now in the soft glow of the day-death, the time of half-lights when roughness blends in melting shadows, they held elusive charm. A little wind-cloud, frayed and streaming out from the apex of one peak, glowed yellow, rose and finally deep blood-color. Brad watched it as the sun crawled lower beyond the edge of the west. Finally soft browns, the color of cinnamon, enwrapped the cloud, and deeper darkness settled in the hills and lay like a blanket over the plains.

The car jolted and sidled as it turned off the main road and slid down toward the Cañon Creek Ranger Station. Little patches of oak, the tops standing in lacework against the evening sky, bordered the road. This low growth gave way to the pillared trunks of old pines as the mellowed log buildings of the station were reached.

Brad stopped the car, jumped out. The station door opened; warm lamplight spilled out on the board porch floor, and the gangling form of Tillamook was limned in the opening.

"That you, Brad?" he called in greeting. "Had supper yet? I've kinda waited for you. Come in."

The yard gate was pulled shut with a bang by a stone weight tied to a wire. The gravel of the path to the kitchen door rattled under his feet as Brad walked toward the lighted doorway.

"Had supper, Tillamook. Thanks just the same."

"Well, come on in here and I'll slick up the station, and then we'll go on down to the village."

TILLAMOOK was a lone ranger, and his dwelling held only Spartan comforts:

A kerosene lamp in the middle of a kitchen table covered with clean white oilcloth. In the corner a little cookstove glowed redly through its front door, while its shining nickel flashed dully in the subdued light of the room. Two kitchen chairs, painted, sturdy, on either side of the table. A coffee-pot, polished and clean, but old and steeped with the aroma of numerous strong brews. A white enamel cup filled with black coffee, in a saucer of the same ware.

The ranger shoved the cup in the warm sudsy dishwater that had previously brought back shining cleanliness to his supper dishes, then moved toward the door.

"Well, I guess I'm feelin' pert enough to be ready for any skullduggery that bunch may want to spring," he answered. "Come on, Brad, let's beard the coyotes in their den."

"You're mixed on your saying, Tillamook. You mean beard the lion."

"Nope," declared the ranger as they went through the gate. "I said it right the first time."

The soft darkness of early summer night in the foothills enwrapped them as they climbed into the rackety truck. Dusk spread away from the probing fingers of light that the headlights shot through the darkness. It made the canopy of needles that topped the pillars of the pines towering over the station seem like near-by clouds of shadow.

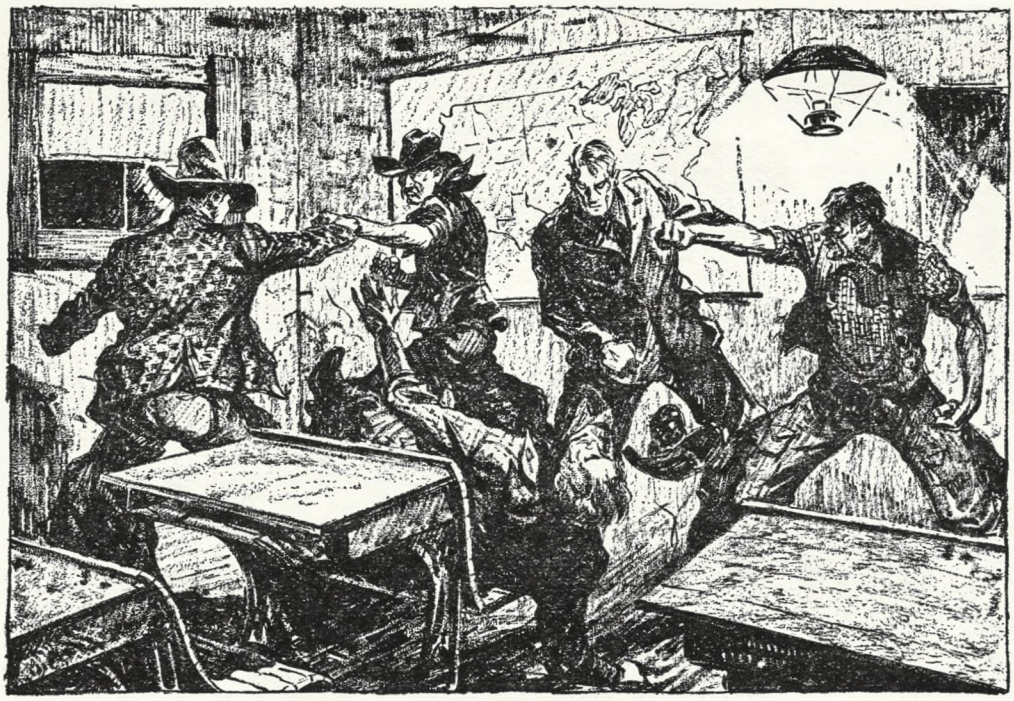
"It's a night for love-making," declared Tillamook, glancing up into the starry heavens and sniffing the air. "Or a murder."

A FEW moments of driving brought them to where the road turned off to Leetsdale.

The car splashed through the creek where clear waters fanned out over the pebble-bottomed ford. It climbed a little hill past cobwebby outlines of barbed-wire fences showing against faint afterglow. Soon the little timber-bordered valley in which the tiny town of Leetsdale snuggled came into view.

Turning the corner at the pool-hall, Brad entered the main street of the village. There were three stores beside the pool-hall. All had false fronts that stood square and blocky in the dusk. Only the pool-hall had an upper story, a barren single room where meetings or dances might be held. A hotel, little more than a commercialized residence, but with a dowdy pretentious porch, stood on the opposite side of the road from the huddled one-story commercial places. In the faint light of the early night, the unpainted frowsiness of the little town was lost and cheery lamps threw mellow brightness from the windows.

Brad parked the truck at a point where the road widened out. As the chatter of the motor quieted, there came the musical gurgle of a tiny irrigation ditch running in a board sluice along the side of the street. Through the night shadows, over the quiet road, with the song of night breeze in pine needles crooning mountain country lullabys in the tree tops above them, Brad and Tillamook trudged toward the schoolhouse. A



Instantly the room was bedlam. "Let 'em fight!" came the insistent voice like a battle-chant.

light gleamed in that box-like structure and found a cranny where the foot-worn threshold swayed away from the bottom of the one door.

ONCE the schoolhouse had been painted white, but was gray in the dusk light. A patch of scrub oak was in one corner of the school-yard; another held a shed where horses of the pupils could be housed for the day while the riders were soaking up knowledge. A squat belfry stood on the foremost end of the ridge of the schoolhouse as though it had been put on as an afterthought.

"Some one's here," remarked Tillamook. "Suppose it's Banks or maybe old man Moon. They usually are among the first on the job."

The little plank landing that was in front of the door sounded hollowly under their boots. Tillamook opened the door. They both squinted a moment, stepped inside, and then looked around the dingy white-walled room. Talk between the three men already there ceased abruptly.

Sitting with his boots resting on the edge of a front row desk, was Lucius Moon, father of Hurley. He was bearded, with hair nearly half silvered, slightly unkempt. Deep furrows were in his forehead; and as he looked at the newcomers a sharp vertical line appeared, extending up from the point where his big nose attached itself to his overhanging brow. His eyebrows had a habit of moving upward and downward without seeming to change the other expressions of his face. There was an air of intensity about him at all times, and when he was thoroughly aroused, he was a dynamic whirlwind of energy.

One of the other men was somewhat slighter, wore frayed khaki pants that were ripped in one leg far enough to show the tops of his scuffed riding-boots. His face was dark, smudged with the stubble of a black beard, and his chin came to a sharp point that hooked up just a little at its end. There was a long line of jaw sloping from small ears that were almost overgrown with black greasy hair, to the point of his chin. He wore a leather vest, and a wide hat was tilted far back on his head. This was Jasper Banks, cattle-man, owner of a small wildcat sawmill that operated in a section beyond Lodgepole Ridge, and a local political force: a taciturn and unscrupulous man.

The third member of the group was Hurley Moon.

"Howdy!" ventured Tillamook, striding forward to the front of the room where the floor area was not wholly taken up with seats and aisles. "Fine evenin'."

Lucius Moon nodded, then looked at Tillamook's feet, raised his eyes slowly,

visually measured the big gangling ranger from his soles to his hat. Banks did not move. Hurley nodded, as did Brad Ogden.

"Don't let us interrupt," suggested Tillamook. "Keep right on talkin'."

"I guess we'd about finished," said Banks shortly.

An awkward moment passed. Brad found a chair, sat on it with its back in front of him, resting his chin on folded arms. Tillamook sat on the top of one of the little school desks and crossed his legs.

"Better light one of those other lamps, Hurley," suggested the elder Moon. "This lamp's hardly enough."

"Oh, it's all right," protested Banks. "Just turn her up a little. Save kerosene for the school district." He reached up and turned up the wick until it stopped just short of smoking. Fresh brightness came to the little oblong room. It showed the desks where initials had been carved in the tops and thus earned transient fame and perhaps a strapping for the carver. It made the red painted wooden book-cupboard in the corner of the room seem to glow dully. It even disclosed the film of cobwebs that were soiled lace in the corners of the ceiling.

"Well, some of the others ought to be comin'," observed Lucius Moon. "We've got a bunch of important stuff up tonight, and they ought to get here for an early start."

Almost in answer there came the sound of trotting horses on the road; the board gate of the school-yard creaked as it was slid back and then closed. The muffled voices of men leading their horses to the shed came through the low-silled windows that stood in regular array in both the side walls of the school building. A moment later, the stamping of boots on the plank stoop was a prelude to the door opening.

Three men came in. The first was big, round-faced, red-skinned. Few wrinkles showed in his face, but there was an ugly rake to his jaw under the rolls of flesh that bulged around his chin. His eyes were small, his nose tiny and quite dwarfed by a wide mustache. Those who disliked Eli Gordon, and they were not a few, said that he had built his herd from the unmarked stock belonging to others, that branding irons of the Bar Zee Kay had a habit of finding mavericks, and some that were not mavericks at all.

Behind Gordon were two lanky young men, with big hands, sunburned faces, sharp features. Kennard and Jefferson Banks, hard-riding, quick-tempered sons of Jap Banks. Both of them wore guns in open holsters. Brad glanced at these, slowly turned his eyes to Tillamook and catching the gleam of the old forest man's eye, dropped his own to where Jap Banks' vest bulged queerly under his left armpit. Another gun was there. Tillamook nodded slightly. It indicated that the reports were true; the Cañon Creek bunch were looking for trouble, spoiling for it; and if trouble did not generate on its own account, they might find some way to start it.

BRAD had thought of coming armed, then had discarded the idea. Force is no general policy of the Forest Service. Meeting force with a show of force often is the spark to start trouble on the range. Even on the trails Brad often went without a gun, partly to show that it was not the custom of the organization to which he belonged to practice gun-toting. For a moment he wished that he had yielded to the idea of being more prepared; then he decided that after all it was wise to have left his guns at home. But his thoughts dwelt on the fact that this group had years of hostility toward the Forest Service stored away in their hearts—especially Moon, Jap Banks and Gordon.

Two decades earlier the coming of the Forest Service to take over the administration of the lands within the newly created Pinos Altos National Forest had first greatly angered Lucius Moon who had come into Colorado just as the last fragments of frontier had shattered and the men who were to build the west of the later days had started to establish homes.

To the foot of a range of low green mountains Moon had driven his covered wagon, and made camp in a tiny valley. From this camp he rode unblazed trails into the mountain land, and on one scouting excursion he found in the valley of Cañon Creek, the meadow that had been a lake. The surrounding lodgepole country, now thick with pine, then had been a tangle of briary raspberries, fireweed, snarled old stubs of fire-killed spruce and tiny seedlings. Food for his stock was there in abundance; no cattle baron had claimed it as his range; no settlers were nearer than Leetsdale; and Moon had to construct the makeshift road into that little valley, over burned ridge and down

little draws through a maze of living and dead and down timber, to reach his future home.

Labor-filled years had passed. Moon filed on his little mountain homestead, patented it. He ranged his stock at will on the open stretches of the public domain. Other settlers came, among them Eli Gordon, who drove a herd of unbranded stock from somewhere down toward Texas. Eli found a foothill valley where wood and water were near and forage plentiful. Also it was a bit secluded, for which the rotund cattleman was grateful. Soon the Bar Zee Kay brand began to spread over the range and prosperity dwelt with him.

Some years later came Jasper Banks, whence no one knew. He simply rode into the country one day, slowed his horse, stopped, stayed, married, and begat two sons. Around his cabin there spread out a ranch with log barns, rambling pole corrals and a big hay-meadow watered by a little tributary of Cañon Creek.

These three, recognizing their strength, had formed a triumvirate for the governing of the cow-land that lay at the foot of the first green foothills and extended back into the meadowy mountain valleys. Range was allotted according to their commands. Small ranchers often were in their debt or were completely absorbed by one or all of these more powerful stockmen. If Moon or Jap Banks or Eli Gordon could have conquered the other two, any one of them would have done just that. But they recognized such a move was ruinous to the individual and so kept armed peace and made common war against all other interests.

In the big log Moon ranchhouse, at the edge of the green meadow with the curious rock gateway it its lower end, Hurley Moon had lived his boyhood. Occasional country school at Leetsdale was a part of his life. There he met Jeff and Ken Banks, and fought and played with them through the brief sessions of school. At the same school studied Della Gordon, the only daughter of Eli. Rosy-cheeked, with pigtails that reached stiffly down the small of her back, a quick laugh and white teeth, Della had been the reason for several fistic clashes between the sons of Banks and the son of Moon.

Della had grown up into a quiet, serious girl who still laughed sometimes, or gazed with brooding eyes at Hurley Moon. At other times she rode the trails with Kennard Banks or his brother, with all the daring witchery of a wood spirit. Della had been away to school, to the girl's college at Cañon. She still had her rosy cheeks, her dark eyes under long black lashes, the tangle of black hair. On rare occasions, when riding with the Banks boys, she seemed a little sullen. But if Hurley was present, she was generally gay, chatting brightly, laughing in low singing tones that reminded those who heard of the murmur of Cañon Creek after it had dashed down from the high country and had found a channel over rounded boulders between rock-strewn slopes.

LUCIUS MOON had held slightly more power over this little community than either Banks or Gordon. So when the Forest Service had first tried to carry out grazing regulations, its men were met by dark scowls from Moon, Banks and Gordon and their followers. A ranger had attempted to secure applications for grazing permits from settlers in the Cañon Creek region. Lucius Moon delivered an ultimatum that he leave quickly or get shot. The ranger had come out empty-handed, and the cattle had grazed over the Lodgepole hills without a permit. But persistent attempts on the part of the Forest men had finally won, with the aid of a threat at a suit in Federal Court; and now all ranchers held permits for the grazing of their stock on the forest.

Bitterly hostile at first, Moon had later come to tolerate the Forest Service. But he still did very much as he pleased; and while the permits named a limit that each could graze, and Tillamook and other Forest men tried to enforce that limit, it was common knowledge that Moon never observed these limits.

Brad Ogden's reduction of grazing permits early in the year had been greeted first by amused grins. But his persistent insistence that those limits would be enforced had aroused all the old resentment against the Forest Service which for years had smoldered among Cañon Creek permittees.

Lucius Moon, Jap Banks and Eli Gordon had never before had their dictatorship so thoroughly challenged.

OTHER men came into the room. They made little groups of twos and threes and fives. Some one opened a window, and through it came the soft air of the night, and the far whisper of wind and water

talk. Brad had ridden the range with most of those present. Had even held a semblance of friendliness with a few. But for the most part they were hard, lean, black-browed men, dressed in copper-riveted overalls or khaki breeches, black, blue or gray work-shirts, or woolen shirts of similar hue, a few with soft dark neckerchiefs and each with a big hat the color of wet 'dobe or gray sand.

"It's a good turn-out," suggested Brad to Hurley. Hurley nodded, pursed his lips, squinted his eyes a little.

"'Taint none too friendly," he replied. Hurley reverted easily to range language. . . . .

"Guess we'd better get under way," said Eli Gordon, as he brought his chair down from its tipped position with a bang. His voice was high-pitched, almost boyish, in contrast to his bulk.

The buzz in the room increased, then stilled. Gordon thumped the table with his fist in lieu of a gavel. Those present found a place to sit or stand beside the walls.

"We'll come to order," said Gordon, whacking the desk again. "First is readin' of the previous meetin's minutes."

The secretary, Jasper Banks, droned through the sketchy report of a meeting two months before. It occurred to Brad that there had been other meetings, not official, at which much more had been discussed than appeared in these minutes.

Hurley Moon leaned over and whispered to Brad.

"If any rough stuff breaks, dive for that corner back of us. We can stand off the bunch there."

Brad nodded.

"Well, I guess we might as well git to business," drawled Gordon in his high voice. "First thing we'll take up is this new reduction of range allotments that the Forest reserves have made."

He paused. Stillness lay like a heavy pall in the room. The scratch of a match sounded loud and rasping as a cow waddie lit his cigarette. The room was filling with thick tobacco smoke.

"Well, any one got anything on his chest?" asked Gordon. "I don't like to be the first one to start askin' questions. Come on, let's talk up."

Slowly uncoiling himself, Jasper Banks stood up. He looked slowly up to the red flame of the single lighted lamp as though there dwelt some suggestion. He turned to face Brad.

"What I'd like to know is about the same as all the rest," he said sharply, directly. "Why in hell they did it!"

THIS was a quick start. Much of the program apparently was already planned. They were going to corner Brad, shoot questions at him many of the answers to which they knew already. They would try to irritate him, get him to flare up, then answer with hot words, goading him to anger and, if possible, "start something." Brad realized that the experience of that morning was against him in what lay ahead. He was still feeling angry over the shooting of Silver, and a bit unstrung too.

All eyes turned to the Supervisor. Brad looked at Gordon.

"I guess you have the floor, Mr. Ogden," piped the President of the Cañon Creek Cattlemen's Association.

Brad got up easily, shoved the chair in front of him, rested his hand on its bowed back. He faced the rear of the room where shadows were held back by the light of the lamp.

"I think I've explained this to most of you before," he said slowly. "It's no intricate sort of a thing. The policy of the Service is to handle the forest so it will produce the most good to all concerned. We want to range all the stock we can in the forests, but we want them to get plenty of feed. We don't want to have them so hungry that they eat the grass down into the ground.

"That's what has gone on recently. The range above the Keyhole, beyond Moon's ranch, is overgrazed—has been for years. Most of you are permittees up there and beyond. You know it as well as I do. We've had to reduce your limits ten per cent all the way around to keep what range we have and let it have some chance to come back to where it was formerly. Just as soon as we can run more stock because the range has recovered, we'll let you men in, up to your old permits. . . . . I guess that about covers it."

HE sat down. A man in the back of the room got up. He cleared his throat. Brad could not see him plainly enough to be sure he recognized him.

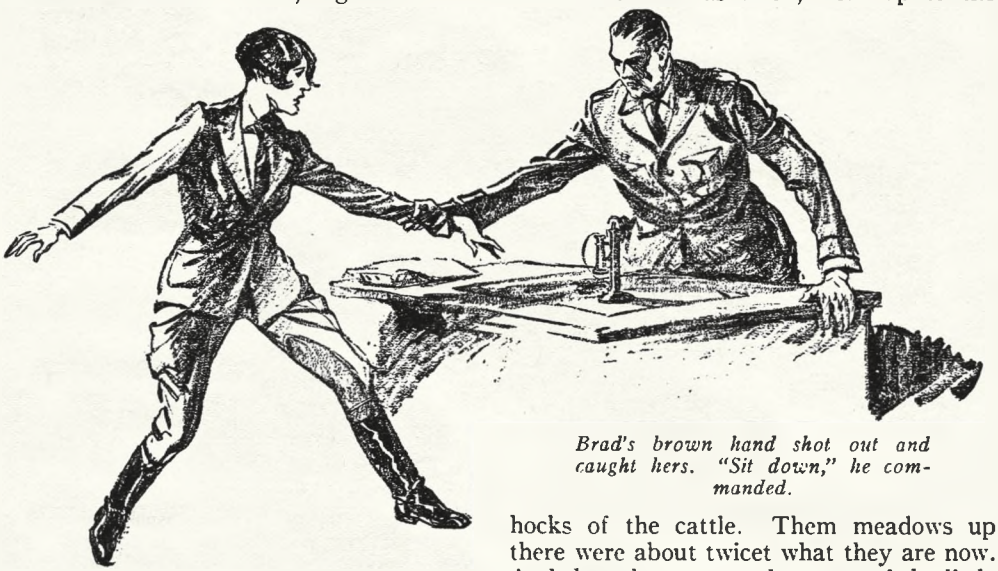
"Yeh," said the voice. "I've heered that song and dance afore. It sounds good. But I've got cattle enough to graze up to my old permit. I got 'em

thinkin' that I had this much grazin' on the forest reserve for certain. And now I've got ten per cent more than I've got a permit for. As far as I'm concerned, I'm goin' to graze my stock!"

He sat down. A murmur ran through the crowd. Hurley Moon arose to his feet. He half faced his father.

"I know there are others that don't agree with me about the Forest Service—" began Hurley.

"And I'm one of 'em," growled old



Brad's brown hand shot out and caught hers. "Sit down," he commanded.

Lucius Moon, his chin sunk on chest, his beard misty and filled with half lights.

"Yes, you're one of 'em. But that don't make much difference who thinks one way or who thinks another. It's who's right that counts. Now, I believe that the Forest men are right in this thing. I've watched the range for a good many years. It isn't what it used to be. The streams are even smaller. The spring run-off is faster. I don't think we're gettin' the showers we did in the past.

"One thing is darned certain: we're not gettin' the beef off this range that we have years back. The forage isn't there to make it. If it isn't overgrazing, what else is it? I, for one, am in favor—"

"I'll tell you, youngster, what it is," boomed the voice of Lucius Moon. "Now you've had your say. You listen to me."

FOR a moment Hurley stood a little defiantly before the older man. His face glowed redly as a flush mounted under his dark skin. A slight whispering titter brushed through the crowded room. But Hurley sat down. Brad could see that he was having a hard time to hold his temper. He admired the young rancher for the measure of self-control that was required in the face of that buzzing ripple of talk.

"I'll tell yuh," boomed Moon. "When I came here,—well, let's see, it's well on toward thirty odd years or more,—when I came here there was as good grazin' up on the Lodgepole range country as you ever seen. It was thick, clear up to the hocks of the cattle. Them meadows up there were about twicet what they are now. And then there were a lot more of the little patches where eatin'-stuff for cows grew in between the timber.

"Them places are overgrown now. That scrub timber up there has come in on the old pastures some. Kinda reachin' out and takin' a little more grazin' area each year. I've seen it comin'. It's starvin' our cows. They cain't feed on the timber. And if they could, this Forest Service bunch wouldn't let us make use of that scrub tree stuff.

"I came here afore there were any Forest Service," Moon's voice lifted a notch; his hands began to tremble. "I liked it a whole damn' sight better'n now, I can tell you. There were no permits in them days; there were no dates that we could put our stock on and when we had to take them off. If the range was ready in the spring, we put them on early. We left them on as long as it was open in the fall. And we had a damn' sight better beef shipped out of this Cañon Creek range than we have for the last ten years.

"I'm gettin' all-fired fed up on this

bunch comin' around tellin' us what we can do on our land. They tell us that forest belongs to the people. We are a part of the people. A good many of us won this country from the wilderness. It's ours if it's anybody's. And by God, I'm plumb sick of havin' some dude appointed down at Washington tellin' me how I'm goin' to handle my stock on my rightful range!"

He stopped for a moment. The roomful of listeners was tensely quiet. Some one shifted his feet; another coughed a little from the thick smoke. Brad could feel the tension of the situation getting into his muscles. He was holding them taut, ready for anything that might pop. The temper of Cañon Creek ranchers was beginning to come to the surface. Scowls on their faces, directed at him and Tillamook were growing darker.

"Let me tell you," roared Moon suddenly, "let me tell you, Ogden: I don't give one whoop in hell what your permit says. Like Judson back there, I'm goin' to run my stock as I please. And I'd like to see you get any sort of a count on it. You and your damned regulations can go plumb to hell."

IT had come to this show-down quickly. Brad had hoped to stave it off. But Moon was telling Brad to his face, in public, that he was going to disregard the attempt to help them by better handling of the range. Moon was threatening to smash regulations that were for the good and protection of all. Brad's own temper flared a little as he shot to his feet again, faced Moon.

"All right. You go ahead. But let me tell you this, Moon: If I can catch you in trespass with more cattle on the forest than your permit calls for, I'll haul you down to the Federal Court, and I'll soak you and soak you until you get tired of paying fines. And that goes for the bunch," snarled Brad as he swung on the rest of the cow-men. He stood half-crouched, his head thrust forward, his jaw tight, his eyes flashing.

"Now let me tell you something else," he snapped. "You've run off half a dozen other Supervisors before I came. I knew that when I came down here from up in Wyoming. I didn't come to be run off by any man or any bunch, not even when some skunk kills my horse this morning from ambush." Brad could hear a quick burst of low talk but did not stop.

"I've come out here tonight to try and play fair; have tried to do that ever since I came here. I know some of you have been in trespass. I know some of you that have been stealing timber. I'm giving you full warning. This forest doesn't belong to you any more than it does to me. It belongs to the whole country. I'm going to run it for the whole country. And part of that scheme is to reduce grazing permits. I've asked for cooperation. I get my horse shot as a reply. I'm through fooling.

"These allotments will stand!"

FEET shuffled uneasily as he turned on the crowd. Moon stood, his eyes blinking, scowl furrows deep in his forehead.

"*The hell they stand!*"

Moon had found his voice. There had never been another Supervisor that had stood up and talked to the Cañon Creek men to their face like this. They had compromised or remained silent.

"Throw him out," bawled a voice in the back of the room. "Throw the yappin' whelp out of here. We kin run our range without him. Throw him out!"

Some one started forward. Gordon rose.

"Order, order!" he piped.

"Oh, hell, Eli," bawled Ken Banks from the back of the room. "What is this, a Sunday-school?"

"You're a hell of a bunch of business men," shouted Hurley Moon, suddenly on his feet beside Brad. "You've got the brains of a bunch of pack-rats. You can't talk sense soberly but have to go off half-cocked and start talkin' about throwin' some one out of here."

"Sit down and shut up," howled Lucius Moon.

"Make me," countered Hurley.

Lucius Moon started forward. That Hurley had been in sympathy with the Forest Service and its work had angered the older man for some time. This difference had caused Hurley to start ranching on his own account instead of staying with his father. But to be shouted at like this by his own son in the presence of others, angered Lucius.

Eli Gordon came trotting from behind the table. He shoved between the father and son.

"Now gentlemen, gentlemen—" he protested.

"Let 'em fight," howled some one in the crowd.

Ken Banks, lanky, dark-faced, came pawing over seats and men toward the front. He had been nursing a "mad" for a week, and with raw whisky to fortify it he was ready to get action.

Lucius Moon turned on Gordon.

"Don't muss in, Eli," he snapped. "Get out of my way."

BRAD stepped forward. Tillamook was up on his feet. Several at the back of the room were scuffling forward.

Brad could see all of the ranchmen were tense, ready for any move. He laid his hand restrainingly on the arm of Lucius Moon.

The rancher whirled with a snarl, struck, missed.

Some one threw a stick of cordwood from the wood-box near the stove. It arched its way through the smoky air and crashed into the ribs of Eli Gordon.

"Who threw that?" he yelped.

"Let 'em fight," yelled a man at the back of the room.

Action-filled seconds were dragging by.

Ken Banks mad and with whisky enough to give him courage, came stumbling toward the group.

"I'm a wild wolf," he bawled. "I'm a wild wolf from the Yellow Dog Ranch. It's my night to howl!"

He swung at Brad, stumbled, missed. He plunged into the arms of Tillamook. The big ranger shoved him away. Ken's foot caught on the iron frame of a desk. He fell with arms flailing to the floor.

Attention had turned to this new break in the quick incidents that were filling the dimly lit schoolhouse room.

An instant Ken Banks lay on the floor cursing. Then he came up charging. In his hand was his big ugly revolver. He threw it down, pointing at Tillamook.

Brad leaped from where he was standing, struck as the trigger pulled tight.

The big gun roared in Brad's ear as they went down in a squirming mass on the floor. Tillamook had dived trying to dodge the threatening death from the gun.

Instantly the room was a bedlam.

Jap Banks grabbed Brad's shoulder and yanked at him.

"Let 'em fight," came the insistent voice like a battle-chant.

"Cut that out," snarled Banks, his dark saturnine face close to Brad's. "You go mixin' in like that, you'll get yourself all mussed up."

"Who'll do it?" snapped Brad.

"None of your lip," snarled Banks, his lips curling back from his yellow teeth.

Ken Banks was on his feet again and came lumbering at Brad.

"You horned in," growled the lanky cowman. "I'll fix you."

He swung with doubled fist at Brad's head.

Brad ducked, knotted his fist, started a swift blow at the unguarded chin of the hulking ranchman. It never landed. Jap Banks had caught his arm.

Furious now, nerves on edge, ready for fight, ready to take on the whole Association, one at a time or in bulk, thinking like a flash of the death of his big horse up on the pass at the hands of some of this same bunch, Brad turned on Jap Banks, struck.

New turmoil seethed around him. Jap Banks was down from the jab. Lucius Moon crowded past Hurley to get to Brad.

Tillamook was lunging forward, fists doubled.

Brad kicked with all his might at Ken Banks, who had come swaying back. The rancher caught the boot in his stomach; grunted, sagged back.

Another stick of stove-wood came flying by. Some one was yelling in the back of the room. The crowd was milling forward.

Brad saw Hurley an instant fighting toward him. Then he felt a stinging blow on the side of the head. He dived forward, bucking through toward Hurley. He felt his shoulder hit the chubby fatness of Gordon. They fell.

Brad stumbled up.

"Here, Brad," cried Hurley. "Over here!"

Brad battled toward the corner. Suddenly Tillamook was at his side, his big arms flailing, his feet striking out.

Another shot ripped through the bedlam.

A window-light crashed. Brad struck, kicked, doubled, plunged again. He was bucking through, with Tillamook helping.

A chair sailed through the air. It struck the light. There was a quick shattering of glass—then darkness seized the room like sudden blindness.

Brad felt some one grab his shoulder. He turned to shake it off. Then in his ear was the voice of Hurley.

"Over in the corner, Brad, quick!" Hurley commanded. "Edge toward the window and out."

THEY scrambled through the crowd. Brad wondered where Tillamook might be. It was impossible to single him out in the blackness.

Brad touched the wall with his hand. He moved along close to it. A match flared where some one was trying to light one of the other lamps. It flickered out. There was a cursing, struggling tangle a few feet back, where Brad had been a moment before.

They reached the window. Hurley lifted the sash and jumped. Brad dived outside.

"Where's Tillamook?" demanded Hurley as their feet hit the ground.

"Not with me," declared Brad. "Back there in that mix-up somewhere."

"I'll get him."

"Here. They'll break you if you go back alone."

But Hurley had clambered through the open window. Brad started to follow, then waited to see what the next lighted match might show.

Redly the light glowed; then there was steady yellow radiance from a lamp.

The tangle in the center of the floor was still snarled when Brad looked. On the floor was the unconscious form of Tillamook. Hurley Moon was in the act of stooping over to pick up the big ranger.

Ken Banks leaped forward as though to interfere. Hurley straightened, faced him, bodies almost touching. Hurley's lips moved. Banks hesitated, backed away. Hurley picked up Tillamook, his feet dragging, and pulled him toward the door. The crowd seemed uncertain. It was ready to break out again at the slightest gesture, but no leader made a first move.

Something about Hurley Moon as he struggled down the aisle held them back for a moment. Then, as one, they came charging him. But suddenly old Lucius Moon was blocking the mob, urging them to stop the fight. Brad wondered fleetingly what had changed the attitude of old Moon. Then he hurried around the schoolhouse.

He met Hurley at the door.

"Over to the pump, Brad. Water on his face. Now hold him as he comes out of it. There, he's coming."

Tillamook gasped, struggled, then got to his feet. In the darkness his hand went up to feel of a big bump on his head.

"Come on—travel!" directed Hurley. "They're powwow-in' in there as to what to do next. The old man stopped 'em, for some reason. Don't let them make up their minds on what to do. It may be rifles in the dark. Come on."

He led the way out of the school-yard, down the hill toward the little Forest Service truck.

"You both better go to town tonight," suggested Hurley. "This outfit is really stirred up. I can see that. We got out lucky. They might take a notion to visit the Ranger Station if you stayed there. If there is any amount of moonshine in that bunch, they may get fightin' drunk and be mean."

"Guess you're right, Hurley," said Brad. "I'm darned sorry I hit at them the way I did. But I was jumpy and sore because of this morning, I guess."

"I don't blame you. You've stood plenty. You did just right to speak up in meetin'. It's a show-down now, I guess.

"How's the head, Tillamook?"

The big ranger growled at his question.

"Come out of it, Tillamook," ordered Brad sharply. "Don't you know that Hurley hauled you out of that bunch in there when you were knocked clean out?"

"Huh! He did?"

"Sure did," affirmed Brad. "You might still be in there with some one's heel in your face, if he hadn't done it."

"Hell," said Tillamook expressively. Then he was suddenly quiet, thinking of that very morning when he had practically accused Hurley Moon of shooting big Silver.

"Now git," said Hurley, turning away. *"Pronto!"*

Whirling starter, coughing engine, the sound of the motor; then the car was rolling toward town. Tillamook made no protest as they turned at the road fork in the direction opposite from the Ranger Station. Brad offered no further chance to talk.

CHAPTER IV

"I'LL take you out to the station in the service truck, Tillamook," offered Brad the next morning after the clash in the Leetsdale schoolhouse.

"Reckon if you don't, I'll have to hoof it," answered the ranger.

Sunshine of early summer flashed and smiled as the flivver trundled toward the Cañon Creek Ranger Station. Prairie-dogs sitting erect on mounds near their burrows barked at the noisy vehicle. A red-shinned hawk leaped from a fence-post, flapped

lazily, then caught the breeze with his wings and soared off at an angle.

Finally the car left the highway and charged along the Ranger Station road.

"Hello, some one's waitin' for us to show up," said Tillamook as they rattled over the bridge and into view of the hitching rack. "Looks like Hurley Moon's horse Sox."

Hurley himself rose and came forward as Brad and Tillamook piled out of the rickety flivver.

"What's new, Hurley?" demanded Brad as he strode through the swinging gate. "Anything?"

"Not new, exactly. Something I didn't have a chance to show you last night." Hurley reached into his overalls pocket and brought out a shining object.

"Where did you get that?" demanded the Supervisor. Tillamook came craning his neck over Brad's shoulder.

"Where did you find it?"

"On the ridge south of the pass, at the point from which Silver was shot. Little tight stand of scrub alpine fir near some rotten granite ledges about two hundred feet from the third switchback."

"Foot tracks?"

"Yes. I trailed them for a hundred yards, then lost them where it was rocky and dry."

"No more clues there, then?"

"Nope."

"Did you see the caliber on this?" broke in Tillamook, his bushy brows rising.

"Yeh," agreed Hurley. "You saw it too, didn't you, Brad?"

Brad nodded.

"That ought to be not so hard," said Tillamook. "Not many .303 caliber rifles in this section."

"Go ahead and say it, Dad," the girl admonished. "May as well get it out of your system."

"You know of any, Hurley?" asked Brad.

"Two. My old man and Jap Banks. Both bought them about ten years ago."

Brad watched him as he mentioned Lucius Moon as owner of a .303 caliber rifle. Hurley's eyes flickered the tiniest bit when he mentioned his father, then held steady.

"Which one?" demanded Tillamook.

"Maybe neither," replied Brad. "There's no monopoly on rifles. I knew Lucius Moon owned a .303. I happen to know, too, that one of Gordon's cowhands has one; and I think that Gilland at the fire lookout has one. That's four that we know of. This may be an indication, but it don't prove who shot Silver. I want proof. I'll suspect no one without more proof," he finished, emphatically.

"Well, this aint proof. But darned important circumstantial evidence," continued

Hurley. "I found Jeff Banks had bought some ammunition of this caliber last week at the Leetsdale store."

All were quiet for a moment.

"That's more to the point," said Brad. "Do you suppose it was Jeff?" he demanded of Hurley with a quick snap in his voice. "If I were sure, I'd hunt him down now and—"

"Probably get shot while you were about it, Brad."

BRAD thought a moment, then changed the subject abruptly.

"Tillamook and I were talking on the way out about your dad holding back that bunch of cow-men at the schoolhouse last night. We can't figure why. Why do you think?"

"Well, the old man is shrewd. I don't even know how his mind works sometimes. He keeps his thinking to himself. He bellers at me about the Forest Service, raises hot Hades, but I'm inclined to think some of his worst bawling at me is with his tongue in his cheek. Maybe not, though. Maybe he really means it.

"But this move last night probably means that he wanted that fight to stop where it did. He saw he couldn't bluff you and figured that it was better to quit and try something different. The old man can do a lot of thinking in a mighty short time."

"Probably you've sized it up," mused Brad. "We'll find out his next move in due course, too."

"There's another thing I had in mind when I came over this mornin'," drawled Hurley, his eyes squinting a little as he looked at Brad. "You're without a hoss, Brad. Better let me fix you up with a good one."

Brad's smile had a wistful little quirk as he looked at Hurley.

"Thanks, old man. But Tillamook has a couple here that will ride good. I'm figurin' on gettin' him to take me over the ridge. I'll phone Carmody to meet us there at the fire-tool cache with that buckskin horse of mine. Much obliged, just the same, Hurley."

"Well, I guess I'll mosey," said Hurley finally starting toward the gate. . . . .

"That's a darned good alibi," growled Tillamook after Hurley had gone.

"What?" demanded Brad.

Tillamook held out his hand with the shell in it.

"How do you know he found that where he said he did. No way to prove that he didn't fire it from old man Moon's rifle—or that old Moon wasn't with him."

"Hell, Tillamook! Can't you trust anyone? Don't you believe in any man when he comes at you fair and square like Hurley?"

"Well, maybe I'm a bit prejudiced," admitted Tillamook. "But I've wrestled with that damned bunch so long I'm suspicious of all of them."

"And when you bump up against one that is a white man, you just can't believe it," chided Brad.

"Just cain't," agreed Tillamook laconically, pocketing the empty shell. "Human nater, I guess."

CHAPTER V

FOR five days Tillamook and Brad rode out from the Willow Creek cow-camp. On two nights Hurley Moon showed up at the camp. He was riding the highland meadows and draws, checking his cattle. The rest of the time Brad and the big ranger had the place to themselves.

For the most part they checked grazing conditions, distribution of cattle, and the placing of the salt.

Everywhere they saw young forest, mostly lodgepole, a rank forest weed where it was thickest. But below that, coming as an under story, was spruce. Aspen thickets, too, with their trim gray-green trunks, protected young growth of good forest trees. In time the aspen would kill out, and then there would come spruce and fir that would grow into good watershed protection and finally find lumber marts as stout planks.

Cattle on the Lodgepole Range were not as plump and sleek as they were elsewhere in the forest. At one place they came on the carcass of a white-face with its feet sticking out peg-like.

"Mighty early for poison weed," declared Tillamook. "Must have been drove to it by lack of other feed. Usually there aint much poisonin' here ontil later. That shows the range is overgrazed. Them white-faces wouldn't have put any of that stuff inside of 'em if they'd had plenty of bunch grass or grama."

At times they would rest on the high ridges and look down over the forest below, watching the cloud shadows sweep

over the green sea of young timber. Brad, his face alight, would point out some low knob where the forest was pushing up fringes of tiny trees, reaching ever higher, toward the pinnacles, trying to blanket down the untimbered areas.

At night, after the supper dishes were cleaned and Tillamook had given the little oilcloth-covered table of the cow-camp a few final touches with a sudsy dishcloth, they would sit while Brad smoked his black old pipe, gazed into the dying embers of the stove and dreamed of the empire of trees that would come over that section of the Pinos Altos in future generations. They even speculated what the annual cut might be year after year under good forest management. Through the mystic clouds of the pipe-smoke, the tiny trees took on giant size: there were saw-logs that had whole houses hidden away in their bodies. Other trees were beams for heavy construction. Planking for docks and bridges were in other stands, and there were millions of ties and mine-props conjured up as part of the big program of forest utilization. New farms appeared magically on the plains as the headwaters of the streams received more and more protection from the forest cover and the water-flow increased.

"Sounds fine!" exclaimed Tillamook one evening. "Darned if I'm not beginnin' to believe it, Brad. You talk that convincin'."

"Believe it," exploded Brad. "Why, you old infidel, you can't stay on my forest and not believe it. That's gospel, Tillamook. Just plain gospel, and by gosh, you've got to be a believer."

SILENCE came as they drifted with their own thoughts. Wind rustled through the leafy dress of the aspen outside the little log cabin. An owl, mourning some unknown tragedy that never happened, hooted rhythmically in mellow voice, softened by the sighing of the wind. The chatter of the hurrying stream crept in with the other noises that floated through the open cabin door, and the sound of the horses in the corral as they stamped or shoved each other around the rock salt added its bit to the voices of the mountain night.

Brad got up slowly, walked to the weathered plank door, stepped through the faintly outlined casement of old heavy native lumber. He strolled toward the stream, stopped, stood. His face lifted, the sweet air of the timber country filled his nostrils, and he took big deep draughts. His eyes sought the faint outlines of the trees as they stood feathery and black against the night sky. Eternity was wrapped in the raiment of the night; it winked out from the bright points of light that were other worlds in the blue-black sky, floating far away in that close, almost palpable vault of the heavens.

Night in the mountains; it was Brad Ogden's time and place of soul feast; the hour when he got courage to carry on against the odds, against disbelief, against selfishness. This night he was absorbing strength for that battle ahead.

NEXT day they rode to the Cañon Creek Ranger Station and turned the tired saddle animals in the pasture. Brad Ogden now knew conditions on the range. He headed back to Hooperville to check up on what had transpired during his absence. Tillamook went afield again to visit a three-man crew building a new forest trail through a choppy foothill section northward.

Sleepy morning activities were moving lazily in Hooperville as Brad walked from his boarding-house to the forest office, stepped in and came to a halt before the desk where Theodora Hathaway sat at her typewriter.

Reveling in the outdoor life of the field trip, he had temporarily put aside the constant threat of the Cañon Creek cattlemen. But he knew that something new had developed the moment he stepped back in the office and saw Ted's face.

"How's tricks, Ted?" he greeted.

"Oh, so-so, I guess, Brad," she replied. "Got some new grief to report. Gilland's sick."

"Isn't he up in the lookout?"

"Nope."

"We've got to get some one else up there in the fire lookout, then."

"Sure have."

"Let's look at that folder."

Ted handed over a manila container with the applications received that year for the job of forest-fire lookout on Noddle Head Peak. Brad thumbed through them, glanced at several, then handed it back to Ted.

"Try to get Hillary. If he's signed up for the season, try this other one here—Linn."

Brad tossed the folder to Ted and passed on to his own little boxlike office where the

scarred oak desk was piled with stacks of accumulated correspondence—memoranda, reports, and all the many varieties of typed and printed matter that flows into the office of a Forest Supervisor were in the orderly mess. He was still reading and making marginal notes for Ted's guidance when she came in at eleven o'clock.

"Found out about both of these fellows, Brad," she reported, handing him the folder. "Hillary has a job on the Lazy H Ranch for the whole season and says he's not interested. Young Linn has gone on over to the western slope to visit his sister. Can't wait for him to come back."

"No—got to have a lookout pretty *pronto,*" agreed Brad.

He thumbed over the applications, picked out a letter in a feminine hand, looked at it, turned it over.

"There's one that might do," he mused.

TED glanced sharply at him, then at the note.

"Della Gordon?" she inquired.

Brad nodded. Ted knew before she asked, who that application was from.

"What do you think of giving that girl a try, Ted?" Brad looked up inquiringly. He saw a queer mixed expression on Ted's face. Ted shook her head.

"You're always looking for converts, aren't you, Brad!" said Ted, a little sting in her voice. "If you can get some of these young Moons, Bankses and Gordons on your side, you think you'll change the older folks."

"They need converting, don't they?" countered Brad.

"Well, if *you* think that girl will do, why don't you give her a chance?" suggested Ted abruptly.

"Call her up, Ted, will you, and ask her to come in town this afternoon?"

"I'm busy, Brad," said Ted, a sharp note in her voice. "Call her yourself, why don't you?"

Brad looked a long moment at his clerk.

"All right," he agreed. He was a little nettled, for he was burdened with work too.

The girl turned and swished out the door. Brad watched her flounce out, smiled a little, sat for several long moments looking at the desk-top and listening to the furious rattle of the typewriter in the outer office. A few minutes later he had the assurance of Della Gordon over the telephone that she would drive her father's big touring car to Hooperville right after noon.

CHAPTER VI

DELLA GORDON kept her promise. At two o'clock Brad heard the door of the office open and her voice as she talked to Ted. A moment later Ted entered Brad's office.

"Miss Gordon to see you," she said coolly, and stepped back for Della to enter.

Brad came forward with his hand outstretched. "Wont you sit down," he suggested, placing a chair for her. "I want to talk business."

"Thank you," she replied in low musical tones.

Brad resumed his own chair, tilted back. "Mind if I smoke?" he inquired.

"No, indeed."

He consumed several moments filling his pipe, secretly appraising the girl sitting opposite: She was perhaps twenty, half a head shorter than Ted, but well proportioned. The outdoor outfit she wore was in harmony with her sun-tanned cheeks. She had thrown her range hat on the desk and had tossed her gauntleted driving gloves on its wide dun-colored brim. There was a soft gold-colored silk kerchief knotted around her neck, and she wore a boy's white silk shirt tucked inside the waistband of buff whipcord riding breeches. Her feet were in smart riding boots. Brad recognized it as an outfit she had worn at a rodeo and race meet held beyond the west boundary of Carmody's District the fall before.

Della fidgeted a little, crossed one knee over the other and turned in the swivel chair while Brad was taking his time filling and lighting his pipe. But she held her peace until he was ready to talk.

"It's about that lookout application of yours," said Brad abruptly, watching her face. Her eyes flashed as she smiled.

"I thought maybe it was," she said eagerly. "I heard that the regular man is laid up."

"Talked to your father about this?"

Her face clouded.

"No. The only person I've discussed it with was Hurley Moon."

Brad waited a moment. Then:

"Pretty lonesome up there all day long on that pinnacle. Have to stay there all daylight, and sleep in that little cabin at the foot of the cliffs through the whole fire season. I don't want to send anyone else up there and have them quit on me."

"I had that all put up to me when I

talked to Hurley. I think he was trying to see if I'd back down."

"Your mother might object," suggested Brad.

"Oh, Mother'll side in with me even if Pa doesn't," she declared. "There aren't many that can handle my father, but Mother and I can together if we have teamwork. I can get her to help me, I know."

Brad mused a moment. He looked into the sizzling bowl of his pipe. Then glanced up sharply at the girl.

"You know, if anything should happen because the lookout was not manned and a fire got loose, it would look mighty funny. I mean, that Eli Gordon, Jap Banks and Lucius Moon are out after my official hide. You know that already. Now, if the daughter of one of them were trusted by me and then something went wrong and a fire got loose and wiped up the country—well, you can get what I mean. That might be a right good way for them to get me busted in the Service. I wouldn't put it past some of 'em to frame me that way."

SLOW red mounted her throat, climbed into her cheeks, suffused her brow. She was on her feet as he finished.

"If you're that suspicious of me, why did you bring me in here?" she flared. "You think I'd do such a trick? You believe I'd be a party to such a business? I wouldn't have your job under these conditions at all. Never!"

She reached for her hat and gloves. Brad's brown hand shot out and caught hers.

"Sit down," he commanded. "I want to talk over your new work."

For many seconds she stood irresolutely, looking searchingly at Brad as he hunched forward in his chair.

"The job's yours if you want it, young lady," said Brad gravely, still holding tight to her hand.

A sound at his office door made Brad glance up. Ted stood there silently, stiffly. Della turned. Brad slowly loosened his grip on her hand as Ted advanced.

"I thought you might want this," said Ted crisply. She laid the folio that held the fire-maps of the Cañon Creek District on the desk. Then she clipped out with her head at a defiant angle.

Della Gordon slowly relaxed into the chair.

"You weren't in earnest then when you insinuated that my father was trying to get me up there so he could do you some dam-

age through me?" demanded Della sharply and looking Brad in the eye.

"No," replied Brad soberly. "I didn't believe that that was the line-up at all. I was just explaining to you how serious it was to have anything happen at the lookout when the fire season is on. Some one must be up there every hour of the day. One big fire loose without the lookout reporting it would mean trouble in big gobs."

He reached for the folio, opened it to where the map of the Cañon Creek District showed ground conditions by different colors.

"You still want the job, don't you?" he inquired.

"Yes," replied Della.

"You know," she said suddenly, leaning over the desk, her voice low, her eyes bright, "Hurley Moon really got me interested in this work. He believes in it so thoroughly I'd like to be on the same side of the fight that's brewing as he is. I can do my share in this lookout position. Can't I?"

"I just reckon so," agreed Brad heartily. But he had acquired a new slant, he thought, on those snappy little jabs from Ted when he had suggested Della Gordon for the lookout.

He shrugged a little, dismissing these thoughts. He bent over the colored maps and with his face close to Della's, began to talk in sharp businesslike sentences about the work of the fire lookout.

An hour and a half passed thus. Then Brad escorted Della to the front office door.

"You'll be there then by tomorrow night?" he inquired.

"Yes, I'm sure I will. I'll take supplies out in the car tonight and probably ride my horse over tomorrow. One of the boys from the ranch will go with me and take my plunder on a couple of pack-horses."

"I'll probably phone you tomorrow night to see how you are lined up—maybe come up Sunday and spend the day getting things strung out for you. *Adios,*" said Brad as he shook hands with Della. "Maybe see you Sunday."

"*Adios,*" replied the girl cheerily. The door slammed as she stepped out. The heels of her riding boots tapped a quick rhythm on the board walk as she hurried away.

"Made peace with part of the enemy," said Ted looking up from her desk. Brad gave her face a searching look.

"I think likely so," agreed Brad. "I guess she'll hold down the job. I think she's really in earnest about the work."

"Of course she's in earnest," agreed Ted. "A very earnest young woman, I should say. Rather pretty, too."

CHAPTER VII

ELI GORDON had not been able to talk lucidly when his daughter told him that she was to be the new fire lookout on Noddle Head. He roared, snorted and roared again, started to swear in long streaming oaths, suddenly remembering that he was talking to his daughter, and then stood with stout legs spread, his little eyes snapping rapidly.

"Go ahead and say it, Dad," the girl admonished. "You might as well get it out of your system. If you keep it penned up inside, you'll burst."

Eli snorted again, swayed and turned half on his heel, then faced her.

"You're no child of mine," he burst out. "That's nothing short of treachery, that's what. You know I'm one of the cow-men fighting that young whipper-snapper Ogden. He's got to come through with what belongs to us by rights here on the range. Now you go gallivantin' off to work for him. Hell and salvation! Of all the ongrateful, head-strong young ninnies that ever walked this section of God's green footstool—"

"Now, Eli," broke in Mrs. Gordon placidly. "Eli, you've cursed enough, and you've bawled enough. I think maybe you better tell Della that you give your consent. She can do what she wants to, and you can do what you want to. You both will, anyway. But you can at least keep peace in this family."

Eli acknowledged defeat after an hour more of bitter argument.

SUNDAY morning early had found the little one-room log cabin below the fire lookout freshly cleaned, things neatly arranged and Della ready to go to the white boxlike crow's-nest where it perched at the top of the granite fingers of the peak.

The forenoon moved along. She wondered where Brad Ogden might be. Brad at the moment was mending his second blow-out of the morning.

Eleven was registered by the little alarm-clock on the cabin wall when she heard the patter of horse's hoofs. She saw the

shadow of the moving horseman as he passed by the window. She jumped up, hurried to the door, expecting to see the trim forest green uniform of Brad Ogden. But the figure that she beheld was very different from that of Brad.

"Why, hello, Ken," she exclaimed.

"Howdy," he answered. There was a surly note in his voice.

Kennard Banks believed that he was the most Western Westerner in the State. He dressed the part, acted it, talked it.

"I didn't expect to have visitors this early," said Della, coming forward.

"No, reckon not," replied Ken shortly. He leaned picturesquely against the corner of the cabin. "I come up to get yuh to drop this job."

"Well, I'm sorry you had your ride for nothing, Ken," remarked Della after a moment's pause. "But you know I've agreed that I'd do this for the season. I'm not going to back out."

"Yuh agreed to stay the season?"

She nodded.

"Well, yuh aint goin' tuh. I wont let yuh."

"Humph. It'll take more than you to stop me," flashed Della.

"It will, huh?" He took a step toward her.

"Yes, it will 'huh.' "

KEN came lurching forward. Della backed against the wall of the cabin. She could smell whisky on his breath. He reached out, caught her wrists.

"What you doing? Quit, you're hurting my wrists."

"Air yuh goin' to stop this nonsense and ride back to yore dad's ranch with me?"

"Not much."

"Well, by God, I'll make yuh then. I come up to make yuh. I'll tote yuh back if I have to hog-tie yuh and pack yuh on a saddle. Yo're makin' a darned fool of yoreself. And yore old man, too. And all of us Cañon Creekers. Damned little fool traitor, that's what yuh air. Come along here, get yore duds packed!"

He pulled her toward the door. With a quick jerk, she freed herself.

"Ken, be reasonable," commanded the girl angrily. "Don't make a fool of yourself. I'm in no mood for fussing this morning. Quit your foolish bawling and keep your hands off of me—*keep your hands off of me, I tell you!*"

Ken Banks lunged forward.

Quickly the girl struck. Her blow merely dazed him, angered him.

"Yuh will, heh?" he snarled. He lunged forward again. "Yuh damned little traitor! I'll wring yore neck for that—and make yuh like it," he finished between locked teeth.

Della stood her ground; her fists doubled.

Ken stopped, a little baffled because she apparently was unafraid.

"Yo're smart, aint yuh? Trailin' off after this Brad Ogden and this Hurley Moon. Must be layin' a snare for one or t'other of 'em."

DELLA flushed, then went white. She stepped back a pace. Ken swayed forward, crouching, shifty eyes alert, outstretched hands partly open.

Suddenly he leaped, his arms flew over hers, pinioned them. She struggled, wrenched, twisted, throwing all of her buoyant strength into an effort to get free. But his crushing grip held, smothered her fighting attack.

She kicked, tried to bite, twisted again and threw the weight of her body against his in an effort to drive him backward and trip him. She had done this when they had wrestled years before as school-children, but now Ken's lean frame held more leverage than hers.

Suddenly she was limp in his arms.

"Well, what do you want?" she demanded. "Just what is it you're after? Do you know?"

"Yore goin' back with me to the ranch—now!"

"I'm not!" Della struck out with such leverage as she could command, twisted partly free. Ken's grip slipped. He jumped forward.

"Yuh would, would yuh!" he snarled. His hands gripped hers, shoved her arms backward. He brought them up behind her back in a double hammer-lock. Slowly, slowly, the pressure started. Pain began to flow dully through her arms. She struggled. The pain increased sharply.

"You brute, you bully!" Della Gordon sobbed helplessly, angrily. "Quit, Ken, quit. You're hurting me terribly!"

Ken Banks grinned evilly.

"How about goin' back with me as I say?" he demanded.

Della struggled a little. The pain was almost unbearable, and she cried out in a sharp repressed little scream.

The next instant Banks' hands were torn from their hold, and Brad Ogden shoved him again as he staggered back.

"WHAT'S the idea?" Ogden demanded. "What's this all about?"

"Ken's drunk," said Della, ready now to at least partly defend her one-time schoolmate. "He's trying to be a wild bad man."

"What's he been doing to you?" demanded Brad. "What made you scream a minute ago?"

"He was—twisting my arms."

"Why?"

"She's makin' a damned fool out of herself," flared Ken, breaking into the conversation.

"Shut up, you, until you're spoken to," commanded Brad. "Now what is his game?" he demanded of Della.

"Oh, he's just angry," said the girl. "He's set against me working for the Forest Service."

"Oh, that's it."

Brad stepped toward him.

"Halt! Not another foot!" warned Banks, crouching, snarling.

Brad looked down. A big .44 had flashed from Ken's holster. It was pointed, from Ken's hip, at the middle of Brad's stomach.

Brad looked up again at the boy's face. He saw there cowardice and bravery. If he went another step forward, Ken Banks would pull that trigger. Ken was frightened and he had to keep up his bluff.

Banks saw he had Brad stopped. A slow insulting grin spread over his face. He sneered as he addressed Brad.

"Yo're smart—not! Yuh think yuh kin come down here from Wyoming and tell us where to head in. Yuh've got another think comin'. We don't head nowhere for no dude like you, Forester.

"Yo're just too darned smart, yuh air. Some day they'll find yuh on some of these back trails with a hunk or two of lead in yuh if you keep up bein' so smart. Yore horse got it once instead of yuh. Yuh'll get it the next time!"

"My horse, Silver?"

"Yeh, Silver."

"You know who shot my horse? Then I'll break it out of you, by the Lord—"

Ogden took two quick determined steps forward.

"Stop. Don't move," shrilled Ken Banks. "I'll blow you to hell if you come another step. I mean it!"

Ogden stalked ahead more slowly. He was set to leap at the first twitch of Ken's eyes.

"Damn yuh, I'll kill yuh," squealed Ken, his face white.

"Not if I see you first," came a cool voice from around the little log cabin. "Now up, Kennard, high like a house. Hands up and no funny moves!"

All three whirled. A rifle muzzle was pointed around the place where the logs were mortised.

His eyes wide, his lower lip sagging, his face whitened, Ken Banks slowly raised his hands.

"Show's over, I guess," said Hurley Moon as he strode around the corner of the cabin. Ted Hathaway followed. Hurley's rifle continued to cover Ken.

"Now, git, Kennard," he advised. "Move, vamoose, *poco pronto. Adios!* And keep your hands high as you go. Don't try to come romping back to shoot up this place. That wouldn't be a bit healthy."

Ken Banks, all of the fight for the moment scared from him, glanced around the group, then turned with his hands still up above his head and started toward the corral corner. All were silent near the cabin until he had disappeared. Then Hurley laughed.

"Bang! Another redskin bit the dust," he mocked. "Dead-eye Dick is in full retreat."

"I think he'd 've shot," said Brad quickly. "He was liquored up and hot under the collar. Up here bullying the new lookout just because she didn't believe the same way about the Forest Service as he does."

"Oh, that was it." Hurley looked at Della and smiled. "Some of the old Cañon Creek spirit outcropping."

"It was partly Cañon Creek spirits at any rate," agreed Della, glancing to where Banks had now picked up the reins of his saddle-horse and was mounting beyond the gate. "That kid certainly thinks he's tough."

TED HATHAWAY had been a quiet observer of the quick finish to the threats of Ken Banks. She now spoke casually to Hurley Moon.

"Lucky we found that break in your line fence, mended it and came on up here, wasn't it?"

"Wont you all come in?" invited Della, stepping toward the door. "I'll get you

"Stop!" shrilled Banks. "I'll blow you to hell if you come another step."

some tea and some other eats, if you'll stay."

"Oh, I don't think we should, do you, Hurley?" said Ted. "We have our own lunch that the cook at the T K Ranch put up this morning and a vacuum bottle of coffee. I'm afraid it would be an imposition, coming in this way quite unexpected." She glanced fleetingly at Brad as she accented the last two words.

"I'd really be glad to have you," insisted Della hospitably. "Don't you think you can, Hurley?"

The young rancher glanced at Ted.

"Oh, I guess we'll not bother yuh, Della." He was a little awkward as he answered. "Some other time maybe all four of us can go on a picnic. Thanks just the same; we'll mosey along."

"Besides," said Ted, as she stood in the door, a little smile on her lips, "Brad hasn't had a chance to talk to his new lookout. I'm sure we shouldn't interfere with that. *Adios!*"

WHEN they were out of sight, Brad turned to Della. The girl glanced up. There was a hint of tears in her eyes.

"She wasn't very kind, was she?" said Della, low and soft. "I wonder why. I tried to be neighborly."

"Doggoned if I know why," exploded Brad. "I've never seen that kid act that way. Maybe something's upset her. Perhaps that little stunt of Ken Banks had something to do with it—her comin' around the corner and seein' him all set for murder. Do you reckon?"

Della was silent, looking over the hills.

"Do you think she really—cares for him?" she murmured at length.

"Cares for who?" asked Brad.

"Ted Hathaway—Hurley Moon. Or is it just nothing but friendship?"

"How should I know? Why do you ask me?" Brad was a little sharp in his remark. It was a question that had been bothering him of late, and he hated to have it put abruptly by some one else.

"I ask because—you can understand why I ask. You see, I—I'm rather fond of Hurley, myself. You'll not laugh at me—"

"I sure'll not. Cross my heart. Here, here's my hand on it, *compadre.*"

Brad stuck out his paw, and their hands met in firm friendly grip.

"Well, let's get this business whipped out," she said after a moment turning to the range-finder. "Then lunch, and then you can get on your way back to town."

The sunny hours passed with Brad telling the girl of her duties. A friendly talk over tea and sandwiches was followed by more instructions up in the little coop on the rock with its gigantic forest empire spread away beneath them.

Through evening shadows that streaked over the forest roads, Ogden drove the little truck. His thoughts were filled with recollections of Ted Hathaway, of the night at the ranch, of Hurley Moon and how he had looked hungrily at Ted, of Della Gordon and the queer twist that had made her turn to him for comfort when Hurley had gone racing away with Ted.

CHAPTER VIII

ON the following Friday morning, when Brad came swinging through the doors of the Forest Office, he found Ted at her desk with stacks of memoranda from the case files piled in towering masses around her. Her mouth was puckered a little, and she was hammering the keys of the typewriter as though each touch of the keys was a blow at some enemy.

"Gosh, girl!" exclaimed Brad, smiling down at her pretty upturned face. "What in Sam Hill has riled you this early?"

Ted glanced up, squinted one eye, crooked her finger imperiously. Brad, obeying the command, leaned over. Ted glanced at the door of the inner office.

"Caverley's in there," she whispered.

Brad's eyebrows raised.

"He's been here since yesterday," continued Ted. "Telegraphed from the city that he was due in on yesterday's train, came in as per schedule without warning, was peeved because you were not here, and then took out his spite by going through every darned file in the office. He's been pokin' his choicest sarcasm at me since I got here this mornin'."

She started rattling away on the typewriter again furiously, then stopped.

"He's in there waiting to talk, Brad. He's had a big bawling-out corked up inside for nearly a day, and he's under an awful head of steam!"

CAVERLEY was a District Forest Inspector, a man with some authority and some power in the District Office at Denver. He was generally disliked by most of the field men. He was slight and wiry, and smart in his Forest Service uniform. His dark hair was sprinkled with white. His face was sallow, his skin flabby, yet giving the impression that it was stretched over the high cheek-bones.

"How are you, Ogden?" he said as he got to his feet. His voice was crisp, with finality in its intonations.

Brad shook his lean hand.

"I'm tip-top, Caverley," countered Brad, his eyes catching the expressionless glare of the Inspector for an instant. Ogden had never had any particular love for Caverley. In Ogden's mind, he had come to classify Caverley as the typical bureaucrat, the man who puts the Bureau, regulations, rulings of the comptroller, exactness according to the prescribed way of doing things, before human service and the practice of true forestry. Caverley worshiped at the shrine of precedent, could do nothing whatever without consulting both the Forest Service manual and the files where the actions of other bureaucrats before him gave him his cue as to what lines to follow.

Caverley cleared his throat.

"I'm sorry to break into your work," he said suavely. "I know there is plenty waiting for you after a field trip. But the District Office wants some first-hand information immediately. So I came in on the train yesterday and am going out today if possible."

"Start right away, then," said Brad easily. "What's troublin' the District Office?"

Caverley cleared his throat again, hauled some papers out of a leather brief-case.

"You seem to have had trouble recently, Ogden," he said crisply, leaning back. "We got a report in Denver about some disgraceful sort of a row that you were partly responsible for, at the last meeting of the Cañon Creek Stockmen's Association."

"Where did you get that report?" demanded Ogden, his temper rising.

Caverley raised his brows a little.

"Now does that matter, Ogden? It's true, isn't it?"

"How can I tell whether you've got the true slant or not until I hear what sort of information or misinformation you've received?"

Caverley picked up the sheets, thumbed them a moment, laid out a telegram in front of him.

"Well, I heard," said Caverley, slowly raising his eyes from the telegram, "that you were invited to explain the grazing

regulations that you have made for this Cañon Creek District. That is correct?"

"Yes."

"Well, according to our information, you didn't go about it in the most diplomatic manner. Sort of told them that they could take them or do the other thing."

"Yes, that's approximately so. But before I said that—"

"Should you have said it under any circumstances?" snapped Caverley. "I've never liked your policy, Ogden. I've spoken to you several times about it in the past. You go at things too direct. You should use more tact."

BRAD OGDEN was quiet for a moment. He was having a hard struggle to keep back a sharp retort.

"Well, I've tried to carry out your ideas, Caverley," he said at length. "But you and I don't work the same way."

"More's the pity," said Caverley. Brad let that pass.

"Before I said anything about those fellows taking it, leaving it or lumping it, they had defied all Forest authority. They had practically told us they would do as they pleased, regardless."

"They should never have been allowed to get into such a frame of mind," insisted Caverley. "You know that our whole policy is to keep on friendly terms with the cattlemen. Work with them, not cross them. Try to make them friends."

"Well, this bunch of *hombres* want to rule the forest. I'm not going to let them, not while I'm super."

"You have put the Service in an awkward situation at Washington by your stubbornness, Ogden."

"Oh, what do that bunch of musty old pensioners know about what is going on here?"

"They have ways of finding out," Caverley glared severely. "Every time you make a *faux pax* such as this, it's felt somehow at Washington. We received this telegram two days ago from the Forester's Office about this subject under discussion. The Senator from this District has had a long conference with the Forester about it. The Forester himself directed our office to try and straighten you out so you'll use more diplomacy with these men."

"Say, do you want the straight of the situation here?" flared Brad. "I'm getting darned fed up on your trying to find faults instead of facts."

"Tut, tut, Ogden! You don't seem to realize that when you precipitate a situation like this in the field with such influential men as Banks and Gordon or Moon, that you make trouble for us in the District Office and trouble for the Forester. It might have some effect on our appropriations for the next year. You know that Senator Cleeland from this District is on the Appropriation Committee, don't you? He is very close to Banks and Gordon. Such a situation can cause us a lot of trouble in the office."

"Trouble in your office," scoffed Brad. "Do you think it's any picnic here in the field?"

"Remember this, Ogden," snapped Caverley primly, "the field is the contact with the public. When we have trouble in the field or in the office, it is because of something that is happening in the field."

Brad slumped a little in his chair. Of all District Office men, Brad would have selected Caverley last as the one with whom to discuss the trouble with old Moon and his cohorts.

"What do you propose to do in the future?" asked Caverley.

"Just what I've been doing," replied Brad. "You can't tell me anything about grazing conditions up there, Caverley. I know. I've been on every ridge, in every valley, through every meadow with Tillamook Thompson within the last twenty days. I'm not taking hearsay for my opinions.

"Caverley, if those fellows are allowed to graze that range this way another two seasons, there isn't goin' to be any range. It's going to be stripped down to the roots! They ought to be reduced half instead of a little ten per cent.

"What's worse, the young forest is going to suffer from erosion and from tramping out of the seedling trees.

"I'm sitting tight and waiting for the next move. . . . . Here's some more for you to think about: I've found that they are grazing more than their allotments right now as they said they would."

"And what are you doing about it?"

"I'm going to crack down on them. I'm going to stand by my guns. Just as soon as I can prove my case, I'll make Christians and believers out of this bunch, so help me!"

"You may find some official backing lacking when you do that," said Caverley sharply. "You can't expect the District

Office to be in harmony with such high-handedness. If you insist that you are going to run this forest your own willful way without giving heed to our counsel, you'll get official censure."

"What's your counsel?" demanded Brad. "Let these *hombres* have their way as they have in the past? Give them the whole darned forest? Let them run it as they please, destroy a lot of good range, and kill a lot of timber stuff that is coming on, too? That your idea of good counsel?"

CAVERLEY'S parchment face wrinkled in a scowl. He pursed his thin lips.

"Well, I think it would be policy to give in somewhere, if we have to."

"That's all we have done in the past. They've run this show here as they saw fit. When a super tried to do anything they didn't like, they broke him or run him off. You've let 'em too, by not giving the field men real support. I was sent down here by Hanum to stop that pilfering. I'm going to do it. If they run me off, they'll do it with me fighting!"

"I don't like your belligerent attitude a bit, Ogden," said Caverley darkly.

"Well, maybe if you'd had a favorite horse killed right by your side with a bullet that was meant for you, if you had been ganged by a bunch of bulldozing cattlemen in a meeting that you went to with the best intentions, and then had some one go trotting to the District Office and telling their tales and the District Office people believing them, maybe you'd not feel any too damned peaceable either!"

Brad hammered the desk as he finished.

Caverley thought for a long time.

"I hadn't heard about the shooting of your horse. When and where did it occur?"

Brad poured out the whole story.

"There," he said finally. "That's what I wanted to tell you in the first place. There's a memo if you want it officially. It's in my locked file. That's why you didn't find it with all your rummaging."

Caverley got up, walked to the window, looked out, squinted his eyes. He stood thus for many long moments without moving. Then he turned to Brad.

"I think that we might make a good move back toward peace in view of something I have with me here," said Caverley crisply. "I think we have it in our hands to take some action which will perhaps be a step in conciliation."

"All right, let's have it," demanded Brad.

"Lucius Moon has made a filing for additional homestead land."

"What?"

Brad straightened up out of his chair in surprise.

"Here it is. It's for forty additional acres above his meadow. He has only a hundred and twenty now. Has a perfect right under the Act of June 11th to make such a filing. Ordinarily we wouldn't give it much consideration. But under the circumstances we might—"

"Close our eyes and make him a present of forty acres of timber-land just because he hollers loud enough and has some friends that are friends of a Senator!" finished Brad.

"You have said it," said Caverley. "I'm glad you'll fall in with it. I think it will go a long way toward—"

"Fall in with it! Who in blazes gave you that idea? Go paying blood money to old Lucius Moon to keep peace? Not by a darned sight! If you expect me to approve that filing when it is strictly against all of the law, regulations—"

"No one has any more regard for regulations than I," countered Caverley, his sallow mask of a face losing its momentary gleam of friendliness that showed when he had thought, in his egotism, that Brad had at last agreed with him. "But I'm ready to do my share in this move to make Moon a friend of the Service."

"You approve that homestead, and there will be hell popping in the Canon Creek Ranger District. That's only the first move. Moon's had this up his sleeve ever since that row. He gets me in a position where he can say that I've been brawling. Some one tried to throw the fear into me by getting my Silver horse shot from ambush. Then Moon comes romping up to Denver with an application for a homestead, filing as typical a piece of the lodgepole forest country as anyone could find and tries to shove that through with the help of his Senator friend. . . . . Caverley, that is the thing he's planned to drive through ever since that row. It's the key to his whole new campaign. He found he couldn't bluff me, so he's doped this out. You approve that, give him that piece of ground, and that bunch will be down on our necks with filings for homesteads on every section in the lodgepole country."

"I'm not so sure."

"I am," said Brad decisively.

"This application is coming to you for your field report, Ogden. I'd suggest you think this over carefully before you disapprove. I think this is a real opportunity for quieting a lot of trouble that seems to be brewing. It will soothe this antagonism of Moon without any great sacrifice.

"You can do as you wish, Ogden, but if I were in your place, I'd look on it with some favor."

"All right, Caverley, send on your request for a report on that filing. I'll report. But I'll give it as I see it. I'm running the Pinos Altos. I'll throw no sop to old Moon to keep him quiet.

"Send on your report if you insist, but I'll tell you right now that it'll be unfavorable, unfavorable as hell!"

"Ogden, you're impossible!" exploded Caverley. "You're utterly impossible. I sometimes think that the Service would be far better off without you in it."

"Well, I can't say that I have any different regard for you," blurted Brad.

Caverley, his thin lips tight, rose quickly to his feet. His cold blue eyes were flashing, his thin brows were level, his wrinkled face held more expression than Brad had ever seen. He actually appeared angry. Brad had grim satisfaction that he had jarred Caverley from his usual restrained preciseness.

"I guess there's no use arguing with you any further, Ogden. I'm grieved that we had to finish without you seeing the advisability of what I suggest."

"Don't let it worry you, Caverley. Just you do what you think right. I'll do what I think is right. Then both of our consciences will not be troubled—or have you only an office manual where your conscience should be?"

FOR a long moment, Caverley scowled and searched Brad's face. His bloodless cheeks were flushed, and he breathed rapidly.

"I resent that last remark. I warn you, you'd better change your mind," he said finally, and began gathering up the papers on the desk.

"I'll change my mind if I see good reason to," replied Brad. "You're welcome to all the resentment you can muster, too. It's mutual."

Caverley picked up his papers, shoved them in the brief-case angrily, turned and walked out the door.

BRAD came to the door of his private office and watched the District Forest Inspector departing. He offered no word of farewell, but grimly shrugged his shoulders and brushed his hands as Caverley went out of the door.

"For heaven's sake!" exclaimed Ted resting her hands on the edge of her desk. "What did you give him in there?"

"Just about all that his official dignity would absorb without blowing up completely," replied Brad, coming toward the stenographer's desk. "I suppose I'm as good as a dead one in this District now. Caverley'll be lookin' for any way to harpoon me. He's against me in this fight with the Cañon Creekers. He'll work with them to bust me. Once a man crosses him, it is war inside the Service under the cloak of the Civil Service until—the bureaucrat always wins!"

"What was this row over?" asked Ted. "Maybe you're right about it."

"Right or wrong makes no difference to that bird. He's out to perpetuate the Bureau and thereby perpetuate the good old pay-check that it showers down to him every month. Bureau first, people afterward. Rules and regulations not for forestry but to give those who are good yes-men a job for life at the public expense. I'm darned near disgusted, to think that such pin-headed people can hold such positions in this great Service which otherwise is so sound and able.

"And now Caverley pulls the prize bonehead of the year!"

"Tell me," insisted Ted.

"You'll never guess," replied Brad, a little of the disgust disappearing from his voice. "Old Lucius Moon has made a filing under the homestead laws to get an additional forty acres in the lodgepole above his ranch."

Ted drew in her breath, her round eyes popped wider.

"Why—"

"I knew you'd be flabbergasted. Now here's another jolt! Caverley wants to give it to him to pacify him and make him a friend of the Forest Service!"

"It wouldn't be good policy to do that?"

"I should say not. Some idea of this sort of a move is what made the old Piute stop that muss at the schoolhouse. Moon's worked it so whatever I do I'm in for trouble!"

"Would it do any real harm, Brad, to give old Moon what he wants this time."

Brad snorted.

"I wouldn't have thought that from you, Ted."

"Well, I didn't know. Forty acres up in that country isn't such a very big piece of ground."

"But that's the key, Ted. That's the impinging point. Old Moon knows where he's striking. We give him that forty and every son of a Banks, all of Gordon's cow waddies and every other cow wrangler in this region would file homesteads in the Lodgepole Country, in every little valley, over every water hole. The precedent would be established. Moon knows Caverley well enough to know that with such a precedent to follow and enough threatening here and at Washington, the others would get their homesteads because he did.

"If all that happened—the Forest would be a wreck! All doled out to private interests."

Ted nodded. "I guess that's right. Not so dusty on the part of Lucius Moon either, is it?"

"Nope. He could get several thousand acres for himself if he could get some young fellows to file on it, prove up and then sell to him afterward. When it comes to filling the residence requirements, they would all get up and swear falsely for each other.

"I've been underestimating old Moon. Right now he's got me in a corner, Ted, in a corner. But I can prove that's forest land to the District Office, to the Forester, to Congress, if necessary. All they've got to do is look at that young growth that is coming in there rank and straight and they'll be convinced. It's going to stay forest if Moon and Caverley bust me flat.

"I'm going to fight—fight!"

Brad turned and went back to his own desk. Ted's eyes were shining, filled with glowing lights, as they followed him striding to his own working den.

Alone, Brad burned more pipefuls of tobacco than was good for him as he pondered. It was war, with Moon, with Caverley. Mentally he mustered the forces at his command. He would lick Moon and his associates, beat them, outplay them until they were forced to admit defeat.

Dusk fell before Brad had finished his plan of campaign.

The next installment of Mr. Carhart's fascinating novel of the real West brings scenes exciting indeed. Be sure to read it in the next, the August issue.

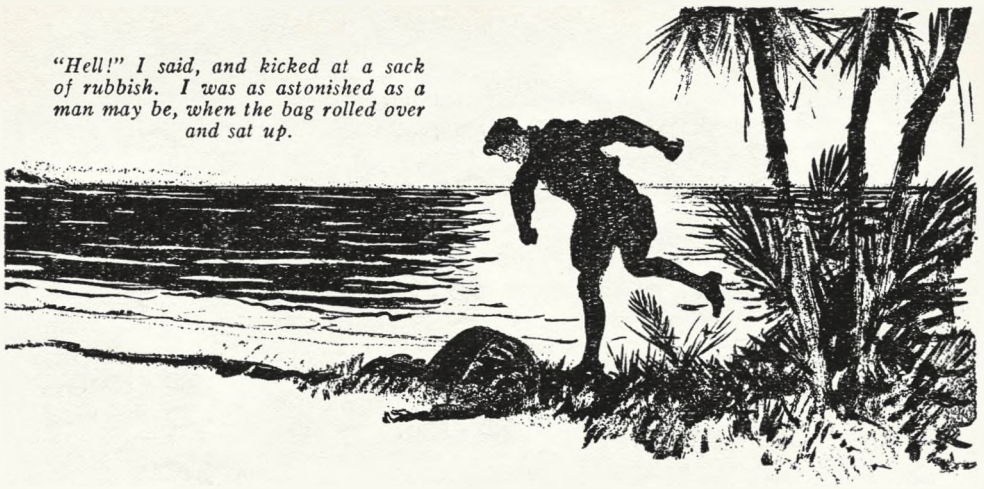
Blue Jim Takes A Hand

THE whole side of the open veranda was a sheet of stars. Out on the beach, not twenty yards away, small waves were breaking in Roman candles of sparkling green; there was sea-fire that night. Without a moon, you could yet see clearly enough to mark the cool emptiness of the coral strand that stretched out invitingly below the "quarters;" you could trace the line of the gray path leading away among the palms. . . . .

One could not be expected to stand what was going on in the house. No. Not with that quiet strand, that peaceful path, and the stars, to call one out of it. I had not had a minute's sleep since the wretched Roy came in. I could not bear it any more. We were alone in the quarters, and I had heard him crying right along since twelve o'clock—it was now, by my luminous-dial watch, a quarter to three.

If we had been women, I suppose one would have gone to his room, and patted him on the shoulder, and said: "There, there!" or something equivalent. And it might have done somebody some good. I don't know—I've never been very much of a woman's man.

But one doesn't go and look at another fellow crying, blubbering like a child, if one can help it. He wouldn't like it, and you wouldn't like yourself. So there was nothing for me but the empty coral strand,



"Hell!" I said, and kicked at a sack of rubbish. I was as astonished as a man may be, when the bag rolled over and sat up.

By BEATRICE GRIMSHAW

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

From far Papua, where the distinguished author has lived for many years, comes this picturesque, unusual and deeply interesting story.

with the sea-fires breaking on it, and the reef, miles out, talking as reefs do talk, late in the night.

The reef sounded, and the palms made papery noises, and the loose coral clinked like china underneath my feet. It was not so very silent out there, after all, and that was well, for if everything had been still, as it is on some of the scorching north-west season nights, I should have fancied that I heard, yet, the sounds that seemed branded into my ears, the sounds of Arthur Roy, almost twenty-one, strong and handsome, about to be married, crying through the night before his wedding day.

NOW, I know that the classical situation —in stories—is otherwise. It is the young beautiful girl who weeps the night through, before the day that is to see the last of her single life. But—I have seen the world; I know that the tragic bridegroom is not very much less common than the tragic bride. He doesn't feature so well in a film; he is perhaps the least bit ridiculous; he is bitterly ashamed of his woes, while the tragic bride—sometimes—gets consolation and capital out of parading hers. But, take it from me, his position is rather the worse of the two.

Knowing this; with those terrible, harsh male sobs still in my ears; with the thought in my mind of the boy lying there, his life spoiled, his future mortgaged, his children cursed before their birth—I went along the quiet strand as if the devil himself had driven me. I found myself talking before long, alone with the night and the sea. "It ought to be stopped," I said; and then: "I—I—for twopence I'd—"

Crazy thoughts entered my mind of fighting Roy, knocking him out, putting him in a hospital for a week or so. The worst of it all was that I knew a week might save him. Just to see the monthly steamer in; just to get communication by means of her radio with the outer world. . . . .

But I was years older, and inches shorter. I might think of knocking out the young giant; thought was as far as such a scheme was likely to go.

"Hell!" I said, and kicked out at a sack of rubbish left by some of the native prison gang in a hollow of the beach. It was duskish there, under the shade of the seaward-growing palms. I was as much astonished as a man may be, when the bag rolled over, sat up, and threw my own ejaculation back in my face, adding indistinctly: "What d'ye mean by it?"

"Is that you, Blue Jim?" was my answer. "Too bad—I thought it was a sack."

"Granted," came his reply, lofty but confused. Then, gravely: "Are you drunk, too?"

"No. Came out for a walk."

"What about?"

I remembered that Jim, drunk or sober, had always had the knack of shooting uncommonly straight. This was surely a sample. I temporized. There was no use giving away Roy's troubles to this insouciant gold-miner, known all over Papua as Blue Jim, on account of an early accident that had stained one cheek of his good-looking dare-devil face the color of the sea. I had known Jim was "in;" the island generally knew all about that. About two o'clock he had hailed me from the steps of the hotel, where he was sitting with a boot in his hand. The other boot was in its natural place. "Look at the holes in me sock," he had complained. "Been walking up and down the town since eleven o'clock, trying to put on other boot. Can't stan' on one leg. Not a st—a stork. Eve'y time, tummle over. Never get that boot on." He looked at me angrily, and I withdrew, lest he should make a personal matter of it. When Blue Jim "came in with a shammy" (of gold), he seldom left the island town without a fight.

And here he was, apparently sobered off, sitting on the beach at three o'clock in the morning, probing, with the very first of his recovered senses, for my secret. That was Jim. . . . . I had often wondered why a man of such sharp intellect should choose to bury himself among the all but inaccessible gold-fields of the mainland; but I had never discovered any reason.

"I—just came," was my lame reply, now.

BLUE JIM stretched out his legs, regarded, with some dismay, the still unshod left foot, and asked me irrelevantly: "See a wild boot running about anywhere? Lasso it for me if you do. . . . . Spit it out, mate."

"What, the boot?" Jim and I had been "mates" once, on the occasion of my sole, disastrous venture to the gold-fields. Since then he had kept the sort of liking for me that a competent man (Blue Jim was most competent, at his chosen job) keeps for a pleasant bungler. That I didn't bungle my new work of Government hospital assistant, was nothing to Jim. I think he mixed that up, inevitably, with ideas of caps and aprons. Whereas gold-mining, as the world knows, is above all a man-sized job.

"You know I don't mean the boot," he said pleasantly, but in the moonlight, I could see a wicked twinkle in his eye. Jim was as mischievous as a goat, on occasion. I feared he would simply add to Roy's troubles by laughing at them, but I supposed he was bound to know in any case. So, briefly, I told the story—more than I have told here.

The effect astonished me as much as I have ever been astonished in my life. Jim, regardless of his unbooted foot, sprang erect on the coral gravel, and cursed the wedding, the bride, her relations, the island, the minister, and everything else connected with the ceremony that was to take place next day, as if it had been his own.

"Hold hard," I said, amazedly. "What's it to you?"

"Nothing. Only that I—I can't stand—You say he got left a couple of days alone with her when the launch broke down, at the plantation—and her brothers got at him, and threatened to have him thrown out of his job; and the girl said she'd tell the manager herself?"

"Yes. I think he'd have better lost a dozen jobs than marry such a catamaran."

"What did they mean to do if he refused?"

"Bring the usual action—down South. Jim, it's a put-up job if ever there was one. She's ages older; she's knocked about the island bars for donkey's years; what she doesn't know isn't worth— Anyhow, he treated her as he'd have treated his own sister, all along. And they talked about innocence, and lost character and betraying. Betraying! It's the lad that has been betrayed, and is paying for it. Why, the very peacock voice of her—"

Under the light of a warped, late-rising moon, Jim looked extraordinarily sober.

"Island bars," he said, musingly, and then: "Voice like a peacock— How long's she been here? Never saw her."

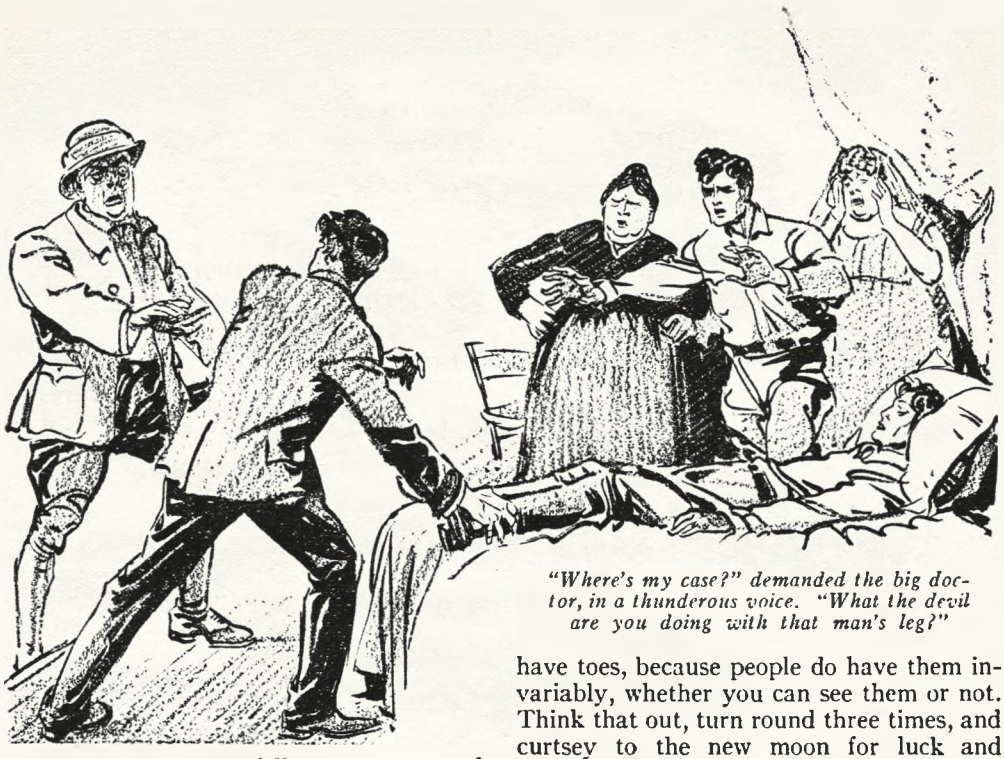
"Some months. Came up from Australia shortly after the last time you were in. Do you know her? Jones is her name."

"Common as dirt. Common as my own name—near as many Joneses as Smiths knocking about. Doesn't tell me much—but— Has she reddish kinky hair, fat figure, big red mouth half round her head?"

"That's she. Do you—"

Blue Jim slapped his leg, suddenly and violently; and the empty beach rang with his wild, not-quite-sobered laughter.

"If you're up to any of your games," I told him, suspiciously, "call it off. Call it off before you begin. This lad is a mate of mine. We've shared the quarters for



"Where's my case?" demanded the big doctor, in a thunderous voice. "What the devil are you doing with that man's leg?"

six weeks, and a nicer fellow never stepped —if that red-haired Satanella had left him alone. I wont stand any funny business where he's concerned."

NOT without reason did I speak; Blue Jim was known all over Eastern Papua as the most incorrigible practical joker in the Territory.

The warning seemed to sober him. He looked at me curiously. "Yes, it is damned funny," he said. "It must be funny to hear him yelping in there like a pup. And you without the ghost of a notion what he's yelping about. That's the funniest thing of all."

I felt the prick of Jim's renowned tilting-lance. "What—" I began indignantly. But he was going on.

"Funny—funny! Funny the way he rolls over on his bed and curses her and himself, and looks to see if the dawn's in the sky, and thanks his God when he finds it isn't—yet. Funniest thing of all is to hear him say about a hundred thousand times: 'My wedding day—it wasn't to be like *this*.' And then he says the girl's name another hundred thousand times—"

"Whose—Judy Jones'?"

"No, owl! I don't know whose. How should I know? I know there is one. Seen her? No. Have I seen the toes inside your boots? I haven't. But I know you have toes, because people do have them invariably, whether you can see them or not. Think that out, turn round three times, and curtsey to the new moon for luck and wisdom."

"She's an old moon," I corrected.

He was not listening. "Have you got, or can you get, a *bagi-bagi?*" he demanded.

"What on earth do you want with one?"

"Never mind. Have you?"

"One of those red shell-money belts the natives wear—the sort they're so dead keen on getting? Well, *bagi-bagis* are growing very scarce, since the boys stopped making them. I don't know that I could—"

"You are the blazing limit. Isn't the window of your quarters next the Government Museum, where they have lots, and doesn't the roof run right up? Well, then, let me have your room for half an hour, and we'll see about the *bagi-bagi.*"

"Are you asking me to become an accessory before the fact to a robbery of Government property?" I demanded severely. One is not Civil Service for nothing.

Blue Jim simply winked. "Come off it," he said. "You're going to be accessory to murder tonight, if I tell you."

"And why, if you please?"

"Because young Roy is your friend, and you want to help him."

"Nobody can help him," I answered with some sharpness. "I told you that already. That's the particular hell of it—that, and the fact that it would be all right if the thing could only be put off till the steamer's in."

"Do you mean to say the tigress would let go her prey just because a B. P. boat came whistling round the corner?"

"Yes. The truth is he made a false declaration when he said he was twenty-one—wanted to be sure of basic wage from the Company—and if anyone could get his father on the wireless, the old man could stop it like a shot. He's not twenty-one by two months. But the brothers say his signed declaration of age, made six months ago, is good enough, and they'd like to see him trying to lie out of it, now. They have him all right. The parson don't dare to go back of that."

"What, *parson!* Has she the cheek—"

"You bet. Parson, Anglican church, bridesmaids, orange-blossoms, veil, and the whole bag of tricks. Honeymoon on Wheeler's plantation; the happy pair depart by launch! It's a crime."

"Couldn't he break the marriage, after?"

"No. Lots of similar cases. The courts don't break 'em. Against public morality, they say."

Blue Jim made several blistering comments on public morality and suddenly sat down on the coral strand.

"Head bad again?" I asked him. I was almost sure of it; the whole of his conversation, during the last few minutes, had seemed to me either crazy or half-intoxicated. But he astonished me by replying gravely: "No. Never clearer. I'm going to put on that boot."

He had found it, and with some difficulty, rejecting all help, got his foot inside. "It's swelled," he remarked briefly. "If ever you get drunk and go without your boots—"

"Pardon me; I shouldn't be likely to—as a civil servant."

"No. Not enough of you for the whisky to stick to anyhow. But if ever you did, I hope you'd remember to put them on before they got too small for you. It's a bad thing to be too big for your boots."

HE was cocking one eye at me now, like a humorous parrot; and once more I had to remember that Jim was famed for seeming-innocent satire. Hurriedly I changed the conversation.

"You didn't tell me yet what you wanted the *bagi-bagi* for."

"Nor wont. What you don't know'll do you no harm. The *bagi-bagi* can wait a little. I'm going to find Bwalè-uta."

"Who?"

"Oh, you know the name, do you?"

"I—can't say. I've only heard of one Bwalè-uta—the chap who was had up before the magistrate for sorcery. He did time for it, and now he's loafing about, getting into mischief, I suppose. I suppose it wouldn't be him you're looking for."

"I shouldn't be likely to—as a civil servant." Jim was walking away down the crashing gravel—quite steady now, so far as I could see.

"But you're not a civil servant," I could not help adding.

"That's just the point," was his last remark, as he went. I thought it over, and concluded that Jim might really be looking for the native criminal.

"They'll raise a scandal among them, somehow," I said despairingly. "I only hope to heaven I'm not in it."

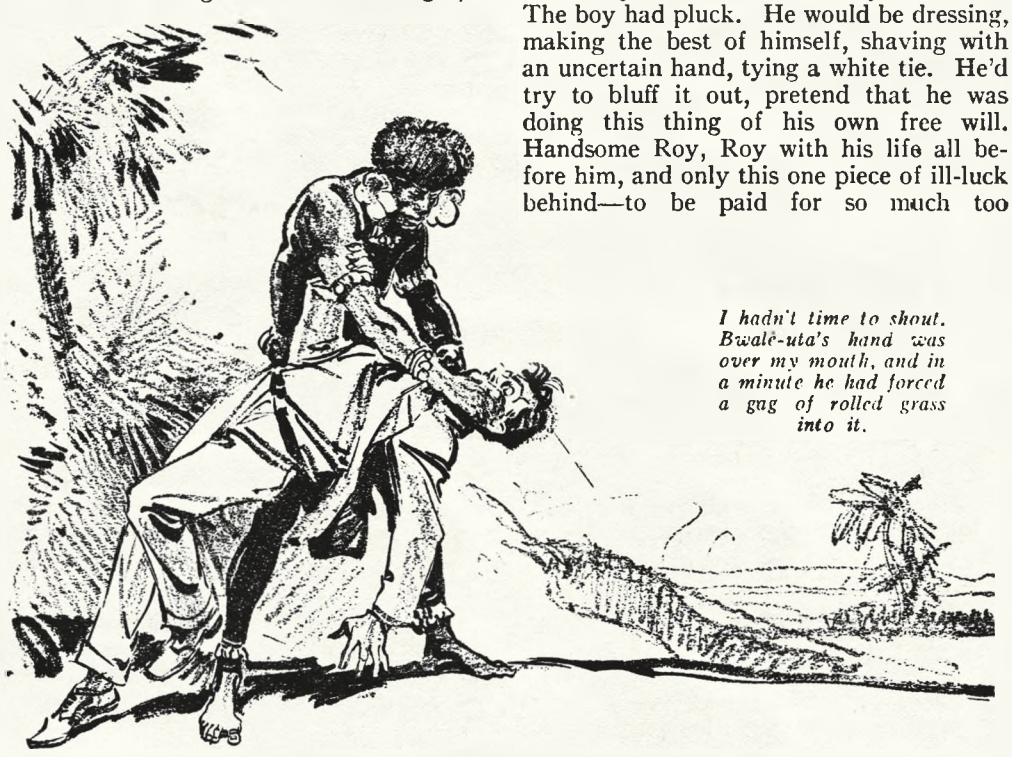
It seemed to me indecent to return to that house. I found a bed on the veranda of the hotel—you can always slip in and take a bed there, without hindrance, provided there's no one in it before you. And after the disturbed first half of the night, I was glad to sleep.

Morning came, and I woke, conscious of a tangled dream wherein Blue Jim, criminals, *bagi-bagis,* and museums, were absurdly mingled. And then I recollected that it was Roy's wedding morning, and that nothing could save him now.

THEY were decorating the church—a mockery of mockeries. Miss Jones' energetic family had cut down innumerable palm-leaves, and were making them into arches and sprays. Through the tall windows one could see the matchless blue of the island straits. A canoe like a big brown dragonfly floated lazily past. I don't know what there was of peacefulness, of careless warm content, about the scene, that made me, by contrast, angry. How could the whole world look like that, when a lad's heart was breaking?

Only island folk know how bitter island sorrows are; how the certainty that every trouble has to be lived through in public, adds keenness to its smart; how love troubles, money troubles, health troubles, all alike are worsened by the impossibility of looking for help outside the one tiny community of souls. But worst of all it is, to know that help could certainly be had, in a few, only a few more days—when by nothing short of a miracle can those few days be given. What the steamer means to

the islands, only the people of the islands know. On her they depend as nestlings depend on their mother; just so long can they live without her, and no longer. For her black wing of smoke in the distance, they watch from dawn to sunset; when they see her, the heaven rings with their happy cries. In the long interval of her flight, a bird or two may have come to grief for want of her—fallen over the edge of the nest into nothingness; starved; been snatched by some marauding hawk that she could have driven away. Safety comes with her—often leaves the port and island when she goes.



I hadn't time to shout. Bwalé-uta's hand was over my mouth, and in a minute he had forced a gag of rolled grass into it.

The hawk had snatched my friend; and there was nothing to be done about it. I could see the bird at that moment. Judy Jones—no one ever remembered that she had been christened Julia—was visible on the veranda of her brothers' house, prematurely attired in white. I took a good look at her as I went past. If she was not thirty, I decided, I was doing her grave injustice. She was grossly fat, red in face and hair, with a certain coarse comeliness about her, and a black eye that called. I had heard her talking; she dropped an "*h*" now and then, said "Go on!" at every second sentence, and when crossed, could swear like any of her brothers. As for them, when I say that they were the typical Jukes family of the colony, students of heredity will understand—and pity. . . . .

I went on to the quarters. If I had shirked last night, it was no time for shirking now. I could picture Roy, just as clearly as if I had already seen him. The boy had pluck. He would be dressing, making the best of himself, shaving with an uncertain hand, tying a white tie. He'd try to bluff it out, pretend that he was doing this thing of his own free will. Handsome Roy, Roy with his life all before him, and only this one piece of ill-luck behind—to be paid for so much too heavily! If all had been known that was merely guessed at, there were probably half a dozen men who ought to have been in his place today. I could picture their relief; could understand, only too well, why Roy, who had good connections, and might have money coming to him, had been chosen out for victim. I had no belief in the "accidental" breakdown of that launch. I recalled how he had spoken the day before, when sunlight kept his spirits up, and the sacrifice was not quite so near:

"No, old chap, I reckon I'll have to go through with it. She says her name's disgraced, says everyone believes the worst, and her family will turn her out to starve. I—I can't leave her like that. Who said I was being forced into it? Rot. I'm doing the only decent thing."

He had laughed then—laughed as soldiers used to do in the war, with a cigarette half falling from white lips, and pain tear-

ing their bodies. . . . . He did not know how thin the walls of his room were, how much they had told—last night.

Remembering that, I felt half crazy when I went through early sun between the flowering hedges of frangipanni and hibiscus, back to the quarters where Roy was breaking his heart.

I can recall the strange shadowy look of it all as I came in—the blinds of green-cane still down on the veranda, making a dim light like the light of forests; Roy's door wide open, one shaft of sun striking through; the mosquito-netted bed within, tall and ghostly. Why! The lad hadn't got up!

Making as much noise as I could, I tramped across the floor, and pulled the net from under the mattress of the bed. He wasn't even awake. "Roy!" I called, and again "Roy! You'll be late." After all, I was best man, and had my duties.

THE bar of sunlight struck across the pillow, right on his face. For an instant a wild thought had possession of me, "He's dead," and with it came almost a wilder: "Better that way." I saw, then, that I was wrong. He was merely sleeping —but what a sleep!

There was almost no color in his face. His eyes were not quite closed; one could see the shine of the unmoving balls between the thick black lashes. His lips were parted, but I could not be sure that breath was coming through, until I had felt his chest. That seemed to be heaving steadily.

Ill? Yes, he seemed to be ill. But what kind of illness was it?

The cooky-boy, who had crept up shivering with fright, seemed to think himself better informed. "This one bad sick my masser have," he whispered, staring at the motionless head. "Me savvy him too much."

Of course, as a member of the Chief Medical Officer's Department, I could not tolerate that. I told the boy not to talk nonsense, and to go for the doctor.

"Dokita no good belong this sick," he demurred.

"Get out and do what you're told," I ordered. He slipped away, muttering to himself some rubbish or other concerning *bagi-bagis*. That was nothing—the natives are always talking about such gear—but it reminded me of something I had forgotten: Blue Jim. I had not seen him since the previous night, but I felt it in my bones that he was up to mischief somewhere. "Lord send he wont drag me into it," I thought, the while I felt Roy's forehead, took his pulse, and as a last resort, slipped my clinical thermometer under his arm. "Temperature tells," I thought. "If fever's in it, and fever mostly is in everything, he'll be a degree or two above normal. Anyhow, thank the gods of luck, it's beginning to seem as if that damned wedding might have to be put off after all."

I took the thermometer out—and it was nearly two degrees below normal!

While I was looking, some one came to the doorway, and peeped in: a tall, naked native man, splendidly made and muscled. He had the woolliest head I ever remember seeing on any Papuan—a veritable fleece. He had dog-tooth necklaces, mother-of-pearl lockets, bead chains, armlets of white clamshell, anklets and bracelets of trembling scented grasses. He had at least a dozen scarlet hibiscus flowers from the garden of the quarters, disposed about his head and body. His face was painted in stripes of white, black and annatto red. A more magnificent-looking personage I had never seen among Papuans; and there was, with it all, a certain deliberate importance that showed him to be a man of standing.

I am bound to say that he did not display any respect for myself or for my position as a Government officer. He merely walked over to the bed, looked down at the unconscious Roy, remarked as if to himself *"Ia namu!"* ("That's well"), and left.

"Here, you, stop!" I called after him. "What do you mean? Who are you?"

He paused on the veranda. "I Bwalè-uta," he answered proudly. And I knew that I was looking on the famous, or infamous, sorcerer who had terrorized a whole district, committed the devil knew how many murders, and, just come out of jail, yet as full of pride and cheek as if he had been presented with the D. S. O. Nothing could down Bwalè-uta.

"If this was a damn theater show, they'd say there was no unity about it," I muttered, mopping my brow. Bwalè-uta had disappeared; the doctor hadn't come; Blue Jim's madness was still unexplained; the cook-boy had seemed crazy; nothing seemed connected with anything, and everything nevertheless mixed up with everything else. "It's enough to drive any sober respectable body out of his mind," I thought; and while the words were forming, the whole Jones family came in.

There were two brothers, tall, rangy brutes, like wolfhounds, but for the expression; no decent dog ever had such a look on his face. There was a grandmother, near as broad as they were tall, with a wreathing smile on her unholy old lips, and an eye that looked too many ways in too few minutes. There was some sort of a kid sister; I only remember her hair, a burning bush, and her legs, long and stalky, like grasshoppers' legs. And right in the middle of the bunch, with her veil half off her head, and her Number Eight white satin shoes soiled with island mud, came the bride.

JULIA was set for battle. Breathing hard through her nostrils, and standing in the midst of the room, she faced me and demanded: "Where's me husband?"

"Have him ou' o' that," advised Granny, nudging one of the wolfhounds. "He's shammin'. Ou' o' that with him."

"I beg your pardon," I intervened, as the bigger brother made a hostile move towards the legs of Roy. "Mr. Roy is ill; I've taken his pulse and temperature, and there's something seriously wrong."

"He's dronk!" bellowed Granny. The whole scene was revolting to me; I could have wished the entire Jones family dead with pleasure, if wishes ever had a chance of being fulfilled.

"I'm a Government official," I said. "I forbid you to touch this sick person. The Chief Medical Officer will—"

"The Chief Medical oyster be damned," interrupted the elder Jones. "Here's at him." He was actually starting to pull the unconscious Roy out of bed—Julia, meantime, weeping noisily and artificially in a corner—when the entrance of Dr. Griffin, with orderlies and a litter, altered affairs.

"Where's my case?" demanded the big doctor, in a thunderous voice. "What the devil are you doing with that man's leg? Since when've you undertaken to treat my patients for me? Clear the room, there, till I see if this disease is infectious, or you'll find yourselves on the quarantine island for three weeks, every man jack of you."

Griffin had chosen his words well. "Disease"—"infection"—promptly emptied the room; and the halo of mystery and power that hangs about a doctor's verdict, kept the Jones family from pressing further inquiry, though they still remained hanging about the road. Being, as one may say, an augur myself, I was not so deeply impressed. I thought I had seen the shadow of a wink. . . . .

But when Griffin had made his examination, there was not the ghost of a wink left. "Queer," he muttered, tapping his long chin abstractedly. "Queer. I've seen something like this—in West Africa. Curious sort of coma—very." He touched the half-seen eyeballs with the corner of a handkerchief. They never moved.

"Take him to the hospital," said Griffin. The orderlies lifted their burden, laid it, covered, in the waiting ambulance; and so began that melancholy journey from the beach, up and up, among the palms and the custard-and-crimson croton trees, that has been taken by so many men of the islands. Always, in my hospital work, when I saw the ambulance winding up to the red roof on the hill, I used to wonder: "Which way will he come down?" For there were only two ways—feet planted on the shining coral gravel, or feet lying in the ambulance once more, on the way to the funeral launch.

"Collect his things and follow," the Doctor told me. I turned down the bed, and began looking for money and such like. I found what I was seeking—Roy's poor little pocketbook, with a thin wad of notes in it, ready for the sacrifice that had seemed likely to merge itself in a greater sacrifice yet. I also found something I had not been looking for, but was in no degree surprised to find, one of those fine leather cases with a glassine panel in the front of it, covering a photograph.

I took a good look at the picture. It was signed simply with the sweetest of all women's names, "Mary." The face caught one by the heart, so young, so gallant and gay it was, with all the courage and fun of the dear "flapper" of these days, shining out of its big straightforward eyes. "Mary" expected the best from life; didn't mean to have any worst of it; but if worst came, would face it like a gallant little gentlewoman. . . . . That was what I read.

Then I remembered Jim: "Funniest thing of all to hear him say: *'My wedding day—it wasn't meant to be like this.'*

"Why, my God!" I said, "Jim must have been right; he must have known. How on this blessed earth did he—"

IT was very quiet in that dusk room, with the green blinds hanging motionless against the sun outside, and the ghostly

mosquito-net draperies trailing, dead and white as snow, upon the polished floor. Nothing moved, nothing sounded, except one hurried, droning fly. Somehow, in the stillness, understanding came to me of the history of Blue Jim, more than he had ever vouchsafed to any man.

"It was the same with himself," I thought, amazedly. "He spent a night like that one—and maybe he didn't get off. No wonder."

I saw the squat form of Mother Jones roll past the doorway.

"Hey," I called, gathering things rapidly into a suitcase, and preparing to leave, "do you know where Blue Jim is?"

"He's dronk," she said. "He was dronk last night, and he's dronk again this morning."

She cursed him with curious particularity. I think she had somehow guessed at Jim's opposition to the marriage, and was resenting it, after her own fashion.

Gathering Roy's gear together, and handing it to the cook-boy, I started for the hospital. I had been sorry to hear Jim was "off" again. Vaguely, I had been hoping more from him than I cared to acknowledge. If this swoon of Roy's broke up—and there was no reason to suppose it would not—within the next three days, the case would be no better than before.

It was growing very hot. I toiled, panting, up the long height, down which men come sometimes so easily, on a longer journey still. Halfway I stopped to breathe. I could see the palm tops glittering in the sun, and the beach outspread below, a belt of blinding white.

"Jim," I said to myself, "oughtn't to have gone off like that again. How am I to know if he meant to do anything, or what he meant? And what did that discreditable nigger pal of his mean, bumping in? And what—"

Consecutive thought, for a moment, deserted me. I had seen on the beach below, a tall, brown figure stalking: a figure unclad, but hung all over with as many gauds as a Christmas tree — Bwalè-uta! And proudly disposed across the wide chest of Bwalè-uta, worn like a bandolier, was the largest, brightest *bagi-bagi* I had ever seen.

I remembered, then, that I had found the looking-glass in my bedroom at the quarters overthrown, when I came in that morning. The glass stood in the window—the window that gave on the roof joining that of the Government Museum.

"Well, whoever did it," I thought desperately, "it wont be found out for a bit —nobody ever goes in there. And perhaps Jim will sober up first. If he doesn't, they'll say I took it. I'm damned if they wont—my room and all. And a *bagi-bagi* like that is worth every penny of ten pounds!" And I went on up the hill.

WHEN I got there, Roy was lying in the deadest coma I ever saw in a man, temperature down another point or two, pulse slow. The doctor was beginning to call him an "interesting case," which, as all hospital workers know, bodes ill for a patient.

"Four days to steamer day, isn't it?" I said, looking at the bridegroom who was to have been. You could see better than ever what a handsome fellow he was, with his thick hair brushed high off his dead white forehead, and black fine bars of eyebrows and eyelashes showing up against closed lids.

"If Mary could see him now," I thought, "she'd love him more than ever." For I was convinced—without much evidence to go on—that the gallant little flapper of the photograph loved Roy as heartily as he deserved to be loved.

Thinking of Mary, I was moved to speak; and I told the Doctor everything. Most of it was old news to him; but he caught like a bird at the idea of Roy senior forbidding the banns.

"I see, I see," he exclaimed. "Most fortunate incident, from one point of view; but I tell you frankly I don't like some of the symptoms. If he stays four days in that state, it'll go hard with him to come out."

My heart gave a jump. I had not expected—that. You may think a man is better dead, even say it; but when some one in authority begins to suggest the idea may have a solid foundation, things look different. To die, at twenty—

I don't know how I got through my work that morning; if I did not dress wounds with beef-tea, and coax bad cases to eat with cups of corrosive sublimate, it was more owing to good luck and set habit than anything else. Lunch-time came, and I went off into the windy hot sunlight again, glad to get the smell of disinfectants out of my nostrils for a while. Descending the hill, I met that Bwalè-uta again.

He was loafing about in the palm clump halfway down; a quiet place, hid alike from

They say that I ran into the sea and tried to drown myself. That is entirely inaccurate—I merely retired waist-deep and awaited a lulling of the storm.

hospital above and town below. He had his betel-nut gourd and spatula at work, and was munching steadily in a sort of ecstatic peace, just like a cow chewing her cud. As I made to pass him, he barred my way. "How is the *ibitoc* (marriageable young man)?" he asked.

"Do you mean Mr. Roy?" I queried coldly. It seemed to me that Bwalè-uta, like other sorcerers, really did not know his place.

Bwalè-uta nodded, licking his spatula.

"He is very ill."

The sorcerer looked at me inscrutably. "How is Jim Smith?" he asked. As usual, he spoke excellent English, in contradistinction to the common native jargon. I must say I thought it cheek. I like a native to be a native.

"He is—ill."

"That's a pity," commented Bwalè-uta. "I should have like to talk to him. No matter."

He was barring my way—insolently, I thought. I am a small man, but I hope I am dignified. I motioned the Papuan aside.

Instead of moving, he burst out into sudden sinister laughter, hooked one leg inside of mine, and threw me to the ground.

I hadn't time to shout. Bwalè-uta's hand was over my mouth, and in a minute he had forced a gag of rolled grass into it, nearly suffocating me. He tied this on with my own handkerchief. Then he knotted a piece of cord round my ankles, lashed my hands together, and swung me into—what?

The Government ambulance.

THERE it was, brought down from the hospital by one of my own orderlies, at the bidding of this unspeakable villain, and kept, no doubt, in waiting, till the proper minute. They pulled down the hood, started off, and in a moment, gagged, helpless, trussed like a fowl, I was on my way —whither?

I could not even guess. Bwalè-uta was the terror of his village, the lord (it seemed) of every native he encountered, not excluding my own Government orderlies. He had a bitter grudge against the Government and its works, due to his late imprisonment. Probably he would not dare to kill me, but that he planned some form of revenge seemed almost certain.

"Disrespectful in the last degree," I muttered to myself, half choked by the gag. And then I saw something that had escaped my notice at first—something that made me angrier than ever. Disrespectful! Why, Bwalè-uta had dared to abduct me, not even in the decent ambulance used for white people, but in one of the rickety, rackety old vehicles kept for and used exclusively by natives!

If I had been near choking before, I all but swallowed the gag, when, by and by, I heard a white man's voice, close to the ambulance.

"Hallo, where you go alonga that one?" It was one of the storekeepers, a friend of

my own. If I could have spoken! I moaned through my nose, and Bwalè-uta, hearing, instantly covered the noise with a careless burst of native song. He didn't stop, either; he went on humming and wailing, as they do, not preventing my friend from speaking with the orderly, but quite covering any little noise I was able to make.

"This one New Guinea boy he go finish," explained the orderly glibly.

"Dead nigger, eh? Who's the other?"

I could not catch the orderly's reply. "Other?" I wondered. "Then I did really hear two ambulances." For it had seemed to me, going down the hill, that once or twice I caught the sound of wheels behind me.

The storekeeper made no further inquiry; clearly, he was not interested. No one troubles over dead natives. I heard my friend's slow footsteps dying away, and then indeed I knew that I was deserted.

We were on the level now, wheeling across a narrow stretch of sand. I cannot describe the horror that took possession of me, when I realized that the ambulance was being lifted across a gunwale, into a boat. For the cemetery was on another island, distant some two or three miles across the straits, and no ambulance was ever taken over there save for the purpose of burying the corpse that it contained.

WHEN I felt the motion of the boat, heard the strokes of the oars, and realized that I was in all probability on my way to be buried alive, I made so much noise, moaning and choking through my gag, that Bwalè-uta raised the hood of the ambulance, and put his handsome, wicked face inside.

"Wassa matter?" he demanded. "Nobody going to hurt you."

It was almost dark now, but I could see the glassy stare of his eyes, and realized that he was half drunk with the potent betel-nut.

I did not quite believe him, but somehow I felt better. After all, I reflected, I had the British Government, the Empire, the Crown itself protecting me; why should I be afraid?

It was nearly half an hour before the gunwale slid up on to soft sand, and the boat stopped. They lifted the hood now, and I saw, dimly outlined beneath a moonless sky, the long pale beach and leaning palms of the cemetery island. Bwalè-uta pulled my gag out as one uncorks a bottle, and the rage and abuse that had been choking me throughout the journey burst forth.

It was "moonlight unto sunlight, and water unto wine," however, compared to the explosion that took place a yard or two away. I leaped in my seat when I heard. "Hold still, can't you?" complained the sorcerer. "What way I cut you loose?"

With difficulty I restrained myself until he had loosened my feet and hands, and then I jumped out of the ambulance, and forthwith tumbled very nearly into the arms of—Judy Jones!

SHE was still in her bridal dress. She was, at the moment when I caught sight of her, engaged in tearing the veil from her head, rending it in pieces, and trampling on the remains. And the torrent of bad language that flowed from her lips made me realize once for all what Roy was—possibly—escaping.

There was not much time for thought. Judy turned on me like an angry dog. I was Roy's friend, was I? I had done this, she supposed—had her kidnaped when she was taking a sleep in her granny's own garden. Well, she would have me to learn that she, and her family, were not to be put off by such tricks. Who did I think I was speaking to? (A mere figure of speech—I had not dared to open my mouth, any more than I would have opened it beneath the downdrop of Niagara.) What did I think I was? She would tell me (she did, with embroideries, footnotes, and addenda). For two pins she would assault me. (The exact phrase, I think, was that she would "smack my chops.")

They say that I ran into the sea and tried to drown myself. That is entirely inaccurate. I merely retired waist-deep, and awaited a lulling of the storm. Judy, I knew, was no lover of cold water.

When she had got to the stage of sitting down on the sand, and crying, I came out—partly. I stood fairly near, and told her that she was laboring under a misapprehension, that I was, in fact, as much a sufferer as herself. She seemed to grasp this fact after a while, wept rather more, and asked me if I had "anything to keep the cold out, on me." As it happened, I had—overproof alcohol, meant for other uses than internal; but I was glad to produce it, and offer it to her, laying it on the sand at some distance from her person, and instantly retiring. She drank all there was, and went to sleep.

DURING the course of our dispute, Bwalè-uta had taken away the boat, so we were abandoned on the cemetery island, and, in fact, were exactly in that position so often celebrated in the short story of today—a man and a woman alone on a desert isle. I have never, since then, been able to understand why such a situation is pictured as agreeable.

I spent the greater part of the night walking up and down to dry my clothes, cursing my bad luck, and wondering what on earth the whole silly business might be supposed to mean. In between times, I found leisure to reflect on Roy, and to feel exceedingly uneasy about him. I could not suppose that the mysterious coma would persist until the arrival of the steamer, four days ahead, without death ensuing. And if it did not persist, we were all exactly where we had been. And why Blue Jim, at such a time, could not have managed to keep sober—at least, to keep sober a little more, or a little longer—was hard to understand. I was convinced that Jim was the key, the hope of the whole situation.

I had plenty of time to muse upon these, and other matters, during the passing of the longest night I ever remember. It seemed at least a week before the eastern sky, over the township island, began to turn from gray to dusky orange, from orange to sunrise red: before the houses of the town, across a plain of brightening rose, showed out like beads strung along the white thread of the shore; before the groves of frangipanni flowers, death-pale and deadly sweet, began to shine like trees covered in newly fallen snow among the long grasses of the neglected cemetery. But day did come; and with it came a surprise that made me, for the moment, forget even Judy Jones, just waking out of her chilled uneasy sleep upon the shore, and beginning anew her angry complaints.

For I saw, with eyes almost unbelieving, a steamer anchored alongside the town.

IT was nothing to Judy. She did not know, as I did, what a steamer, fitted with wireless, and able to send messages to the magic land of "South," meant to Roy and his forced marriage. Nevertheless, she handled the situation with a certain ability.

"You'd better start signaling straight off," she said, handing me the torn remnants of her veil. "Tie it on to a stick, climb up on that high rock, and keep shakin' it about till somebody sees you. If it's true what you say, that they been havin' the loan of you too, I reckon you want to get back and get even with them, same as me."

"I can't imagine," I said, "what induced Bwalè-uta to behave in such an extraordinary manner."

"Too right," she agreed. "He's a fair cow. Now you get up and shake that rag."

"There's no need," I told her; "something's coming."

Something was coming—a small but fast launch, and in it—as the speed of the boat soon allowed me to see—Blue Jim.

Blue Jim entirely sober, and rather sorry. Blue Jim driving the launch hard, and anxious—apparently—to get in as soon as possible. Nevertheless he stopped his engine in several feet of water, and letting the boat drift slowly with the tide, hailed me cautiously, before attempting to land.

"What sort of a night have you had?" he demanded; and I was not in any way placated by the twinkle that I fancied I caught in his eye.

"You can imagine for yourself," I replied, with some dignity.

Julia began to weep. "I don't know what crool vile man set that nigger on to leave me here among the dead corpses on me weddin' night that should have been," she complained. "But if it hadn't been for this kind gentleman he left too" (I could scarcely believe my ears, remembering the names she had called me,), "I'd 'a' had me death of cold. And now you can bring us both back again as quick as you like."

"How's Roy?" I asked anxiously.

"All right and walking round. He got better," said Jim, choosing his words carefully, "about half an hour after the boat came in. Soon after Bwalè-uta got back with the Government whaleboat and ambulances."

"What about the wedding?" I cried.

"Yes, what about it?" languishingly demanded Julia.

Somehow she terrified me, when she began to languish. I could understand how she had terrified—almost fascinated—the wretched, captured Roy. I could— What was Jim saying?

"Somebody," he cocked a wicked eye as he said it, "somebody sent a radio last night, after the steamer got in, to old Roy in Sydney. And he radioed back that his son was under age, and he refused consent. So that's that."

I expected hysterics from Julia. I got

nothing of the kind. She was not made of such poor clay as to waste a fit where it could be of no conceivable use.

"Come ashore and tell me about it. It's true I was 'ropable' yesterday," she said, still with that languishing tone in her voice. "But I can forgive the boy; I know he's been misled."

Blue Jim ran the launch in, dropped anchor, and sprang ashore off the bow. He swaggered up the beach with his hands in his pockets. He had both boots on today, and looked reasonably tidy. He was shaved, even, and in spite of the blasting-powder mark that had given him his name, one saw that he had been a personable, even an attractive man at a time not very long past.

"I owe you an apology," he said to me with a side glance, which I found hard to translate, toward Julia. "Bwalè-uta's a good lad, and knows his friends, but when he gets chewing too much betel-nut, as he did yesterday, he's apt to mix up names. Nothing more. Somebody—I wonder who it could have been?—advised him to kidnap Roy in an ambulance, and drop him in the cemetery for the night. And the same bad lot was wicked enough to suggest he should *'puri-puri'"* (enchant) "this lady here, so that she'd stop quiet at home for the first time in her life, until the steamer came in—"

"How—" I interrupted. Jim flowed on.

"Seems Bwalè-uta had had news by 'native wireless' that an extra boat was to call; all the natives knew. Well, he got a nice present given him, and went to work hard to earn it, being an honest gentleman on the whole. But he couldn't find his—his boss, let's say—to tell him who was what, when he got a bit confused. So he had Julia here kidnaped instead of Roy, and put Roy to sleep instead of the lady. And he rounded it off by kidnaping Roy's chum, you, to make everything all even. Good lad—only a bit apt to mix things up. I know what it is myself, sometimes."

Jim stopped, and began to feel in his pockets for his pipe. He looked entirely satisfied.

NOT so, Julia Jones. "I'll have my rights!" she began. "If this gentleman has taken away my good name before the township, by staying all night on the island with me, I'm sure *he'll* act as a gentleman, and make amends." She gave me one of her terrible, languishing glances. I shuddered, as a man may shudder who sees a snake strike at him, safely separated from him by barriers of a strong plate glass.

"My wife's coming up next mail," I said quickly. "She was only waiting till I got a good job with the Government."

Julia turned her eyes, her large, dusky, wicked eyes, on Jim.

"You can spare that," he commented coolly, lighting his pipe, "because your mother isn't dead; and anyhow, a man can't marry his stepdaughter."

"It was you who dusurted my mum?" cried Julia. "You left her the day after you married her, when I was just a baby?"

"A baby of fourteen—yes," agreed Jim. "Old enough to remember me, I reckon, only in those days I hadn't been fooling about with blasting-powder." He took a long, satisfactory draw at his pipe. "And your old granny never met me," he went on. "Else I don't suppose I'd have had the chance to—"

"What?" demanded Judy, dangerously quiet. "What, if you please?"

"Fetch you back in my launch," ended Jim, with one of his wicked winks. "Are you coming quietly, or would you rather stop here among the dead men?"

Judy said no word, but she gathered herself together and went.

I SAW Blue Jim depart again for the gold-fields, which are according to his own somewhat fanciful description, "at the back of nowhere, and the end of Godspeed," I saw him leave with his money all spent, his health just a little further broken than the last time, his future a little deeper mortgaged. He laughed as he went. There was a tall, dignified, clever-looking native in his boat; and the native, Bwalè-uta, wore a splendid *bagi-bagi*, very like one that the Government still is looking for.

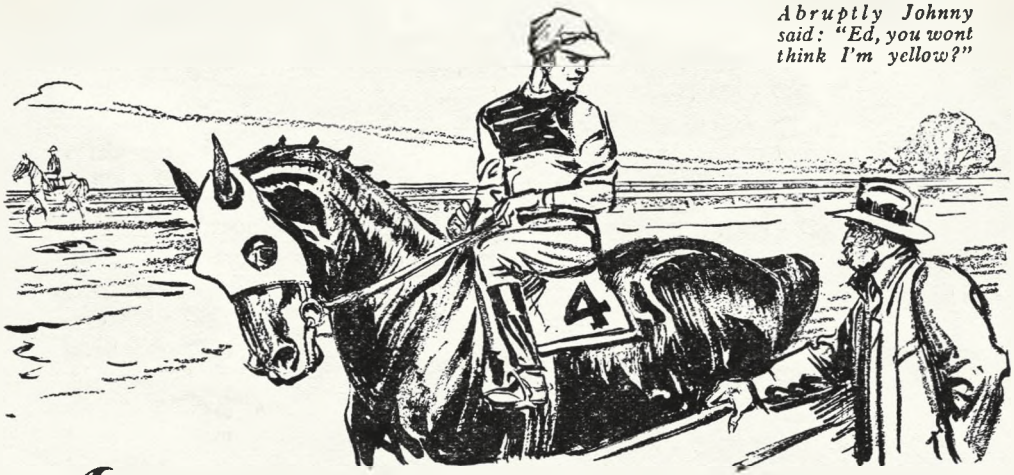
Roy went "South," got another job—and is married, I hear.

When I was looking over one of my Kiplings the other night, I came upon a passage opposite which certain initials had been lightly written since last I saw the book—it had been extensively lent about the town, and I had only just recovered it.

The passage was *Mulvaney's:*

"Can him that helps others help himself, sorr? Answer me that."

And the initials were "J. S." Almost the commonest initials anyone can have, but somehow I could not help fancying they stood for Jim Smith—Blue Jim.



Abruptly Johnny said: "Ed, you wont think I'm yellow?"

A Fighter in the Saddle

By GEORGE PIDDINGTON

Here we have both a fight and a race in one story—and a very good story too, by the author of "The Mud Runner."

PREAKNESS Eve! And as usual, the night before Maryland's greatest race found Ed Pearson seated in his accustomed place, in front of his stable in Poverty Row. No matter where "the Kentucky Colonel," as he was known the width and breadth of Race-land, had his Glen Farm stable campaigning, he was bound to be in Pimlico for the big event.

From this vantage-point he had witnessed many a Preakness Eve come and go. Against the whitewashed fence-rail had he stood many a memorable May day when the field thundered past. But from none of them had he secured the thrill he was enjoying tonight. The Preakness, long a cherished dream, had become a personal affair with the entry of His Excellency, considered by the Colonel to be the peer of all horses.

From the infield of the track inclosure—Pearson could barely see the pale fence-rail outlined against the inky black of the background—arose myriad voices of the night: the droning chirp of crickets, the wistful song of the whippoorwill. A cool breeze swept toward the stable from across the infield and the track, bringing with it the fresh, sweet scent of dew-odored grass. Pimlico at night—an earthly paradise, under a canopy of winking stars.

Near by, a stable or so away, a horse was stamping fretfully in his stall. From somewhere in back, mellowed by distance into a haunting, century-old chant, came the plantation songs of a group of colored stableboys: forgotten words, of a barbaric origin, repeated over and over in a melancholy refrain. The blending scent of hay, oats, liniment, leather and horses were fragrance in the Colonel's nostrils.

As he moved his well-worn folding chair backward so that he could lean against the tack-room door, the rays of light from the lantern inside gleamed on the silvered head, lighted up the weather-seamed face, the drooping mustache of white, revealed an expression of gentle tolerance in his kindly twinkling eyes.

THE expression of tolerance at this precise moment was dedicated to Robert Moore—millionaire sportsman, sworn enemy of all Poverty Row denizens such as the Colonel—who within the hour had proclaimed that his colt, Freeman's Gold, was

going to win the Preakness and would defeat His Excellency in so doing. Stirred by the challenge, the Colonel had wagered his Kentucky farm—all he possessed besides his five head of racing stock—that Moore's judgment was wrong.

Ed could afford to be tolerant, even though he couldn't afford to bet, for deep down in his heart he knew that his colt could not be headed, especially since the gods had dropped the gift of a "riding fool" in his lap.

HIS kindly face wrinkled in a silent laugh at thought of Johnny Layton. It had been just a week since the combination of jockey and prizefighter had stepped out of the dark, with his conflicting ambitions and abilities, bringing Ed the impression that at last his worries were over. And here was Johnny back again. Probably had decided not to attend the fight in Baltimore after all—no, it wasn't Johnny. It was a messenger-boy.

"Are you Ed Pearson?" the messenger demanded. This had been Johnny's first greeting. The Colonel nodded, reaching out, with some apprehension, for the envelope the boy held in his hand. He was still old-fashioned enough to distrust such envelopes as bearers of bad news.

Nervously he opened it and read:

> Come to Arena in Baltimore at once. May need you. Have fight tonight with Newsboy Grogan. Starting at nine.
>
> JOHN.

The folding chair almost tipped over as Pearson leaned further into the tack-room, rereading the letters that persisted in blurring, even though his eyesight was in perfect condition. Fight! Newsboy Grogan! Ed was stunned.

THE messenger-boy had turned and faded into the gloom, just as the dark of night had swallowed Layton earlier in the evening.

Ed Pearson turned again to the missive, to be sure he understood aright. Had a fight on! Why had Johnny picked this night, of all nights in the year, to fight? Surely he must have known that the result of the Preakness would rest upon his condition to ride the race.

Pearson arose, looked at his watch. By hurrying, and a fast taxi, he might get a chance to aid Layton, bring him back safely. He swung into the tack-room, his tall frame almost blotting the light from the doorway. He discovered Jazbo, the stableboy, industriously shining the stirrups and leather of Layton's saddle.

Ed spoke hurriedly. "I'm goin' into Baltimore after Johnny. You stay here an' guard Prince"—that was the stable's nickname for His Excellency—"an' take good care of him. Tomorrow's the big day."

"Don't worry, boss," the boy grinned, flashing a row of shiny teeth; "that black boy'll be safe with Jazbo."

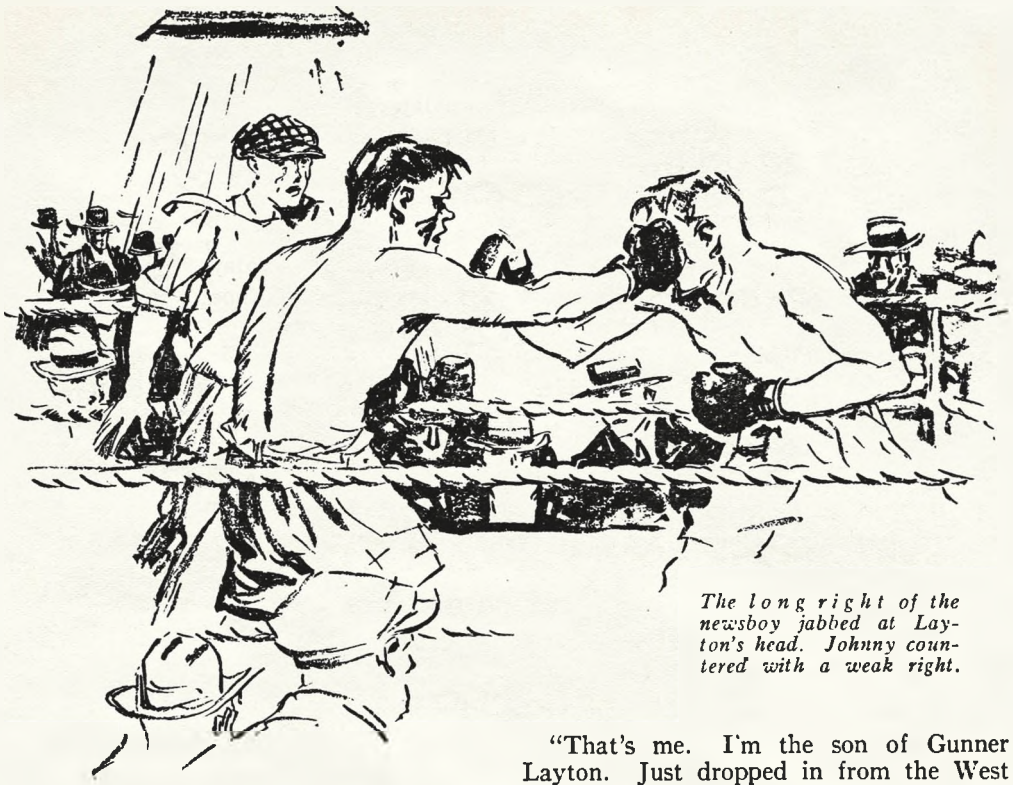
Taking a final look at the sleepy ebony colt,—who was bedded down for the night, as comfortable as human hands and years of experience combined could possibly make him,—whispering good night to the pride of his heart, Ed hastened across the field to the gate, seeking a taxi.

NOWHERE under the sun are the peculiar quirks of Fate so pronounced as in the world of racing. One such chance had enabled Pearson, owner of a small farm in the Blue Grass, to purchase a broken-down mare named Princess Pam, out of the royal Franciscan line, at a bargain. To the mare he had mated his own King Hal, out of equally good equine ancestry.

From this mating had come the colt in the stable he had left behind: a magnificently beautiful piece of horseflesh that came rightly by the title His Excellency. Not only in name was he regal; his walk and imperious manner proclaimed him to the wide world to be a prince. The other quirk of Fate—probably causing a sardonic laugh from the goddess—was His Excellency's temperament. He had certain decided and set opinions about being ridden—not that he minded the riding itself: it was just that he refused to be mounted by any person who did not come up to his requirements.

From the day the colt was foaled, Pearson felt he had a winner for the Preakness, upon which his heart had been set for many years. Even from fledgling days the colt showed an ability for great speed, and promise of developing into a stayer for long-distance running; had indeed shown a love for racing once or twice as a two-year-old when given proper handling. But this season, as a three-year-old, with the Preakness drawing near, the horse had not put his heart in the preparatory racing. Ed knew what the trouble was: he hadn't been able to find the proper rider.

There was plenty of good riding material



The long right of the newsboy jabbed at Layton's head. Johnny countered with a weak right.

at Pimlico; the jockey colony was the best in years. And Ed had tried them all, from the apprentices up to the stars, in the hope that one would prove acceptable. But the bugs couldn't handle the horse to suit the Colonel. The star jockeys and the money riders wanted exorbitant fees—and didn't suit His Excellency. Even they, some with years of riding experience, didn't seem able to solve the problem of handling him. In vain had Ed tried to explain that His Excellency didn't want strong arms, didn't want to be coaxed, mauled or urged —that all he desired was a soul as soaring as his own, a companion to glory with him in battle. No jockey adequate to the job could he find.

Then Johnny Layton had appeared on the scene. Out of the darkness of the infield he had walked into the semicircle of light gleaming from the tack-room—had stepped into the lantern-rays jauntily, cockily, as a winner stepping into the magic semicircle in front of the judges' stand.

"ARE you Ed Pearson?" he demanded. Without waiting for an answer, he continued: "I'm Johnny Layton."

The Colonel paused in the midst of a fierce tug at his mustache, from which he was trying to pry an answer to his riding question. "Johnny Layton?"

"That's me. I'm the son of Gunner Layton. Just dropped in from the West coast. My mother told me to look you up and give you her love."

"Gunner Layton's son? Mabel Layton's son? Well, I sure am pleased to meet you!" And genuine pleasure was carried in Ed's words.

Layton was a likable youth, with a fairly good-looking face, pleasing features —friendly, alert, intelligent gray eyes, set wide apart, strong mouth and chin; a slender body, tapering down from tight shoulders to slim legs. He was of medium height, slightly taller than the ordinary youth Ed saw around the tracks.

The young man, apparently between twenty to twenty-five years of age, returned the gaze frankly, seemingly as much interested in Ed's appearance as the elder man was in his.

"So you're Gunner Layton's son?" Ed commented. " 'Pears to me you aint got the build of your daddy."

Johnny laughed, an expression that made him more attractive than before—his eyes crinkled, and his mouth opened in a wholesome smile. It reminded Ed of the young man's mother, for whom he still had a strong affection, even if she had married the other man.

"No, my dad was built like a real man," Johnny said. "I guess I take after the Carters, on mother's side, as I'm small and

light. It hurts me too, in my business; all I can do is make the flyweight division. Boy, if I had my dad's size, I'd make a real champion."

PEARSON offered the young man a folding chair like his own. "Your business?" he queried. "What business you in?"

"I'm a fighter, and a darn' good one," Johnny replied. There was no tone of braggadocio, just a confidential expression of facts. "I've licked all the boys in my class out on the coast, so I came east to try my luck here. If I could only put on weight, I'd get up in the big money division; but no matter what I do, I still stay light."

"The Carters were all small, anyway," Pearson observed. "So you're a fighter! I aint seen a fight since your daddy and John L. Sullivan went to it. That was out in Frisco, years ago. Then your mother got married, an' I came—"

He stopped abruptly, changing the subject. "Did you ever do any ridin'? You're built like a jock."

For Ed had noted the slender build, the tapering legs, the strong, powerful arms and shoulders.

"Yeh, I've rode." Johnny flicked out a hand in a deprecating gesture. "Got my license and rode on every track between Tia Juana and Edmonton, on the coast. But that aint no fun. I win almost every race I go into."

Pearson's heart added an extra beat. He turned around, gazing into Layton's eyes, as if questioning whether he had heard aright. "You—you win every race you go in?"

Johnny's eyes brimmed over with confidence. "Pretty near every race. Why shouldn't I? I come from the Carter family, and my mother taught me to ride when I was a kid. I supported her for a while by my riding—you know Dad's gone—until I got old enough to fight. Now I'd rather fight than eat, and if I was only bigger, I'd be a heavy money man. I make fair dough as a flyweight, but I can't get enough bouts out West. So we scraped up enough to bring me here. I just landed today and came here to look you up the first thing."

THEY talked awhile longer. By asking a few questions the Colonel found out how Mrs. Layton was, heard of the hardships the family had since the death of Gunner Layton. He also discovered that Johnny had just taken enough money for railroad fare, that now he was practically broke.

"What are you goin' to do now, Johnny?"

"I'm going to look up a guy here by the name of Moore, Robert Moore. He's a big promoter of fights, and he may be able to place me. Thought I might be able to pick up a few riding engagements, too."

Ed didn't answer for a moment, thinking of the Robert Moore the boy had come East to see—Moore, owner of a big racing stable, a hardened gambler who played the game for all it was worth, stopping at nothing that would aid his colors in winning. He had heard something about Moore being interested in the fight game. If Moore acted the same in fighting as he did in racing, it wouldn't do for Johnny to get mixed up with him.

"Don't worry about your livin', Johnny," Ed declared. "Anything I have belongs to the son of Mabel Layton."

"Oh, I'll work for my living." Johnny's tone gave indication that he was no parasite. "I'll exercise your hosses, or anything. Being walloped through the ropes a couple of times flopped my pride."

Ed was thoughtful. "Might not be a bad idea givin' him a try at Prince," he mused. "He can't do any worse'n the jumpin' jacks around this track."

AT daybreak next morning His Excellency and young Layton were introduced to each other, the introduction being in the form of a thundering gallop around the mile oval. Ed, perched on the rail at the bend near the barns, saw them fly by—watched the colt's long, easy stride, noted with astonishment that His Excellency was interested, was running free. A glimpse of Layton showed him to be a natural race-rider, with light hands that touched the leathers delicately, and an easy crouch.

The colt flew down the stretch, his hoofs pounding the loam with drumlike beats. Ed looked at the stop-watch in his hand, and almost fell off his rail perch in amazement. His Excellency had beaten any of his previous efforts.

But Pearson concealed his elation, not wanting to add to the superb confidence of the rider. "Fair ride," he commented, as he stood solemnly above the young man, who in turn was watching the colt as it was being wiped down and cooled off.

His Excellency, slim-legged, deep-chested, sturdily flanked and muscled, with a deep black satiny skin under which muscles rippled easily, turned his aloof, distant eyes—the courageous eyes of a conqueror—from the track he had just circled and fastened them appealingly on the young man who had made him extend himself. He seemed to be asking Layton to do it all over again.

"What a hoss! What a hoss!" Johnny was grinning. "Golly, they don't grow 'em like that out in my country. Ridin' that baby gave me a thrill."

"Is it better'n fightin'?" Ed asked expectantly.

"No." But Ed noted a slight hesitation. "Still, I did get a lot of fun out of the work-out. I'd like to have a leg up on him in a race."

"You will." Ed's tone was dry. "You're goin' to ride him in the Eureka stakes this afternoon, a test race for the Preakness. If you make good, I'll give you a chance for the Preakness next week."

"Me? Ride the Preakness?" Johnny fell back a step, a pleasant flush reddening his face. "You're kiddin' me!"

Ed's eyes twinkled. He drew in a deep breath, realizing that he felt better now than he had in months. "I have been known as a kidder, Johnny, but this is one time in my life I'm serious. You win the Preakness, an' you'll ride the Kaintucky Derby right after it. Any hoss, or rider, that c'n win both of them races, goes inter the hist'ry books. You forget about this fightin' game, sonny. A good rider can make more than a box-fighter. Anyone c'n fight, but a good race-rider has to be born."

OF course His Excellency, with Johnny Layton on his back, won the Eureka —won in a walkaway, leaving the highly touted Freeman's Gold—the horse generally conceded by experts to be the Preakness winner—a bad second.

That was where Ed had made his mistake, he realized now as the taxi rolled into the downtown traffic of Baltimore. He lowered a window to get more of the fresh spring air. He knew it wasn't the cab that was making him sweat, but it served as a good excuse.

The Colonel wondered if the proper course of action wouldn't have been to have kept his new-found rider under cover until the day of the race. But his inherent code of squareness, and the anxiety to get the colt on edge for the contest, and to test Layton's qualities in a race, had permitted his winning combination to show.

WHEN the Colonel arrived at Johnny's dressing-room, the boy grabbed him by the arm. "Gee, I'm glad you came! I want you to see what a good fighter Gunner Layton's son is. The promoter, Harvey, got me a half-baked pug as a second. I'd rather have you go in my corner."

"That's what I intend to do, Johnny," the Colonel replied, and his tone was grim. "Why didn't you let me know you were goin' to fight?"

Johnny told how he had been approached that evening, just before leaving the track, by Bill Harvey, who backed the Arena mitt shows. They had gone back to the barn to tell the Colonel, but couldn't find him. Pearson nodded, remembering that Moore had taken him to a neighboring barn to have their bets witnessed.

It seemed as though one Geordie Brisbane had been booked for the fight, but was hurt in an accident, and Harvey had secured Johnny as a substitute.

"Aint that swell, Mr. Pearson?" Johnny was exuberant. "Grogan is a top-notcher, and in line for a chance at Young Roberts, the flyweight champ. You can't imagine what it'll mean to me. If I lick Grogan I may get a chance at the champ himself. They sure work quick here."

The Colonel agreed soberly. "How come they got you for this fight?"

Johnny laughed in jubilation. "Guess my rep must've spread to this section of the country. This Harvey guy came to me and asked if I was Kid Layton. When I says yes, he says he seen me fight on the coast."

"Didn't you think about the race tomorrer?"

"Sure. When he asked me to fight, I told him I couldn't, as I had to ride the Preakness. This guy said it would be all right and that he'd fix it up with you. I knew if I turned this chance down, I wouldn't get another. So I came on in with him, and sent you the—"

Something within the older man's face must have warned Johnny, for he glanced at the Colonel quickly, a look of anxiety creeping into his eyes.

"You don't object to my fighting, do you, Mr. Pearson?" he asked anxiously.

The Colonel turned, walked to the corner of the room to hide the concern he

felt. "The night before the Preakness!" he was muttering.

"You don't object, Mr. Pearson?" Johnny had followed him. "If you don't want me to, I'll back out, right now."

THE Colonel looked down at his rider, his eyes wrinkling up as he smiled. "I thought I said it would be O. K. with me. Only one thing I ask—what kind of condition you goin' to be in for the race?"

"I'll be fine!" Johnny was confident. The good humor had returned to his face at the Colonel's answer. "I know what this Grogan can do, and I can take care of myself. Why, Colonel,"—his tone grew sincere,—"I wouldn't miss ridin' that Preakness for anything in the world!"

Outside, the crowd roared its approval as Grogan, seemingly popular, stepped into the ring.

Carrying a towel, bottle of water and a bucket, the Colonel followed his lithe young rider out into the glare of lights in the auditorium, almost stumbling down the wooden steps leading to the ring. A smattering of applause greeted Johnny—to be followed by a chorus of groans as the fight fans discovered that the newcomer wasn't Brisbane.

The Colonel was groaning too, but inwardly. At the ringside he discovered Moore, a squat, swarthy, unkindly man, with a certain glitter in his evil eyes that betokened him unscrupulous to deal with. A glow of satisfaction lighting his face quickly faded to ill-concealed surprise as he felt the eyes of the veteran trainer upon him. Moore was seated in the front row, a quartet of hard-looking characters grouped about him.

JOHNNY had stepped into the ring. The Colonel, crawling through the ropes, straightened his great length up beside his fighter. He whispered: "Did Moore know you were goin' to fight?"

Layton looked down at the sportsman, smiled pleasantly and waved a hand in greeting. "Yeh, he was the one that tipped Harvey off to me being in the East."

The announcer, from the center of the ring, roared that the bout, the final on the card, was to be a ten-round affair, and that Kid Layton, of San Francisco, had been substituted for Geordie Brisbane. The Colonel looking down speculatively at Moore, wondered whether Brisbane had been really hurt. Something within him was sending a warning that all was not well.

As he assisted the rider out of his bathrobe the Colonel heard jocular remarks from all sides about his white head, glimmering like silver in the glare of the arc-lights overhead. He waved at the crowd, seeing that all the kidding was in a humorous vein, with the exception of that coming from where Moore was seated.

The formal introduction over, the gong clanged. Grogan, a sleek, swarthy Italian youth fighting under an Irish name, flashed half across the ring, meeting Layton almost in his own corner. Rapid, triphammer blows were exchanged. The Colonel felt his blood teeming with excitement, and clung to the padded post before him, trying with all his strength to aid Johnny on.

LAYTON'S lightning quickness surprised him—never had he guessed the lad so fast. But a sudden sharp dismay shook him as he saw how successfully the long right arm of his left-handed antagonist held Johnny off. Layton stepped back, and as quickly leaped in again, trying to catch Grogan napping. Again he was smacked with Grogan's right. Johnny shook off the blow, broke through, crossing his own right to the jaw. But a vicious left swung out wickedly, crashed against Johnny's chin, and sent him heels over head against the ropes.

"One—two—" the referee intoned over the fallen body. A wild, devastating roar, deafening, of a crowd gone mad, drowned the rest. His hand, rising up and down, kept tally. The Colonel found himself exhorting Layton to get up, though he knew a longer fight only jeopardized his own interests the more.

Ear-splitting yells at the right of him caused the Colonel to glance in that direction. He saw Moore, standing up and face level with the ring floor, shrieking madly. The words "Grogan! Kill him, Grogan!" came through the clamor of the mob.

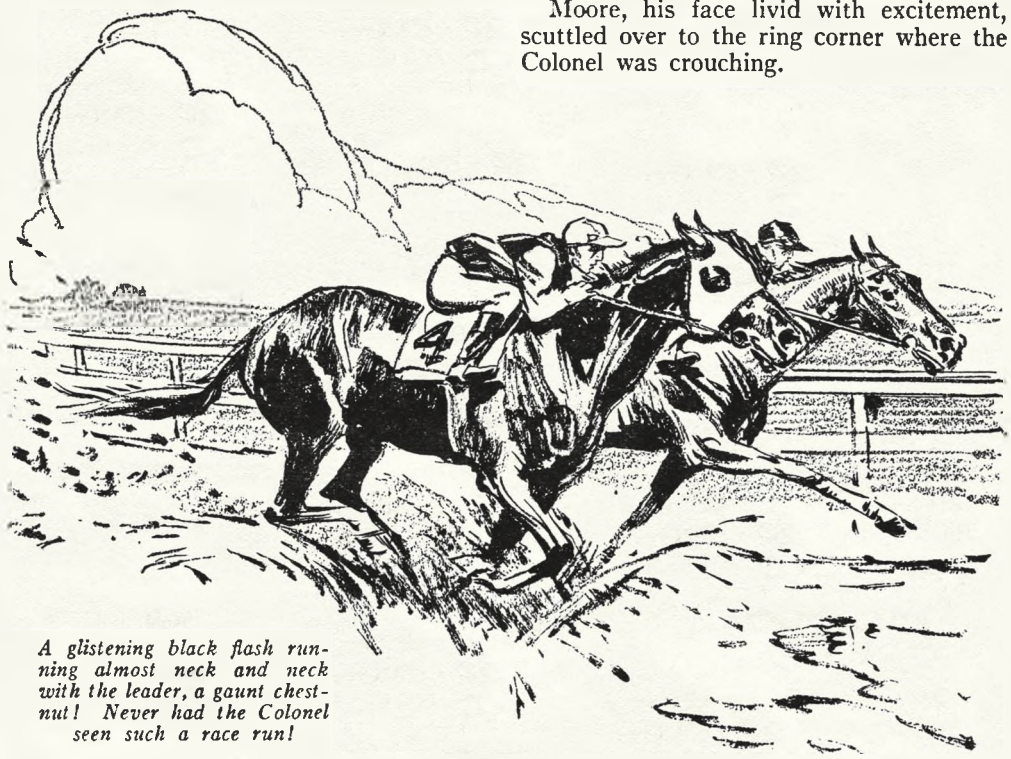
The wealthy sportsman was pleading with Grogan to put an end to Layton! Why? If Moore had secured the fight for the young rider, it would only seem natural that he would be favoring him to win.

"—Five—six—" came the sound of the referee's voice, again drowned by a pandemonium of sound. Johnny regained his feet, fell into a clinch with Grogan. The Colonel could see the rider was badly dazed. Grogan, hampered by the clinch,

devoted attention to Johnny's back and sides: big red welts, livid bruises, appeared there. The clinch was broken.

Johnny stepped back, followed by Grogan. The Colonel just got a glimpse of an evil, brutal face. The long right of the newsboy jabbed at Layton's head. Johnny countered with a weak right. Pressing his advantage, Grogan followed up with his left again, catching Johnny flush to the jaw.

Layton staggered back, striving to stay on his feet, then sagged against the ropes. The gong!



A glistening black flash running almost neck and neck with the leader, a gaunt chestnut! Never had the Colonel seen such a race run!

WITH an agile spring the veteran trainer leaped into the ring, rushed to aid Johnny to his corner. Frantically he worked over him, using smelling salts freely as a restorative. Recalling an old trick he had seen worked on Gunner Layton, he took a mouthful of water and blew it upon the pink and white chest. A gasp, a deep breath, then a smile—Johnny's invariable come-back. The Colonel kneaded the flesh, feeling muscles of iron underneath.

"He caught me asleep," Johnny grinned weakly. "I should have knocked him out in that round."

Johnny had come back to his senses, the Colonel saw, as the gong rang for the next round. Grogan was back at his rapid-fire tactics, but Layton was more cautious, letting the dark youth take the offensive. The newsboy was getting the best of it still; only Johnny's clever blocking prevented him from landing damaging blows.

Moore, his face livid with excitement, scuttled over to the ring corner where the Colonel was crouching.

"You can kiss your Preakness race good-by, Pearson," he howled. "When that young punk of yours gets out of the ring, he wont be able to ride for a month. I'll teach you cheap sports you can't compete with Bob Moore an' win!"

Before the Colonel could answer, Moore had raced back again to his seat, a triumphant leer on his face as he watched the fight.

The man was now beyond all control of himself, the Colonel saw—his vindictive nature had forced him to blurt out something his smoother outer self would have retained.

The gong clanged, awaking Pearson from deep depression. Johnny came to the corner, a tight smile on his lips.

"I've been framed, Mr. Pearson. Grogan's been making cracks all through the round. Says I wont never ride no Preakness race." Johnny was breathing easily—

the fast go seemed not to have affected his excellent condition.

"I just heard that myself," the Colonel admitted, forcing a smile he did not feel. "Moore told me he was expecting to see you laid out. Just for that, I want you to knock Grogan silly. Let's forget the race an' get this settled first."

"Moore said that?" Johnny sniffed. "Hell, I can lick him and a room full of Grogans!" Pearson could feel the glow of confidence exuding from his jockey. "I'll pound his body till he wilts!"

The jangle of the bell. It was Layton who took the offensive. Darting under Grogan's right arm, Johnny struck savagely: a right, a left, a right to the face. Grogan's head was knocked back. He ducked away, surprised by the attack that took the fighting away from him.

Johnny followed. Feet dancing in and out, weaving and swaying in with both shoulders, he covered Grogan's face and head with a rain of blows. Grogan struck back blindly, missing. He backed up against the ropes, covering his face with gloves and forearms. Johnny shifted his attack to the body.

"Yellow!" "Coward!" "Kill him, Kid!" the fight fans howled, changing sides like a weather-cock.

Ed found himself jumping up and down, yelling himself hoarse. Grogan was groggy, he could see, swaying dizzily. Suddenly Grogan threw both arms to his belt —dropped to the resin-dusted floor, writhing and squirming, apparently in distress.

THE referee pushed Johnny away, bent over Grogan anxiously. Johnny staggered to his corner, tears rolling down his cheeks. "The dirty louse!" he sobbed. "The quitter! I never touched him below the ribs. I never fouled a guy in my life, riding or fighting!"

Bedlam broke loose as the referee reentered the ring, giving the fight to Grogan on a foul. The crowd was with Layton now, and loudly booed the decision. The Colonel, knowing even in his inexperience that Johnny had fought fairly all the way through, started toward the ring center to argue with the third man. Through the corner of his eye he saw Moore motioning to the quartet about him; the men in turn started out through the crowd. Checking his steps, Pearson turned quickly, and wrapped Johnny in his robe.

"Hustle, son," he said. "Run in an' take a shower. Stay out of the dressin'-room until I call for you!"

The flyweight saw the seriousness in the Colonel's eyes. Without waiting to ask questions, he hastened to obey.

The suspicious departure of Moore's henchmen had caused the Colonel considerable worry. He stepped over toward Moore, who was talking to a group of men. "My boy'd 'a' trimmed that ham plenty if he hadn't been fouled," he heard Moore say.

The Colonel touched him apologetically on a sleeve as he started up the aisle. "C'n I see you a minute, Mr. Moore?"

Moore's eyes widened, as if puzzled. He looked up questioningly at the tall man beside him, not realizing that the stately figure made his own small frame dwarfish in comparison. Seeing Pearson's humble look, he nodded, arrogantly.

"What for?" he queried.

"I'd like to talk to you in private," Ed explained. Gently, without seeming to use force, he led the man toward the dressing-rooms. "I want to talk to you about that bet of ours."

"Oh, you want to back out of it now, do you?" Moore sneered. They had left the auditorium and were approaching Layton's dressing-room. "So Colonel Pearson, one of America's famous racing men, known everywhere as square, upright an' honest, is goin' to welch on a bet. Wont that be a fine piece of news for some of your Kentucky friends!"

The Colonel grimaced, pitifully. A glance into the dressing-room showed that Layton was not in. His clothes were still hanging on hooks, where he had left them.

"I'd like to get out of that bet, Mr. Moore. I'm afraid my boy wont be able to ride tomorrow, an' I can't get no one else for the colt. I'd hate to lose the farm. It's an old estate, an' about all I got—"

Moore laughed shortly. "I know your boy wont be able to ride tomorrow. But damn you, that bet still is good, un'erstand? I'll take your farm away from you, an' it wont be long till I even get your colt too." He glanced around the empty room suspiciously. "Where's your boy?"

"That's what we are goin' to find out!"

SUDDENLY the Colonel gripped Moore's arm with his fingers, twisting it back until Moore squealed in pain. His arm, pinioned in a grip of steel, was twisted so he was powerless. He shrank back, whin-

ing in fear, unable to meet the stern battle look of the old horse-trainer.

"Keep your mouth shut, you damned crook!" the Colonel ordered. "I'm not goin' to hurt you, unless I have to. We're goin' to find Layton, an' if we don't, I'm holdin' you responsible."

FORCING Moore to walk by his side, the Colonel stamped boldly down the narrow passageway of the hall, passing the row of dressing-rooms. He stepped out the side door of the arena.

Four dim figures, vague and threatening, fell upon them. A startled cry, horror-laden, was halted in Moore's throat as a blackjack fell heavily upon his head.

Pearson felt the man, short in body and resembling Layton slightly in the dark, wrested away from him. Pushing an attacker aside, he leaped back in the hallway, closed the door after him. From outside came a laugh and the sounds of an inert body being lifted. Presently a motor whirred, roared away up the cañon of the street. . . . .

From the far echoes of the clubhouse "Boots and Saddles" had been sounded, calling the Preakness candidates to the post. The Colonel had just given Johnny a foot up in the saddle; now he stood in the paddock repeating final instructions to the eager rider clothed in a radiant outfit, topped with a silk blouse of royal blue, with white arms and shoulders.

Ed feasted his eyes on the jet-black colt, shining like polished ebony in the rays of the warm Maryland sun—a colt imperious in manner, full of life, straining on the reins as if anxious to be gone.

Johnny smiled down at Ed, the smile relieving the tense, serious look of him. Mechanically he arose in his stirrups to test their strength. Then abruptly, leaning over as far as the mettlesome colt would permit, he said:

"Ed, you wont think I'm yellow?"

"After that fight last night? You're the gamest lad I ever saw!"

His Excellency swung sidewise, champing at the bit. Johnny patted his neck tenderly. "Well, I'm finished with the fight game! All last night I kept thinking of what a blow it would have been to you if you hadn't got in the race."

He swung his horse into line for the parade to the post. The Colonel, feeling himself grow weak with emotion, leaned against the fence rail to support his suddenly aged, wabbly legs. A mist, hastily brushed away, formed before his eyes.

The reverberating cry, "They're off!"—like a blast of sudden thunder—sounded before he had recovered his composure.

Frantic in the thought he might miss sight of the long-dreamed-of race, he struggled through the shouting throng and finally secured a position near the finish line. The field had just rounded the turn for the drive down the home-stretch.

A jet-black colt, surmounted by a centaur in royal blue, appeared from nowhere in the van of horses, swung out wide and around, detached from the blurred confusion of speeding toys, passed by as if they were standing still.

A glistening black flash, slender feet pounding the loam in long-reaching, rapid strides. Royal blue silks above, huddled over until only the blouse, ballooning back in the wind, was all that showed, swaying forward rhythmically with each bound.

Running neck and neck with the fleet leader, a gaunt chestnut! He was the only one to beat now—Moore's by the number—and even eyes beginning to blur from the heart-breaking strain could detect the black edging his nose in front.

NEVER in all of his years of witnessing races, and the Preakness especially, had the Colonel seen such a race run. And to have his own horse, the beloved His Excellency, and Johnny—Their Excellencies! For the first time in many years, tears coursed down his cheeks, blinding him, obscuring the finish of the race.

The world about him rocked to the sound of: "Excellency! *His Excellency!*"

Through the roar came the blare of music. The band was playing: they were playing his song, for him! He found himself keeping pace with the melody by repeating almost-forgotten words:

"I will sing one song, of my old Kentucky home,
'Tis summer, the—"

He ended abruptly, embarrassed. But no one was paying any attention to him: they were too busy watching Johnny guide His Excellency in to the winners' semicircle in front of the judges.

The Colonel straightened up, preparatory to entering the stand for the high honors. "I got to get out of this here business." He dabbed at the tears streaming down his face. "I'm gettin' too damn' sentimental!"

"Ha!" breathed Bull Bodin. "You got my rocks! Put up your mitts, damn you!"

Four Diamonds

By LEMUEL DE BRA

This tense little Chinatown drama is by the man who wrote "The Sunset Opal," "The Return of Stiletto Sofie" and many other well-remembered stories.

Illustrated by O. W. Fackert

BULL BODIN'S tight little eyes whipped up and down the narrow Chinatown street, paused for a startled instant on the broad back of Detective Lieutenant Lyons, then returned to the gold and crimson stair-door that led up to the private office of Big Jim Toy—just as the door swung open.

Onto the walk stepped a slender, immaculately dressed man with sallow face and cold, gray eyes. His gaze lighted on the form of Detective Lyons, but did not pause there. Turning swiftly, he hurried in the opposite direction.

"Spot Carney!" muttered Bull Bodin. "What'n'ell—" He frowned at the gold and crimson stair-door. "O-ho! So—them two were in cahoots to beat me out o' my four rocks, eh? O-ho!" His under jaw thrust out, a dangerous light in his little eyes, he strode down the street.

Five minutes later, Bull Bodin paused in the gloomy hall of the fifth floor of a hotel on the outskirts of Chinatown, made sure the number was eight, then, with the ends of his blunt fingers, tapped cautiously on the panel. The door swung open silently. Spot Carney arched his brows in surprise, motioned silently for Bull to enter, closed the door again, and locked it.

"Well, if it isn't Bull Bodin!" Spot Carney, known among the elite crookdom of London and San Francisco as "the Blarney Kid," smiled and thrust out a welcoming hand.

"It is!" growled Bodin, ignoring the

hand. "An' I want a talk with you!"

"Of course! Have a seat, Bull! And a cigarette! I'm glad to see you!"

"That's a lie," Bull Bodin said evenly. "Ever since you an' Big Jim Toy tricked me out o' my four rocks you've passed me up like a white chip!"

Spot Carney stared, puzzled at first, then with the light of comprehension in his cold, gray eyes. He nodded slowly. "Sure you weren't followed here, Bull?" he asked quietly. "I saw Detective Lieutenant Lyons—"

"Naw! I'm too old a hand for that fat-head dick to tail me. You an' Big Jim have a pleasant chat? Or is he holdin' out your share?"

WITH a graceful gesture of his slim, white hand, the Blarney Kid waved that aside. "You're all wrong there, Bull! I'll prove it in a few minutes. Maybe I'll do more. Seeing you has given me an idea." He reached for a cigarette, lighted it, and puffed thoughtfully. "I suppose you heard about the Sunset Opal?"

Bull Bodin started. His tight little eyes narrowed craftily.

"Of course I've heard of it! With half a million people talkin' about that case, an' every cop an' dick in the state huntin' the Sunset Opal, who aint heard of it? Are you"—Bull's gaze bent on Carney's face, searchingly—"are you goin' to say *you* know where it is?"

Spot Carney continued to puff thoughtfully, a dreamy look in his eyes. Then—"Oh, pardon me!" he spoke abruptly. "I—I was thinking! About that opal—the Sunset Opal—you heard *all* about that case, did you?"

"Well, I don't know! If you know where the Sunset Opal is, then I haven't heard it all—yet. What I heard was that over in Shanghai an English crook named George Weatherby bumped off an old Chink an'—"

"Murder number one," interposed Spot quietly.

Bodin nodded. "An' swipes the Sunset Opal. Then Weatherby's wife, a New York dame known as Gold-digger Grace, slips a dose o' poison into her husband's liquor an'—"

"Murder number two," said Spot. "Go on."

"An' then she skips out for Frisco with the opal. Detective Lyons an' a Customs man locate the woman at the Channelview Hotel, accuse her of the murder, an' of havin' the opal. She admits everything, an' tells 'em to wait—she'll get the opal. Then she turns her back an' shoots herself—"

"Third violent death!"

"Yeah! She dies without makin' a squawk an' the dicks never find the opal." Bull Bodin paused, significantly.

Spot Carney crushed out the stub of his cigarette. "Not superstitious about opals, are you, Bull? Don't believe they bring one bad luck?"

"Naw!" Bull Bodin gestured impatiently with his big hands. "I got no time for that bunk! Only superstition I have is Chinks. They always mean bad luck—for me? Them four diamonds o' mine—"

Suddenly, Spot Carney's slim, white hand darted above the table-edge; and over the table-top rolled something that seemed bursting with gorgeous, flaming colors. It came to rest directly in front of Bull Bodin.

Bodin stared. Amazement, cupidity, shone in his eyes.

"*The Sunset Opal!* What a beauty! Look, Spot! You can see the ocean—the waves rollin' in—an' the sun goin' down in a sea o' fire—"

"Or blood. Remember, that stone already has two murders—"

"Well!" Bull Bodin flung up his head defiantly; "many a murder has been done for less! What the devil you drivin' at?"

The Blarney Kid smiled. "You want your four diamonds, don't you, Bull? And you want to even that score with Big Jim Toy? Well, listen! There's a superstition in China against that opal ever being taken out of the country. Knowing that, I was sure I could make a good deal with Big Jim Toy. So—I went to see him. I told him I had the Sunset Opal, but I didn't show it to him. I warned him that he had tricked me once and that this time he'd have to accept my terms. So"—Spot looked at his watch—"Big Jim is coming here to—"

"Coming here?" Bull Bodin half raised out of his chair. "That crook—"

"He's coming here in a few minutes, Bull. I'm going to give him that opal—the Sunset Opal—and in exchange, he's going to give me your four diamonds."

"O-ho!" Bodin sat up. "I'm just in time, eh?"

Spot frowned. "Just in time, yes; but, Bull, I always intended to get those diamonds back for you. I never throw down a friend. *Never forget a friend; never forgive an enemy!* That's my motto. But, just the same, Bull, you've got to put something into this deal. So, here's my new idea: when Big Jim Toy leaves here with the Sunset Opal, you follow him. *In your own way*"—Spot moved his hands in an expressive gesture—"get my opal and bring it back. Then I'll give you your four diamonds. See?"

Bull Bodin blinked. Leaning forward, he peered into the Blarney Kid's face as if to see what lay behind his spoken words.

"So that's it!" he muttered at length. "Uh-huh!" Nodding slowly, his gaze wandered around the room, took note of the bed, the trunk, the suitcase with straps hanging, the open bathroom door, paused for an instant on the opal that still lay on the table in front of him, then flashed up to Spot Carney's face. "That's an old trick, Spot! I thought *you* would spring something new, something—smart. Well,"—Bodin arose; with his left hand he picked up the Sunset Opal,—"if that's your scheme, count me out! Here!"

Spot Carney hesitated, a frown over his narrowed eyes. Instead of moving to take the opal, he slid off the chair—away from Bull Bodin's big hand.

But Bull Bodin, known on police records as a "strong-arm thief," knew how to handle a situation according to his methods. With a movement, incredibly swift for a man of his build, he caught the Blarney Kid by the arm, dropping the opal. Jerking him forward violently, Bull's big right hand closed over Carney's throat. A single agonized gasp burst from Carney's lips; then Bodin had him forced back over the edge of the bed. Not until Spot's sallow face was becoming puffy and darkened did Bull ease up on his vise-like hold; then with the straps from the suitcase he bound Carney hand and foot, gagged him with a pillow-slip, and dragged his inert form into the bathroom. Puffing a little, more from the excitement than from the exertion, Bull Bodin locked the door and dropped the key into the wastebasket.

Picking up the opal, Bodin thrust it into his vest pocket and glanced quickly around the room. Everything was in shape. He looked at his watch. It was half past two. And Spot had said Big Jim Toy was due in a few minutes.

The time dragged. Bull glanced at his watch. Only five minutes! Bull frowned, rubbing his big thumb over the crystal. Then, abruptly, he shoved the watch in his pocket and took out the opal. A long time he regarded it intently, marveling at the play of colors, the uncanny motion of the emerald waves, the glitter of the sun against the blood-red sky—

Bull looked at his watch. Only two-forty! He got up, scowling, walked to the door, listened a moment, and went back to the table. On sudden impulse, he stepped to the one window and looked out. No fire-escape within reach, no way to get out of the room except by that hall door. . . . .

Rat-a-tat-tat!

Bull Bodin whirled around. That sound—the swift, cautious thrumming of fingernails on the door-panel! The call of the underworld! Stepping quickly to the door, Bodin took hold of key and knob, turned them together, and swung the door open.

BIG JIM TOY glided into the room. His sharp eyes darted swiftly about the room, but betrayed no astonishment at finding only Bull Bodin. Not a big man—mused Bodin as he cautiously locked the door again—but a dangerous man. Something about his high cheek-bones, the barbaric shock of coarse black hair, the thin nostrils and broad mouth, that suggested power, cruel and ruthless.

"Been waitin' for you, Mr. Toy," Bull Bodin mumbled, putting out a chair. "My partner, Mr. Carney, had to keep another appointment an' he left me to finish the deal. You know what I mean, of course?"

Big Jim Toy did not move to sit down. Again his gaze wandered about the room. "I understand," he said; "but—"

"An' you brought my—the four diamonds?"

Big Jim's smoky eyes turned to the white man. There was a silence; then—in the bathroom—the sudden crash of falling glass! Bodin jumped—and sat down again. He managed a grin.

"Guy in the next room drunk, I guess. Never mind him. Well, Mr. Carney left the opal with me. Did you bring my four diamonds?"

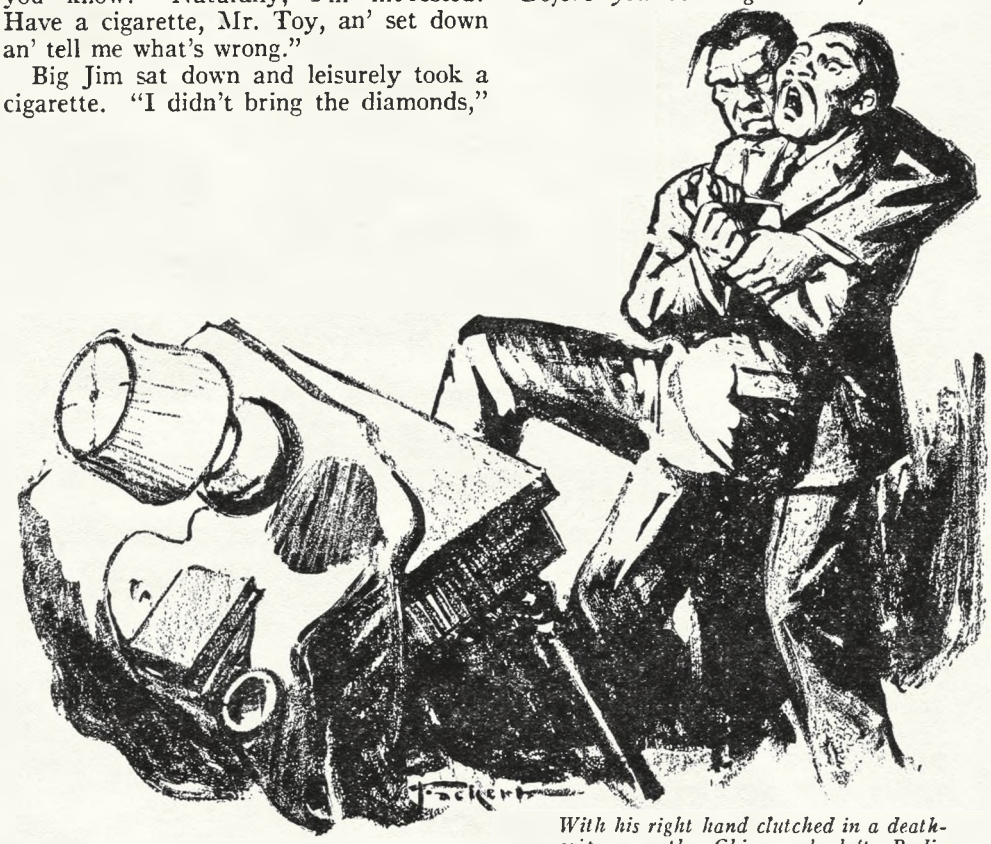
"No," replied Toy, his gaze on the bathroom door.

"Why not? Wasn't Mr. Carney's terms O. K.? He's keen to wind up the deal. So am I. Them was my diamonds, you know! Naturally, I'm int'rested! Have a cigarette, Mr. Toy, an' set down an' tell me what's wrong."

Big Jim sat down and leisurely took a cigarette. "I didn't bring the diamonds," he said—then put the cigarette between his lips, and struck a match.

"*Ha!*" breathed Bull Bodin, jerking a snub-nosed automatic from beneath his left arm-pit. "You can't trick me this time! You got my rocks! I can see it in your dirty eyes! Put up your mitts, damn you, or I'll blow your heart out!"

FOR just an instant Big Jim Toy sat motionless as a statue, his smoky eyes on the gun the white man held aimed at him. Then, with steady hand, he put the flame to his cigarette, and unconcernedly puffed it alight. "I believe," said Toy, carefully dropping the match into the ash-tray, "that I told you once your methods are very—ah—crude. Now I know it. You threaten; but you wont shoot. You don't want the police here—any more than I do. Now here," Big Jim turned as if to face the white man more squarely, and steel suddenly glittered in his right hand—"here," he went on coolly, "is a weapon better suited to our profession. This speaks—silently. *Before you could get out of that chair,*



With his right hand clutched in a death-grip over the Chinaman's left, Bodin was forcing the blade deep into Big Jim's chest.

I could drive this into your heart. So—" He left the sentence unfinished.

Bull Bodin stared, first at the Chinaman's stony face, then at the glittering blade; and, slowly, the sickening fear in his little eyes changed to rage. His hand shaking, he put the automatic back in its holster. "You've called my bluff," he said thickly. "Now put that damn' thing away—an' let's talk business!"

Big Jim Toy nodded. His hand slipped beneath his coat, came away empty—

Swiftly, desperately, Bull Bodin struck. Like fingers of steel, his big hand closed over Toy's right wrist, and jerked him violently forward across the table. With his right hand, Bodin caught the Chinaman by the throat, dug his fingers in

brutally, twisted the Chinaman's head down savagely against the table-top, held him there, apparently helpless, choking.

Taken by surprise, Toy was quick to recover. With his left hand he seized hold of the table, jerked it from beneath him. Then his hand darted beneath his coat, and again Bodin was facing the glitter of steel.

THE sight of that blade in the Chinaman's hand struck Bull Bodin with a panicky terror, a frenzied terror that made him fight with a savage strength and desperation he had never known before. Instead of dodging back, he released his hold on Toy's throat, hurled himself against the Chinaman, and caught the hand that held the knife. Then—how it happened, Bodin did not know—he was behind the Chinaman; with his left arm he was crushing the Chinaman's body against his, with his right hand clutched in a death-grip over Big Jim's left, he was forcing the blade deep into Big Jim's chest.

Then Bull Bodin suddenly became aware that he was holding a limp body . . . . . that the table had been knocked over . . . . . that a radio in the adjoining room had been silenced. Then a chair scraped, steps approached the wall—

Quietly, Bodin eased the limp form to the floor. For an instant, nausea seized him; then his face hardened. He bent over and searched swiftly, found the four diamonds and thrust them in his pocket. Stepping quickly to the trunk, Bodin raised the lid, lifted out the tray, shoved it beneath the bed, grabbed an armful of clothing out of the bottom of the trunk, hurled that beneath the bed. Then, he gathered up the body, jammed it roughly into the trunk, closed the lid, turned the key and flung that in the waste-basket.

Breathing easier now, Bodin replaced the table, picked up the scattered cigarettes and the ash tray. He straightened his clothes, adjusted his tie, took a last look around the room, and stepped quietly to the door. As he opened the door, the radio in the next room picked up a downtown orchestra that was playing, "Meet Me Tonight in Dreamland!"

Bull Bodin shivered, closed the door softly, and hastened down the gloomy hall. A bad mess, but he was safely out of it! Around the corner, and—

"Hey, you!" The voice of Detective Lyons! In the hall behind him! Bodin hesitated a split second, then moved on, unhurriedly.

"Hey, Bodin!" Heavy steps were hastening down the hall.

Bull Bodin stopped, looked around with well-feigned surprise, then frowned. "You callin' me?" He drew out his watch, impatiently.

"Yeh, callin' you!" Detective Lyons drawled. "What you doin' in the Blarney Kid's room?"

"Waitin' to see him. Guess he aint goin' to show up. An' "—again Bodin looked at his watch—"I can't wait any longer." He turned to go on.

"Just a minute, Bodin! I don't want you, but I want to talk with you. Let's go back to Carney's room!"

"Sure!" Bodin agreed promptly. "But, make it snappy!" He followed Lyons into the room.

Detective Lyons looked around quickly, then turned to Bodin. "Guess I'd better frisk you, eh?"

Bodin managed a grin. "Go ahead!" he invited, and raised his arms.

LYONS regarded him a moment in silence. "You an' the Blarney Kid pretty close, aint you?"

Bull Bodin lowered his arms. He knew this detective's methods, knew that once in his clutch he would be wrung dry of every scrap of information, that sooner or later he would be searched—the four diamonds, and the Sunset Opal would be found. Lyons would hang on like the bull terrier that he was, until—

"Not particularly," said Bull Bodin, thinking faster than he had ever thought in his life. "He aint treated me just right. Why?"

"I got a tip that he knew Golddigger Grace Weatherby, the woman who killed herself—after hiding the Sunset Opal. Did he?"

Bull Bodin smiled knowingly. He stepped to the table, calmly lighted a cigarette. "Now I know what you're drivin' at, Lyons," he said quietly. "An' you give me an idea. I aint no squealer, you understan'; but neither do I forget when a bird does me dirt." He took a long draw on the cigarette while appearing to study Lyons' face. "I believe I can trust you. You want the opal, eh?"

"Of course! Has the Blarney Kid got it?"

"He's got it, but he doesn't carry it with him. Listen, Lyons! I aint afraid o' you. You got nothin' on me. See? But I am afraid o' Spot Carney. He's a bad actor—a killer. So give me your promise—if I tell you where the opal is, will you protect me?"

Detective Lyons hesitated. He helped himself to one of Carney's cigarettes, lighted it, and took a turn across the room. Coming back, he stopped before the trunk, eyed it a moment, then sat down on it.

"Bodin, I don't generally bargain with —with crooks. But it means a lot to me to find that opal. Do you know where it is, or are you—"

Lyons broke off as Bodin swung around and stepped to the dresser. With his left hand, Bodin took one of the upper drawers clear out. "I'll show you I'm not stringin' you," he said, and thrust his right arm far back in the recess, fumbled around—then uttered an exclamation of annoyance. "Knocked it off, damn it! But—"

Detective Lyons was bending over the second drawer as Bull Bodin drew it out. Bull Bodin's big hands pulled at the stuff in the drawer; but—far back in one corner, where Bull Bodin was not looking—Lyons spotted the opal, and instantly he pounced on it.

"Now, listen, Lyons!" Bodin pleaded earnestly,—when the detective had examined the opal carefully, the place where Spot Carney had "hidden it," and had asked Bodin a dozen questions as to how he knew it was there,—"you promised to protect me. So here's the lay! Carney may show up any minute. Put the opal back where it was, an' I'll blow. When Carney comes, you give him a frisk, then search the room an', after a while, find the opal. See?"

AGAIN Detective Lyons hesitated. "Mebbe I'll do that, an' mebbe I wont. You better get out, though. If there's anything crooked in this, I'll pick you up later. I guess you know that."

"I got nothin' to run for," grinned Bodin, starting for the door. "Only I don't want Carney to know I tipped you off. Well, good luck!" He got to the door.

"Better give me your present address," Lyons spoke up, a bit sarcastically. He laid the opal on the table, and got out a small notebook and pencil. "An' the name you go by there."

Bull Bodin turned around, his hand on the door-knob. "Sure! You can find me at—" He gave an address. "Just phone that you want me an' I'll run down to the station. So long!" He turned the knob.

"Just a minute! What's that phone number?" Lyons bent over to write, and his sleeve accidentally struck the opal, knocking it off. It rolled across the floor against the trunk.

Laying down his pencil, Lyons stepped to the trunk, picked up the opal and laid it back on the table. He reached for his pencil, but stopped, held up his hand, looked at his finger-tips.

"So long!" Bull Bodin called back from the open door. "I'd better blow before—"

WITH a bound, Detective Lyons was at the door.

"Not by a damn' sight!" he snarled, covering Bodin with his police .38. He caught Bodin by the shoulder, jerked him back into the room, kicked the door shut. "Pretty damn' near got away with it, eh? Oh, don't try to look so innocent! Look at that opal! . . . . *Look at that opal!* You can't see the sunset now, can you? Why? Because there's blood on it—*blood on the sun!*"

A moment later Bull Bodin's automatic lay on the table beside the opal and the four diamonds, Bodin was in handcuffs, and Lyons was using the phone. "Yeh, better send up a coupla men, Cap'n! Got Bull Bodin, four rocks, an' the Sunset Opal. No, didn't get the Blarney Kid. Bull Bodin got to him first, killed him, an' locked him in a trunk. Yeh, murder case this time. . . . ."

Before the other detectives arrived, the day-clerk came up with a pass-key and opened the bathroom door. Lyons saw first the broken water-glass; then pieces of strap that obviously had been sawed through with broken glass, then—weighted down with a bar of soap—a hurriedly scribbled message.

Lyons snatched up the paper, read it half through, glanced out the open window at the drain-pipe, snorted in disgust, then read aloud:

> Dear Lyons: Sorry, but I'm not in the trunk! On the other side of this sheet you'll find an account of just what Bodin did. Tell him I'll be thinking about him the day he hangs for that murder! By-by.
>
> THE BLARNEY KID.

A Modern Pirate

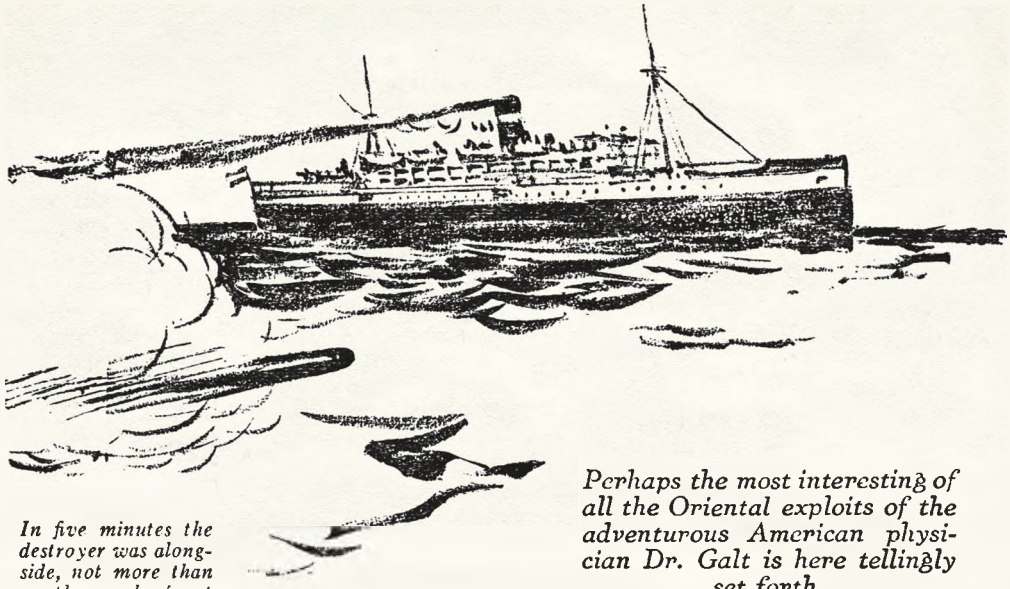
By

CULPEPER ZANDTT

THE rusty, nondescript craft which had been lying for a week over near the Pulau Brani reef in Keppel Harbor was registered in the first edition of Lloyd's as a "deep-sea wrecking-tug" belonging to the Henderson Wrecking Company of San Francisco. Her speed was given as twenty-five knots—which aroused no comment from Lloyd's surveyors at the time she changed owners because they knew all about her previous history that naturally accounted for this. But had anyone else been sufficiently interested in the boat to look her up, that twenty-five knots—for a wrecking-tug—would have instantly appeared as a most unaccountable inconsistency. She didn't *look* fast—unless one glanced along her water-line from a rowboat in smooth water—because she had a sponson on each side which added fourteen feet to her midship beam, the presumable idea being to give her more stability when lifting partly submerged wreckage with her derricks, there being two pairs of these forward and two aft, also cable-sheaves at her bow and stern. The space forward of her boilers, which would have corresponded to the Number Two hold of a cargo-boat, was fitted up as a machine-shop with two good-sized forges and all the equipment necessary for emergency repair-work at sea. And she had come into Singapore—as was understood to be her owners' usual procedure—to await the results of an auction-sale of wrecks in the China and Java Seas advertised by the Admiralty Court.

The Lascars who made up her crew had none of them happened to serve on a warship, so were not sufficiently interested to unlash the canvas coverings of two bulky objects below, one on each side, which any navy-man in the world would have recognized as pressure-chambers and tubes for discharging torpedoes under water from either side of the bow, and they had no keys for the lockers against the side plating containing four "Whiteheads" in each locker. The two five-inch rifles with their tripod swivel-mounts, which were greased and securely lashed in the same hold, they knew of course for what they were—but supposed them to be used merely for sinking an occasional derelict at sea.

Twenty years before, the British Admiralty had auctioned off a few "destroyers" of obsolete type to anyone who cared to buy them, either for junk or any other purpose. One of the smaller Central American States purchased two for less than ten percent of what they had cost to build, and had done some very satisfactory bluffing with them against neighboring States until the latter obtained larger ones and turned the tables. After a fourth change in Government, the purchasing State sold one of them to an English speculator in San Fran-



In five minutes the destroyer was alongside, not more than a thousand feet from the liner, and had fired a shot across her bow.

Perhaps the most interesting of all the Oriental exploits of the adventurous American physician Dr. Galt is here tellingly set forth.

Illustrated by William Molt

cisco for five thousand dollars, and he had fitted up the craft as previously described for a wrecking-tug. This man was both an excellent mechanic and a navigator, but above and beyond all that he was an adventurer—a speculator—who had run up three or four hundred thousand dollars for himself by taking risks that no business man with common sense would have considered for a moment. True, he had lost more than half of what he made, but that never worried him—he confidently expected to win more than he lost in the long run.

His chief idea in buying the "destroyer" had been to use her as a fast yacht in which he might cover long distances in the minimum of time—and his sense of humor prompted the joke of making the craft look about as unlike a yacht as was nautically possible. To make good on the joke and provide a *bona-fide* alibi in case he ever wanted one, he did salve a few wrecks on the other side of the Pacific and gave the purely mythical "Henderson Wrecking Company" an honest and indisputable commercial status.

The office of the company consisted of two rooms in a Market Street skyscraper—in charge of a blonde stenographer and a *blasé* office-boy, each capable of acting intelligently upon cabled instructions from the far corners of the globe. The speculator was socially known in London as the Honorable Mark Sefton, a younger son of very good family, and was supposed to be making a fair living somehow, in the outports. His dark-bearded companion, who acted as Master of the "wrecking-tug" under the name of Christian Sonneschien, was also known in London some years before as Frank Walburton, formerly of the Coldstream Guards. The Chief Engineer was an American of forty, also heavily bearded and known on board as Hans Schmidt—hailing originally from Salem, Massachusetts, where he had been Tommy Bellows. Aside from these three there were no white men on the craft, the stewards and cooks being Chinese, and the rest Lascars who spoke little or no English.

SEFTON was not supposed to have any connection with the tug—being on board merely as an old friend of Captain Sonneschien's, who had run across him in Rangoon and invited the Londoner to cruise for a few weeks. In another part of the Archipelago, some months before, it had seemed rather a lark to Sefton when he came aboard in a make-up so entirely different that the Chinks and Lascars who saw him then for a month or two failed entirely to recognize him for the same man when he rejoined them at Rangoon.

Just what he might have in mind by these strange actions, and by his insistence upon Walburton and Bellows concealing their real identities—aside from the busi-

ness of salvage—neither of them had much of an idea, beyond a notion that possibly the Henderson Wrecking Company was not a legally authorized corporation and that Sefton might be forestalling future complications in case they found money shipments in some of the wrecks and failed to report it. As far as the two men knew from everything they had seen of the man, he was commercially honest and respectable. Every contract they had entered into for salvage had been scrupulously carried out. In two cases where he had bought wrecks, "sight-unseen," and made money on them, he had divided the profits into shares which gave each of them an eighth, with a bonus for each of the crew, though he was in no way obliged to do this, since they were merely his paid employees. Inwardly, Walburton and Bellows—together with most of the crew—recognized in him that nameless something which is part of the pioneer or adventurer the world over, and warmed to him because they all had a good bit of the same quality.

MARK SEFTON came ashore that morning, a week after they had dropped anchor, in spotless "whites" and solar-topee—hailed a motorcar at Jardine's Wharf, and was driven the four miles into the heart of the city where he had tiffin at the Raffles and then took a rickshaw eastward to Rochore Road which, as everyone knows, is headquarters for pet animals or reptiles of every description and can be smelled a mile away if there is a breeze—a center known the world over, where Malays barter what they catch in East Indian jungles to obese Chinese and Germans at prices which make the trade worth while—where agents for the zoos and circuses of the world purchase such commodities for their own collections.

As the *wallah* set him down by the arcade near one of the corners, a Malay who was slipping silently along through the crowd stopped at one side to look closely at the Englishman—and then followed him. A rather handsome woman, accompanied by one of the Staff and a younger girl, did the same thing—putting up her lorgnette and noticing the shop into which he disappeared. To complete the peculiar freak of chance which probably wouldn't have drawn these four human beings together once in another million times, an American physician—retired from general practice but rendering occasional voluntary service to others which made him one of the most popular men in the Orient—had noticed Sefton as he came up the road in his rickshaw, and stopped in the arcade to study the man when he got out and paid off his *wallah*.

Doctor Galt was first the physician—then botanist, scientist and student of human nature in turn. The bearing of the Londoner impressed him as that of a man well poised—entirely at ease—sure of himself in any emergency—and unconventional when it came to doing things or taking risks which other men usually avoided. While he was studying the man, he also noticed the Malay standing in the shadow watching the Englishman with eyes as expressionless as those of a snake, but with the suggestion of venom behind them. Presumably, here was a brown man hating a white one for some real or fancied injury with a savage ferocity which merely bided its time. The Doctor trailed along after them, as the woman had done.

It happened that while coming down the Strait from Rangoon, Sefton had been reading Kipling—"The Jungle Book"—and had taken it into his head that a mongoose would prove an interesting pet. Hence the visit to Rochore Road. He was quite sure of obtaining when he wanted, because the friendly little animal no longer goes by his own name, thanks to the immortal chronicler of the East. You have merely to say: "One *Rikki Tikki,*" in that part of Singapore and you get a mongoose. Sam Wah's big godown, with its cellars and rear buildings, was known to the Londoner from previous visits—and, as corpulent Sam never forgot a face or an enemy, Sefton was greeted as smilingly as if he had been in the day before.

"Ullo, Sefton Sahib! You feelin' belly damn' fine these mo'nin'? Yaes? Mebbeso you likee Numbel One pallot? Topside bi'd—swear goddam allee samee like sailo'-mans! Yaes? Mebbeso Bo'neo Numbel One monk—*s-o-o* big—nize long tail? Yaes?"

Then, catching sight of the *wallah* who was now standing close behind his customer, he asked: "These you' *wallah?*"

Sefton glanced carelessly behind him.

"Lord, no, never saw the beggar before! An' no can do parrot or monkey, Sam. Wantee fine Number One Rikki Tikki. You got? Catchee fine healthy one—eh?"

"Oh, yaes! Send boy that side—out back. He come bimeby soon—bling Num-

bel One Likki Tikki. You likee see beeg Numbel One snake an' clocodile befo' boy come these side weeth Likki Tikki? You come bottom side in cellel. Yaes?"

"Oh, quite so—just to pass the time while I'm waitin'. Cellar must be cooler than this place—an' you always did have a good show down there!"

They went down a flight of fairly broad concrete steps to an immense well-lighted cellar extending under the entire building and out some distance into the rear.

It wasn't so much cooler here than in the shop above, because the reptiles of the tropics are too sensitive to changes in temperature and sicken in places which are too cool—but there was a dampness and a fetid odor which suggested swamps or slimy places. Following them, silently, came the big Malay, and following *him,* came the now thoroughly interested American medico—one hand back under his white coat, near the butt of an automatic. And at the end of the odd procession were the English ladies with their escort.

SEFTON strolled along the line of cages —glancing at a lively assortment of cobras, coral-snakes, rubber-pythons, East Indian *fer-de-lances,* pit-vipers, and so to the larger cages in which pythons of all sizes were luxuriously slithering from one massive coil to another. As they went along, the Malay—supposing himself unobserved—stopped a moment before one of the netting-faced cobra-boxes, lifted the cover slightly, and when a few inches of hooded neck slipped through the opening, grasped it just at the base of the hood and pulled out the six-foot snake which immediately coiled the rest of its body around his arm, accustomed by this time to be handled in that way.

Stepping noiselessly up behind Sefton, the man squeezed the cobra's neck to make him ugly, then darted his arm forward to jab the cobra's open jaws against the Englishman's neck at just the moment when Sam Wah unexpectedly turned about to say something—and saw him. The squeal of horror forced from the usually imperturbable Chinese made Sefton instinctively drop to a squatting position and spring sideways. His neck narrowly missed the cobra's fangs—and his legs tripped the Malay, who sprawled over them on the concrete floor, with the snake partly under him. Before the would-be assassin could roll over, he was bitten on the shoulder.

Sefton was on his feet as the Malay fell. He saw the cobra's fangs sink into the brown flesh and suddenly grasped with his left hand the lower folds of the cobra's hood before it could wriggle away. Holding out the squirming, enraged reptile to Sam Wah, Sefton shoved his right hand into his trousers pocket for a jack-knife.

"Here, Sam—take the beast!" he said. "Put him where he belongs! This man was bitten! There wont be more than a couple of minutes to save him!"

The knife was out and a sharp blade opened, as soon as the Chinese had grasped the cobra.

"Now lie perfectly still," Sefton ordered the prostrate man. "I've got to cut in an inch or more to stop that poison from getting into your circulation! Steady, now!"

All this happened in about thirty seconds. Galt's automatic had been out the instant he saw what the Malay intended to do—but it was impossible to get accurate aim. In the scrimmage, he couldn't be sure of not hitting the wrong man, and hadn't seen the Malay bitten—didn't know just what had happened until Sefton started to cut a chunk of flesh out of the Malay's shoulder. Then he was kneeling by them instantly, his pocket case of emergency remedies open, and a small pile of red permanganate crystals poured into the palm of one hand.

"Good workmanlike job, old chap! You've cut below where the poison could have reached in this time! Now we'll just rub these crystals into the open wound as a sterilizer before we attempt to stop the bleeding. I think you severed a ligament that will leave the arm stiff for the rest of his life, but there was no way out of it, and he may live now to be a hundred!"

Galt repeated to the man in Malay his opinion that his proposed victim's prompt action unquestionably had saved his life; but the man, still writhing in pain, somewhat insolently asked:

"And who art thou, O Hakim, who would give another the credit of thy own medicine?"

Sam Wah, after quickly tossing the cobra into its own box, had returned, and replied contemptuously in Malay:

"This be the Tuan Hakim, of the Great Tong—O dog of a fool! And this Tuan Sahib whom thou wouldst have killed hath saved thy worthless life—even as the Tuan Hakim says! For all his medicine would have been as naught if the poison had not

been kept from creeping into thy blood!" Then in his usual pidgin-dialect, he added:

"Catchee look-see, these man, Sahib! Mebbeso know him one time?"

Sefton studied the Malay's features closely.

"Well, I'll not say positively—but I fancy he may be the beggar I once caught in Penang, beating a gray-haired old Tamil woman with a bit of jute rope. I grabbed the thing from his hand an' thrashed him with it until he couldn't stand. Humph! Seems he wasn't satisfied to let it go at that! Oh, well—he may have learned something this time. Fix him up in good shape, Doctor—an' then dine with me at the Raffles. An'—er—Sam, if you could send my Rikki Tikki up to the hotel for me about nine, in a comfortable bit of a box, I'll take him down to the boat from there, d'ye see. What?"

By the time the snake episode was under way, the younger woman beat a retreat up the stairs, but the other had waited at the foot of them until certain Sefton was unharmed. The party of three met him at the top when he came up with the Doctor.

"Mark Sefton! Has there ever been a month of your life when you weren't in one scrape or another? Here, when I've not laid eyes on you for five years, had no idea whether you were in New York or Fiji, you turn up in a Singapore cellar with a Malay trying to kill you!"

"Mrs. Harvey—by Jove! Well, I'm dashed!"

"It used to be 'Cecilia' in the old days, Mark."

"Aye—before you married a 'political' an' got into the Cabinet crowd. I'll not soon forget Harvey's face that day at the lawn-party when I called you Cecie. . . . . Has he been transferred to the Indian Governm'nt?"

"Oh, no—I just came out with Bertha Lowndes and the General—Bertha, pardon me, dear. This is an old friend—the Honorable Mark Sefton. Leftenant Ordway, you and Mr. Sefton should be good friends—you both have a weakness for adventure in the far corners and the outports. Dr. Galt, of course, we all know—everybody does."

"Faith, I can easily understand why! I noticed that he had a gun in his hand to shoot either that beggar or the snake, but I was right in line with 'em. Takes nerve—not to fire in a case of that sort, you know! The Doctor an' I are pals—if he'll have me. We're dinin' together this evenin'—but if you, Miss Lowndes an' the Leftenant will tell me where I can find you, I'll be lookin' you up tomorrow. What?"

HAVING got the addresses, out at Tanglin, the party separated—Sefton and Galt putting in the remainder of the afternoon in a motor ride out along the lovely Buona Vista road along the southwest shore of the Island. It was not until they were smoking upon an upper veranda of the Singapore Club, however,—the Doctor having suggested this in preference to the hotel,—that the Londoner said:

"Doctor, one tells many things to a physician which he wouldn't to a more talkative person. Do you mind if I touch upon my earlier acquaintance with Mrs. Harvey, an' then—er—well, possibly ask you a few questions?"

"Not in the least. The lady has interested me ever since she came out here—as a psychological study. She's been under some sort of a nervous strain ever since she reached Singapore, and I can't quite decide whether it's constitutional or from external causes. Was she of a nervous temperament—as a girl?"

"Hmph! Rawther not! Nerves as steady as if she were practicin' for a champion-marksmanship. Topping rider to hounds, good at all sports, perfect health all the time—never recall her bein' ill enough to have in a medico. I say! Ordway's quite evidently on the staff—so she's one of the Governm'nt crowd, out here—an' I recall a General Lowndes connected in a way with the I. S. S. That would be Miss Bertha's father, presumably? Eh?"

"Yes. I don't think the General does anything in the line of going among the brownies in disguise, but he must have done so in his younger days and been very good at it, because he knows the Asiatics as well as any Occidental can know them. Mrs. Harvey, apparently, is welcome in all of the best houses—"

"That's kowtowing because of her husband's political position as much as anything, I dare say. He's by way of bein' quite influential in Whitehall—though frankly, the man's a cold-blooded cad who never cared anything for his wife except for the money she brought to him, and her looks. She'll always have the sort of breeding that he never can learn, an' she's a handsome woman in spite of her nervous manner, which is something recent. Most

A squeal of horror from the Chinese made Sefton instinctively drop to a squatting position.

of her money, I fancy, has been used to further his political career, with or without her consent. Commandeered!"

"In circumstances of that sort, I suppose a divorce would be difficult if not impossible for her to get—with all his political influence against her?"

"Er—just what put that into your mind, Doctor?"

"Underground gossip here in Government circles. Some of the people who might be in position to know, are hinting that she has left her husband, permanently—that she would admit it if one were impertinent enough to ask such a question. Out here the sympathy appears to be with her, but it's generally thought that she'd get very little if she went back to live in England. It's supposed that she still has enough of a personal income to live comfortably in modern circumstances—such as one may do out here much more easily than in Europe. But if her husband is vindictive, as I assume that type would be, there may be times when she'll not find even living out here very pleasant. In such a position, if it is true that she has separated from him, she's got to walk a chalk-line anywhere in the Straits, Hongkong, Shanghai or India. Anything more than ordinary attention from the men she meets will be magnified, gossiped about, reported to Harvey—and may be made the basis of a rotten divorce-suit by him in which she'd lose and he'd blast her reputation."

"Damn him! For just about tuppence, I'd go back to London an' call him out! If he wouldn't fight, I'd take a dog-whip to him in front of his own club! You've guessed, of course, that we were as good as engaged in the old days. I've always had a wandering foot—was away for a year—Capetown an' then Buenos Aires, makin' a bit of tin, d'ye see. In my absence the whole family forced her into this marriage with Harvey. I was a waster, d'ye see—no good, always knockin' about. He was already in the House. With the money she could bring him, he was certain to be in the Cabinet. She waited ten months; my letters were stolen an' destroyed—supposed I must be dead or had lost all interest in her. Well, the circumst'nces an' the pressure were too strong for her, poor girl! When I turned up in London again, they were on their wedding-trip. When she heard about my letters, she accused him of complicity in side-trackin' 'em—an' gave him proper what-for. Never loved the bounder, of course. Fancy they've had some deuced unpleasant discussions in the past ten years. An' there it is! I'll have it out with her tomorrow—see where she's really at. There might be a way out—in

the States, possibly. At all events, I'm under obligations to you, Galt! Possibly I may impose upon your good nature an' ask for a suggestion or two—when I've learned a bit more."

NEXT afternoon Sefton went out to General Lowndes' villa at Tanglin and found the Doctor there, chatting with the ladies. After a while he strolled down to a little summer-house at the foot of the lawn with Mrs. Harvey. For several minutes there was silence between them; then she gently ran one finger along the slight edging of gray at his temple.

"Quite becoming to you, Mark, even if it is a bit early for thirty-five. One imagines that you've seen life in the last ten years—and not of the humdrum sort, either. What?"

"Oh—aye. I've seen life—all over the place. So have you."

"But my adventures have been merely in the line of common domestic tragedy. Yours, one would say, have been a bit more lurid—possibly a bit outside the law at times—eh?"

"M-m-m—no. Rawther close to the edge, perhaps—but really straight in the final show-down. Funked the lawbreakin', I fancy—or perhaps savin' that for a really proper occasion."

"Yes—one doesn't think of you as funking anything, Mark. That beastly cobra yesterday, for example. My word! One doesn't see how you had the nerve to grasp the thing, after that Malay'd been bitten!"

"Couldn't let it go crawlin' about, snappin' at everybody, you know! Close to Sam Wah's feet as it was—might have got him. . . . . But Cecie—how is it with you? From what I know of Harvey, he'd not have allowed you to come out here alone unless you managed to give him the slip. Have you left him?"

"Yes—I had stood all I could."

"What are you going to do?"

"Live in the out-ports or America for some years, I suppose. Harvey isn't going to live as long as he thinks—bad heart. General Lowndes and Bertha have asked me to make my home with them indefinitely—they know all about what I've been through. But of course I sha'n't impose upon them too long."

"Will you come to me? Live anywhere you say."

"Not until you've money enough to go back to London with me and fight that brute through the courts for a divorce that will leave me unsmirched and brand him for what he is. Although he hasn't so much money outside of his Government pay, you couldn't start anything of that sort on less than two or three hundred thousand dollars at least. Oh—some day when I'm older and nothing matters any more, I might throw reputation overboard and go anywhere with you. But I'm only thirty-two, Mark—a decent, good-looking woman whose people have been among the best in England for a thousand years. I'll not submit, tamely, to being dragged through scandal and filth by a brute like Pat Harvey—using his Cabinet position to crush a woman of my standing!"

"H-m-m—when I have the money—you'll come to me? What?"

"Yes—my dear. That's a promise! If we don't think it worth while to go back and fight him—well, a million will buy respect and acceptance in other countries, in these modern days. If I decide to be a sinner, I'll not be a defenseless one at whom anybody may throw stones or mud!"

SEFTON and the Doctor remained for dinner, and the party afterward motored out to the "Gap" along the Buona Vista Road, by moonlight. The Londoner didn't point out his rusty old wrecking-tug as she lay over near Pulau Brani in plain sight, when they drove along the shore of Keppel Harbor, nor had he told Galt anything about her—merely saying that he had come down from Rangoon with a friend and was stopping aboard until he left port. But when the party returned, dropping him at Jardine's Wharf and the Doctor at the Singapore Club, and he had returned to the tug, he found Walburton and Bellows smoking in their deck-chairs under the awning—the night was too hot for berths. Sending one of the China boys for a brandy-peg, he drew a Canton chair up to theirs and asked if they were sleepy.

"Because, if you're not, we'll have a bit of a pow-wow. Eh?"

"What's on your mind, old chap?"

"Well—a question of ethics, I fancy. As I've told you before, I rigged up this ridiculous camouflage on the old boat as a bit of a joke, in the beginning. It suited my sense of humor to have her look as though a steady ten in fairly smooth water would fetch groans from every plate of her, an' then have the old tub beat some fifteen-knot liner into port by two or three days.

I was a good enough engineer an' mechanic to make those sponsons really useful, of course—bracing an' bolting 'em in such a way that it's practically impossible to make the boat turn turtle while they're on her sides. An' we've done quite a bit of honest salvage business with her—good credit at all the banks, good for anything we wish to buy in any port. At the start I can't recall havin' anything unlawful in view concernin' her, though at the back of my mind I fancy there's always been a feelin' that we might some day run into rawther int'restin' adventures with the boat. Well—we've been together a good bit, now—know each other pretty well. I've been wonderin' tonight, how far we'd all go, outside of the law, if there was a chance of puttin' us all on Easy Street for life if we pulled it off?"

"Hmph! I fancy every chap has some such thought in his mind at times, Sefton. Me—for example. I served in the Coldstreams several years, as you know—resigned from the service when I came into a small legacy which, by scrimpin' an' a bally lot of self-denial, I've managed to increase by half. Always kept the honor of the old regiment in mind—never cheated at cards or bandied a woman's name about in clubs or mess—tried to live straight an' decent, you know. And on every side of me I've seen beastly crooks gettin' all the good things of life—big estates, beautiful women, yachts, horses—all the things a chap wants like the devil even when he's too old to get all the good out of 'em. Aye—I've been wonderin' of late how far I'd go, outside the law, to be safely where those bounders are—to know that I'd enough to waste as much as I pleased an' still have enough left to last my life out. How about you, Tommy?"

"About in the same boat, old chap! If I'm doing no better than this for myself at fifty—well, I'd about as soon be in jail!"

Sefton nodded.

"Suppose we ran out through Sunda to one of the Cocos Group—some cove where nobody'd see us? Take the sponsons an' derricks off her—all masts but one pole at the bow for antenna an' signal-flags—put back the old four funnels, now in the hold. Fill the rivet-holes in her sides an' give her a fresh coat of paint. Then hang around the Malacca entrance—fifty miles west of Sabang. Stick around there until one of the big Messageries boats comes along with a gold shipment to the Saigon banks. Two months from now they'll be havin' out their semi-annual gold an' note reserve for the banks in Saigon, Hué an' Hanoi. Of course the P. & O. with bullion an' specie to the Hongkong an' Shanghai would be a bigger haul—five or six millions in one shipm'nt. But those P. & O. masters are a resourceful lot, they never get rattled—an' they sometimes turn the tables in an affair of this sort when you least expect it. I'd tackle 'em if there was nothing else—pull it off, too, I fancy—but it's more risky. The French are more likely to get stampeded—fight like the devil at close quarters, but a torpedo gets their morale, d'ye see. They'd put their gold an' notes aboard of us rather than risk bein' torpedoed—particularly if they're carryin' mails an' have a full passenger-list."

"AN'—afterward—when we've got the gold aboard? Where do we go then?" asked Bellows.

"Back to wherever we took the sponsons off her. Put 'em on again with the derricks an' cable-sheaves at bow an' stern. Paint her with red oxide an' then acid to make it peel an' rust in spots. We'd figure out something to conceal the gold in—some ord'n'ry stuff that nobody'd bother about stealin' in the mass. Put Frank's share ashore in one port, in some bonded warehouse—Tommy's share at some other port, mine in a third one. We're known to be carryin' on salvage an' wreckin' operations. If the Henderson Wrecking Comp'ny fetches into port any little quantity of rather valuable stuff,—rubber or any sort of machinery,—it would be merely supposed that we had stumbled upon some wreck an' found the stuff on her—clearly our property, no interest to anybody else—no suspicions aroused, no questions asked. Delivered to us at any time upon presentation of our warehouse receipts. . . . . Very likely we'll work out a simpler an' better scheme if we go into any such game."

"Suppose the gold is in bullion?"

"Make gold-dust of it while we're refitting. We could deposit sacks of it in any bank, and it would be supposed that we had a secret gold-mine somewhere which we naturally are keeping quiet in order to prevent a rush to stake claims all around us."

"Suppose they suspect the gold to have been that from the Messageries boat?"

"Let 'em suspect an' be damned to 'em! Thing is to prove it—which they can't.

Knowing that, they probably wouldn't even try."

"H-m-m—I never saw gold-dust made from bullion-slugs—but if you say it can be done, I wont argue with you—"

"We've got a couple of big forges below, haven't we—an' big ladles for lead? All the tools we need for meltin' the gold. Then we build a wooden pan eight feet square on the deck-plates, an' fill it with sand. Pour a thin trickle of the molten gold into it from as high as we can get before it cools. It will be in semi-globular form when it hits the sand—which spreads an' breaks it into little uneven nuggets an' grains. May take a bit of practice, but it's a perfectly simple proposition. Afterward we pan an' cradle that sand just as we would the dirt of any mining claim—"

"I say! You spoke of refitting at one of the Cocos group? How the deuce are you going to find a place down there which none of the inhabitants will spot? There are several hundred people in that group!"

"I remembered that just after mentioning it. Neither Cocos nor Christmas would do at all. But I know most of those reefs up in the China Sea—Spratly Island, near the Ladd Reef would do. It's fifteen hundred feet long by nine hundred wide, and eight feet high, on the west end of a much larger coral-bank—no barrier-reef or lagoon, but good anchorage under lee of the northeast side. Nothing but turtles an' birds there."

"How the deuce would you refit in an open road like that?"

"Bein' a wreckin'-tug at present, we've all the materials right aboard of us—upward of a hundred casks an' chains for pontoons, with plenty of plankin' to deck 'em over. Put a big pontoon under each sponson, cut it loose, lash it to the pontoon an' warp it up onto the shelving coral in a sheltered spot, anchoring it there. Leave sponsons an' other gear on those pontoons until we come back. I'd rather have a larger, wooded island as a rendezvous—but you'll find very few in the Archipelago which are uninhabited or where some lot of brown or white humans mightn't happen along an' either see us at work or find our sponsons while we're away. Up there at Spratly, on the contr'ry, every master within a hundred miles of the spot is doin' his best to keep away from those reefs—not to go look at 'em. Except for an occasional Navy boat, surveyin', there'll not be a chance of anyone happening along for a look-see. And I know that none of the English, French or Dutch boats are working in those waters just now."

GALT saw Miss Lowndes again at the end of the week, while Mrs. Harvey was up at Government House. As they were on the veranda by themselves with nobody to overhear them, they happened to drift into a discussion of the early love-affair between her friend and Mark Sefton—Miss Lowndes giving the Doctor a few side-lights upon the home life of the Harveys which her friend had told her at one time or another.

"In the States, Doctor, there wouldn't be all this fuss and scandal which British law gives Pat Harvey the chance to rake up.. She'd simply leave him, get a lawyer to look after her interests, live out in Reno a few months—and then quietly marry Mark as she always wanted to do. There are times when Cecilia is almost desperate. If she had money enough, she'd go back to London and fight that bounder to a finish! She even told Mark the other day that she'd go with him now, if he had a million. . . . . Oh! I shouldn't have told you that! Please forget it, wont you? One speaks so unreservedly to you medicos about everything! You'll not remember or mention that—will you?"

"Of course not! But it's exactly what I'd think of doing in her place—though a bit of latent caution might prevent my actually doing it."

There was little chance of Galt's mentioning that remark of Mrs. Harvey's—but forgetting it was more difficult. He couldn't help putting himself in Sefton's place, after what the man had told him, and trying to decide what his reaction would be to a suggestion of that sort. Knowing Sefton's adventurous type perhaps better than the Londoner himself did, the conclusion was obvious that he would go out and get that million—somewhere. Galt had understood, vaguely, that Sefton was staying aboard some craft out in the Roads or in Keppel Harbor with a friend who was master of her—but hadn't the slightest idea what craft. Calling his efficient China boy, Ling Foh, he described Sefton and told him to get this information—which Ling had no trouble at all in doing, through his countrymen alongshore. Then the Doctor ran out with him in a small power-launch and took a leisurely cruise as far as the naval station, examin-

ing various steamers at anchor as they went along.

The appearance of the wrecking-tug intrigued him. Running the launch obliquely across her bow, he glanced along her narrow lines, aft, making a mental allowance for how she might look without the clumsy sponsons, derricks and sheaves. When they went back, he turned up the latest edition of Lloyd's register—getting the full and varied history of the craft. Here, then, was a very serviceable tool which Sefton might use in carving out his million provided he hit upon some direct and simple way and was not too scrupulous. It was only a piecing-together in the Doctor's mind, you understand, of the man's unusual type—a certain object to be accomplished, the incentive, and quite possibly the means.

As the wallah set Sefton down by the arcade, a Malay stopped to look closely at the Englishman.

A MONTH later, when the wrecking-tug had been reported from two different ports on her legitimate business, the local news-sheets mentioned the chartering of a deep-sea cruising-yacht in Hongkong, for six months, by the Honorable Mark Sefton of London, and of his clearing under cruising papers for a pleasure trip through the eastern Archipelago. The wrecking-tug had left Hongkong the day before—after putting aboard the yacht, during a pitch-dark night, enough Lascars and Chinks to run her. Being an oil-motor craft, this didn't require as highly skilled engineers as would have been necessary under steam—and no stokers. Also—except for shooting the sun, most Lascars are good dead-reckoning navigators. So, with the assistance of six brownies, Sefton was quite able to take the one hundred and eighty-foot craft anywhere among the Islands as long as a typhoon didn't hit him.

A week after the yacht left Hongkong, the big French liner *Phèdre*—built at Toulon the previous year—was within a hundred miles of Cape St. Jacques when a wisp of black smoke off her starboard quarter was noticed from the bridge.

While they watched the little patch of smoke on the horizon, it grew perceptibly larger. In half an hour a very fast craft with four short funnels was rapidly approaching them, apparently upon the same course,—making for the mouth of the Saigon River—presumably, a French destroyer from the naval station, though her lines seemed to be more of the English type. Then when not over a mile astern, the radio officer—who had been expecting that she might report her number as she passed—was stupefied by receiving a message ordering the *Phèdre's* master to stop his engines and break out the gold shipment in his treasure-room.

Dumont's first reaction to this was to shove over the engine-room telegraph to "Full-speed Ahead." But in five minutes

the destroyer was alongside, not more than a thousand feet from the liner, and had fired a shot across her bow. Still, Dumont thought he'd take a chance—but screams of terror from the passengers who were lined up along the rails of all three decks made him rush to the starboard end of the bridge and look down—at the unmistakable wake of a Whitehead torpedo, just below the surface. Frantically reversing his engines, he succeeded in slowing down the momentum of his boat sufficiently to let the torpedo cross his bow less than sixty feet ahead of it. (The destroyer's commander had figured upon exactly this reaction and aimed his torpedo accordingly.)

While Dumont was still watching the torpedo streak away in the distance, his radio-officer brought him another peremptory message in perfect French:

> You are carrying mails and passengers. Put every box of that gold and banknote shipment aboard of us at once, with your own boats—or we will open up the whole side of your ship and send her to the bottom before any of you can get off.

NOW, it is easy to sit in a swivel-chair at home and say what Captain Dumont could or should have done. It is admitted he might have chanced a few shots from a six-inch gun before surrendering—but there is something coldly final and compelling about the wake of a torpedo when you see it approaching the water-line of your boat at race-horse speed and know that the impact will blow out the side-plating over an area thirty or forty feet in diameter, letting in all of the sea that the hull will contain. Dumont dropped his boats into the water with a promptness which indicated his state of mind.

The gold was all in bullion slugs. The boxes of bank-notes contained bills of all denominations, no ten of them consecutively numbered. As each box was passed up to the deck of the destroyer, it was opened by two Lascars—no white man being seen on the craft—to make sure there was no attempt at trickery. Then the radio officer brought Dumont a message of thanks for his courtesy under duress and congratulations upon his common sense—with a final warning not to call for assistance before the destroyer was hull-down if he didn't wish it to return and sink him.

When the pirate's smoke was merely a blur upon the horizon in the south-west, the radio wail for assistance went out from the *Phèdre*. In a few moments the big stations at Singapore and Hongkong, together with a half-dozen liners up and down the China Sea, were excitedly asking for details. This was something which concerned every craft afloat. Cruisers came racing out from the naval stations, converging toward the chart-position where the pirate was last seen, but none of them approached the coral-banks because navigation among them was fully as dangerous for the pirate as for other craft, and it seemed inconceivable that he would risk his bottom where any rise in the wind would put him on jagged coral.

Meanwhile—the destroyer had changed her course due east as soon as no other craft was in sight, and just before dark anchored alongside of the chartered yacht under lee of tiny Spratly Island. All through the night, while half of the Lascars were towing the pontoons with the sponsons and other gear out to hundred-fathom soundings and sinking them, the molten gold was being dropped into sand in the big pan, taking many curious and beautiful shapes—then put aboard of the yacht in unmarked boxes of various sizes and shapes. When all of the notes and gold were safely stowed in the yacht's hold with such tools and equipment as could be kept without risk of being traced to the wrecking-tug, she also was towed out to hundred-fathom depth. A contrivance was rigged to explode dynamite against her bottom, and her sea-cocks were opened. When they had watched her go down until she rested on bottom, the yacht hove up her anchor and proceeded down through the Straits to Sourabaya—where a dozen of the Lascars were given most generous shares of the loot in French notes of small and medium denominations.

Walburton and Tommy Bellows—now appearing with clean-shaved faces and in smart yachting whites—visited old friends ashore for two or three days. Then the yacht pulled out for Macassar, where she merely stopped for mail and then went on up the Borneo coast to the mouth of the Sesajap River, up which she slipped after dark and hid in a little creek before she could be seen next day. Here, she remained for three weeks—then stole out again and went down to Singapore—where invitations were given to General Lowndes, his daughter, Mrs. Harvey and Lieutenant Ordway of the Staff, to cruise for a fortnight or more. Doctor Galt happened to have gone up the Peninsula for a week.

SINCE leaving Hongkong, the yacht had been reported from Sourabaya, Macassar, Sandakan, Singapore—widely separated places in or about the Archipelago—giving the inference that she also must have been reported from various other places during the month if one cared about turning up the news-files to look for mention of her. In Singapore, she was apparently accounted for every day of the time since she was chartered in Hongkong—and Sefton as well—Bellows and Walburton being old friends who were known to have come aboard from one of the C. P. R. boats just before the *Cythera* sailed, so that there was naturally no record of them in the Hongkong hotels. Of course there was no possible resemblance between her and the pirate destroyer either in length, beam, speed, engines or rig—not a person on board the *Phèdre* would have even suggested it. Had any I. S. S. man, disguised as a Malay, fancied he recognized one of the wrecking-tug's former crew, the man would have said that part of her bottom-plates, rusted through, had dropped out somewhere N. E. of the Natunas as they were coming across from Saigon. Sonneschien and the engineer thought they might manage to keep her afloat, but had sent off the crew in the boats, paying them to date in French notes which he had obtained at the last port. They had rowed to Kuching in Sarawak—entering the river at night and naturally going to the native city, so that they hadn't been seen by the authorities. All were convinced that Sonneschien and the engineer had gone down with the tug.

DURING the fortnight's cruise, all three of the yachtsmen hinted, jokingly, that they had struck something in one of the Dutch islands which looked pretty good to them. They had been in to have a look-see during the first part of the trip—acting upon a somewhat rambling story told Sefton by a Dyak whose life he had once saved.

Sefton admitted to the General and Ordway that he hoped to make a paying strike when a favorable opportunity permitted them to go in again—but told them frankly that if any word of this leaked out ashore, it would probably dish him and his friends out of the whole proposition. In a little over a fortnight, the yacht returned to Singapore—with the guests in possession of a most convincing story to account for Sefton and his friends having gold dust or nuggets in their possession, if they ever did, though the story was treated as strict confidence until a month or two later.

Of course all Asia was thoroughly aroused over the daring piracy of the French liner. At first, Dumont had been severely censured by the press—but interviews with his officers and passengers soon completely exonerated him, and he was complimented upon his sense in not taking the foolish chance of being sent to the bottom with all on board. The search for the pirate destroyer continued for a month—but no trace of her was ever found—no craft answering that description had been seen by anybody. No casual gossip overheard in the bazaars by disguised I. S. S. men was regarded by any hint that this man or such a man might have been one of the crew aboard that destroyer—the native bankers who changed the Lascars' notes for them were a close-mouthed lot who minded their own business and possibly didn't even suspect that they might have been from the *Phèdre*. Sefton had given each of his two friends a quarter share—then, from his own half, had given each man of the crew what amounted to enough for life-independence in Asia, though the entire amount was but a small percentage of his own share—and he had little thought of their betraying him because they believed it a hanging matter for every one of them if implicated. Much safer to know nothing about such an occurrence!

After another month of cruising, the *Cythera* sneaked up the Sesajap again, one night, and lay hidden for three weeks more—during which time, Sefton tried out a more successful experiment with the gold. At a height of ten feet above the sand-pan, he stretched a galvanized-iron screen attached to wires from a dynamo which heated it to incandescence, so that the molten gold dropped through without sticking to it—the sand now having sulphur mixed with it and covered with three inches of water. The result was very close to placer gold, with nuggets formed from several holes enlarged in the mesh. Then they ran out of the river and went up to Shanghai.

There, lying in the Woosung, Walburton and Tommy Bellows had their heavy boxes taken ashore in broad daylight by big Yunnan coolies and stowed in the vaults of a Chinese bank on the Bund, directly opposite. If the coolies or anyone on the

street had a suspicion as to what the small heavy boxes contained, they gave no evidence of it. The two adventurers got their deposit-receipts from the suave Chinese manager and knew that their boxes would be forthcoming with the lead seals unbroken when they again presented them. The bankers were purchasers of gold in any form and had many ways of disposing of it. In Hongkong, Sefton had his own boxes taken ashore and stored in the vaults of another Chinese bank—reserving only two, which he took down to Sam Wah in Singapore and sold for a very large sum. These transactions being concluded, he took Dr. Galt, the Lowndes party and Ordway, for another fortnight's cruise and then turned over the *Cythera* to her owners' agents.

GALT'S China boy, Ling Foh, had been instructed to keep tab on Sefton whenever he was ashore—and soon reported the sale of two heavy boxes to Sam Wah for a bank-draft in six figures. Galt knew that Sam, in addition to being one of the principal animal-dealers, had at least a couple of hundred thousand invested in one of the Chinese banks—probably nearer double that. As a supposed member of the Great Tong with fairly high rank, he could have compelled the fat Chinese to give him any information he wished about Sefton—that is, anything Sam Wah really knew. But he had sense enough to use such authority very sparingly, which was one reason for the unbounded respect and even fear in which he was held by Chinese and Malays alike. So instead of giving orders—he merely suggested that he was making a few chemical experiments in which he needed a little pure gold—preferably, dust or nuggets. He knew that Sam's bank dealt in precious metals for the native jewelers and goldsmiths. Could he accommodate him with something of the sort? Sam most assuredly could—and did—selling him some of the nuggets and dust which had most recently come his way.

Galt took his purchase to the private office of a much more intimate Chinese friend—an influential banker of red-button rank—and in a few minutes, into the private assaying laboratory of that cultivated gentleman. A few days later, he asked Sefton to accompany him to the same laboratory and watch a certain experiment he was desirous of making.

The little warning bell in Sefton's mind vibrated faintly. For a moment, he debated, inwardly, upon the chances of expressing his gold back to the Indo-China banks, anonymously—but there were his companions and crew to consider. In running down some possible clew, the secret service men would probably wind up with Tommy Bellows and Walburton. No—he had committed an irrevocable act—must play the game through—and his nerve was altogether too good to let him even hesitate. When they were in the banker's office, the Doctor introduced Li Sung Wang as one of his earliest friends in the East—educated at Cornell University.

"Among other things, Sefton, our friend here specialized as a mineralogist and financial expert, having in view the succeeding to his father's and uncles' business out here—which he did some years ago. I brought him, the other day, a few specimens of gold nuggets and dust which vary in form and general appearance from any I ever saw before—they were also strange to him, until he happened to think of an experiment he had once tried in the college laboratory. We were interested enough to go fifty-fifty upon two hundred dollars worth of bullion and try the experiment over again—would have done it yesterday, but I happened to think that you might like to see it also. Eh? Very good! We'll put the slugs in this electric furnace—it should be melted in about eight minutes, I think." It actually took nine, by the clock. "Now—I get up on this stepladder. Li passes up a ladleful of the stuff. . . . . Watch out that it doesn't drip on you! I tip the ladle until this tiny trickle of molten gold falls into that box of coarse sand on the floor, in two inches of water. There! Now we turn off the furnace and pan out the gold with this aluminum frying-pan—the water having cooled it. H-m-m—see this nugget? Looks something like a piece of fan-coral—eh? That was the big blob that fell when I tipped the ladle too far. See these little globules of bright gold—from the tiny drops of molten metal? Now I'll spread out three exhibits upon squares of white paper. First the dust and nuggets I recently bought for experimental work. Second, placer-dust nuggets, as they are brought in and sold to the banks. Third—the experiment we have just made. Look at 'em closely and see if you notice any perceptible differences?"

Sefton examined the gold coolly.

"Why—yes, I do! Of course your artificial stuff is much brighter and more perfectly globular than the placer-lot—though

I can't see much difference in the 'fan-coral' nuggets in any of the three—they all look pretty much alike to me. This lot that you bought is perceptibly darker than your experimental lot—so are the placer-dust an' nuggets—the natural corrosion of earth-acids, I fancy. Possibly yours is a shade more globular. But—d'ye see—they once told me at Ballarat, in Victoria, that river-sand will often roll gold-dust over an' over with the water action until it's almost as round as shot.

"I say, Doctor! This stuff you bought looks almost exactly like some we recently panned in the interior of Borneo. I sold some of it to Sam Wah. We fancied we had an almost inexhaustible mine, but it proved to be a sort of pocket—scarcely a trace of gold beyond a hundred-foot radius from that river sand-bar. We dug an' panned all over the place but couldn't get 'color' anywhere. You see, I got the tip from an old Dyak when he was dying—chap who'd been under some obligations to me. Now, our mineralogist friend here, Li Sung Wang, would possibly know how such pockets in the coarse gravel under sand are formed an' what sort of abrasive action there might be as the gold is deposited. I'm not an expert, d'ye see—I can only tell you the sort of place we found it in. Naturally, I'll not say what part of Borneo because we may decide to have another look-see, some time."

THIS calm statement was rather staggering to the Doctor—he thought he had Sefton with enough circumstantial evidence to give him thirty years' penal servitude, if he cared about doing it, though he was by no means sure that he did care to. And now—even Li Sung Wang couldn't be positive that the Doctor's purchase wasn't natural placer-gold after all; it certainly had the partly corroded appearance.

Sefton had been inwardly congratulating himself upon the forethought which had led him to scatter sulphur in that box of sand and water.

After some further discussion with Li, Doctor Galt carried Sefton off to dinner at the club. Afterward, on the upper veranda, he said:

"I could make out a pretty good case of circumstantial evidence against you if I wanted to do it, old chap. You'd been told to go out and get a million before you could have what you wanted—certainly, a very decided object. You're the adventurous type who would get that money any way you had to—but get it, one way or another. And you've got it! Your wrecking-tug was originally a twenty-five-knot destroyer, and those sponsons could be knocked off with a few hours' work. You had a native crew who'll be afraid of hanging if they blab, and were doubtless well-paid. And your 'dust' was presumably made from melted bullion-slugs. Fairly strong case—isn't it?"

"Dare say men have done penal servitude for weaker ones—but watch me knock it to bits: I chartered the *Cythera* in Hongkong six days before the pirate was looting the *Phèdre*. Walburton an' Bellows joined me that night from a Canadian Pacific boat that had just come in. We cleared the yacht for Sourabaya next day, reachin' there on the nineteenth—which is pretty good travelin' for even an eighteen-knot craft, especially as we were buckin' a heavy sea part of the way. Must have been in the Java Sea when that pirate was at work up near Saigon. We took friends to Bali for a three-day cruise, then went to Macassar, Sulu, Sandakan, Manila, down to Singapore. Reported all over the place. The Lowndes party an' Ordway knew about this gold-mine of ours before we actually sneaked up that Borneo river an' got the gold. You see? Nothing to your case as far as we're concerned. Try it out if you like—I'd be int'rested to see what the Courts could do without the slightest grain of proof. Don't know just why you should want my neck or my liberty, old chap, but go as far as you like!"

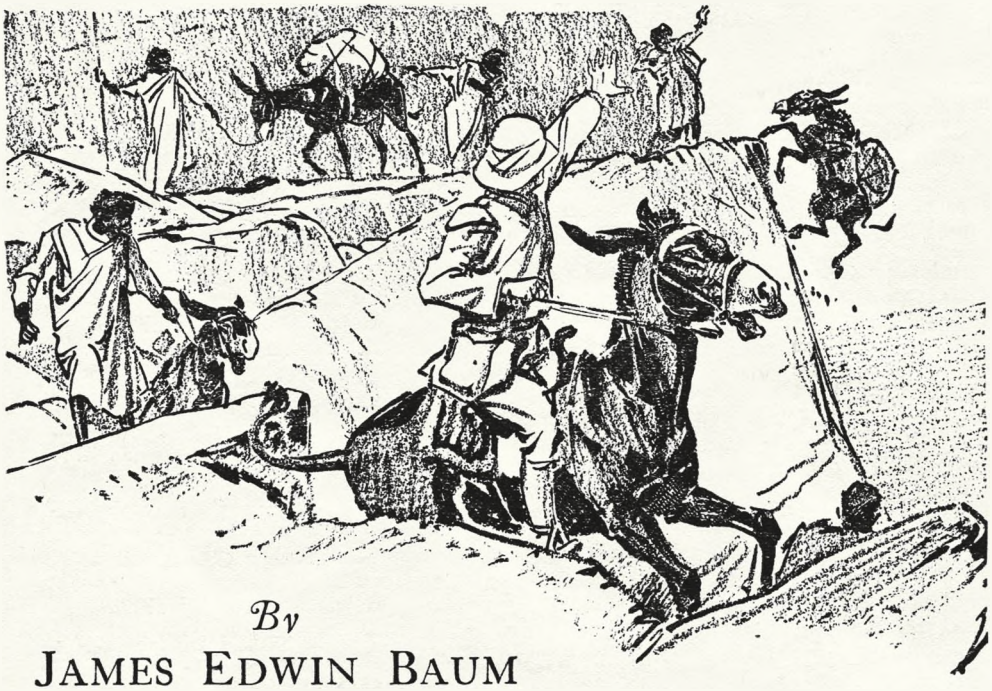
NEXT afternoon Sefton went out to General Lowndes' villa. He thought that Bertha's manner was rather curious when she joined him. Cecilia's manner, when she appeared, also indicated something unusual.

"I'm waiting for you, Cecie—at last. We have the million."

"Oh, Mark! I'll come to you, dear—in a month—regardless of appearances. God knows I'd nothing but disgust left for him. We'll not need your million after all! This cable came an hour ago. He dropped dead at a Cabinet meeting this morning. I can marry the man I love—and respect."

A thoughtful, rather weary smile crinkled the corners of Sefton's mouth.

"Dead—eh? Well—one wishes that worn-out heart of his had lain down on its job some months ago!" he remarked dryly.



By

JAMES EDWIN BAUM

Spears in the Sun

The Story So Far:

TO Addis Ababa, capital of Abyssinia, had come that romantic young adventurer Angus McPherson at the conclusion of an ivory-poaching episode. And there he idly watched the cavalcade of the chieftain Ras Gootama entering the city, he saw a strange thing, a young American girl with two old Westerners as companions, also watching the gaudy procession.

And just then—it happened. A retainer of the Ras, with his master's sanction, threw a stone at a crippled beggar; and the girl, in blind anger, struck the Ras across the face with her riding crop.

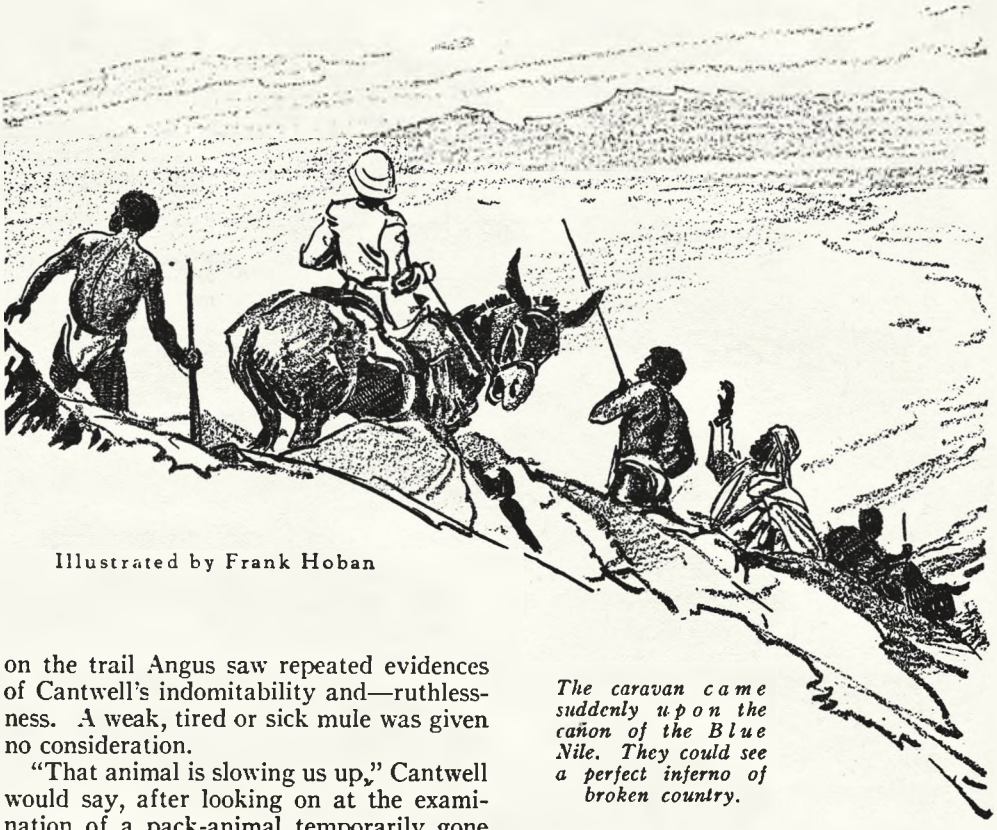
Quick action on the part of Angus saved her. And later one of the old Westerners, Nick Marr, told him part of her story: she was in straits for money, with a blind mother to support, and was pursued by an objectionable cousin who wished to marry her. She had found some sort of paper locating a treasure in Abyssinia—and had come to find it.

McPherson helped the Americans outfit and saw them leave Addis without learning more. But a few days later another American by the name of Cantwell showed up and engaged McPherson to help him on an expedition in pursuit of the girl Mary Leonora, claiming her as his wayward daughter. *(The story continues in detail:)*

AT the start things went smoothly. The men, at the suggestion of Cantwell, were engaged at higher wages than necessary. And Angus impressed upon them the fact that their employer demanded in return exceptional services—especially willingness to march long hours. The pack-mules were selected with the greatest care. They were stanch and in the best of condition, and there were a half-dozen extra pack-animals purchased.

Cantwell at first found the long marches tiring, but soon his superb physique began to assert itself. His muscles hardened, and he showed that there lay, deep in his constitution, hidden reservoirs of stamina that could be called upon by exercise of his powerful will. In fact, Angus, after studying the man carefully for a week on the trail, came to the conclusion that he was possessed of a strength of will of a sort met with but once or twice in a lifetime, a will indomitable and ruthless in overcoming obstacles. Cantwell was unsparing of men, mules or himself, and during the first week

The stirring story of a terrific adventure in the strangest country in the world—Abyssinia, where they eat their meat raw. The author is the one man in the world competent to write it, the historian and hunter of the Field Museum Expedition.



Illustrated by Frank Hoban

The caravan came suddenly upon the cañon of the Blue Nile. They could see a perfect inferno of broken country.

on the trail Angus saw repeated evidences of Cantwell's indomitability and—ruthlessness. A weak, tired or sick mule was given no consideration.

"That animal is slowing us up," Cantwell would say, after looking on at the examination of a pack-animal temporarily gone lame. "Shoot the beast and buy another at the first village we come to." Angus at first had suggested trading in the incapacitated mules on the purchase price of the new animal.

"Wont do." Cantwell had decided. "Bringing him along will delay us. Shoot the beast."

That expression "Shoot the beast" became a byword among the men. It was the first English phrase which many picked up.

Angus had protested at first, pointing out that two men could be left to bring a weak mule along slowly as far as the next village, where it could be sold to the *shum* or head-man. The men could then catch up easily enough, and there would have been no delay. But invariably the answer came: "Shoot the beast."

The deep cañon of the Muger River was crossed, the pack-train descending from the cool and pleasant eight-thousand-foot plateau with its almost freezing nights and comfortably warm days to the tropical heat of the river-bed. The opposite escarpment was successfully negotiated after a long, trying day. The broad and rolling plains of Shoa lay before them. The trail here was good, and twenty to twenty-five miles a day could be made. Almost daily now natives met along the trail or questioned in the villages replied with a wave of the arm and an outthrust of the lower lip in the direction of the trail ahead.

Yes, a Ferengie caravan of twenty *buckalows,* two white men and. wonder of wonders, a *Ferengie sitt* (white woman) was marching in the same direction some distance ahead. But when Angus or the interpreter tried to pin them down to a definite distance, they were vague—as natives always are: "Oh, the *hamla*" (caravan), "it is near. One, two—, no, three,

four, six days ahead." There was no pinning them down to a definite estimate of the distance separating the caravans. Cantwell raged at this childishness. And then one day they had a long talk with an unusually intelligent *shum*.

"There is," that dignitary informed them, "another caravan on the trail ahead. They passed three—four days ago. There was a white woman and twenty mules. Their interpreter was very nice. His name was Sallassy. Yes, he was a likable young man—" The old *shum* discoursed at great length upon the virtues of the interpreter. Sallassy had given him an empty tin can. He displayed this as evidence of the young man's generosity, and it was not until Angus and Cantwell were mounting to ride after the caravan that the old man added:

"And there is with that other party two *ferengies* of a most remarkable kind. Old men, white of hair, who must be great chiefs in their own country." They were terrible in war, the *shum* said, for he had heard that one of them had run down and caught a *shifta*—a brigand, one of a band that lived in the neighborhood—and had punished him severely for stealing a mule from the picket-line at night. But the wonderful part was the way in which the *shifta* had been captured. The old ferengie had chased him on horseback, whirling around his head a thing of magic, something that looked like a grass rope. This he had thrown with amazing skill. The *shifta* had been jerked backward off the stolen mule, his spear flying from his hands. Yes, he had hit the ground very hard. The terrible one with the magic rope had promptly dragged the *shifta* halfway back to camp before turning him loose. The *shifta* was badly scuffed up, it was said by those who had seen him afterward. And the *ferengie* had been singing, chanting, probably some song to his god, while performing the miracle. It was a most strange affair, for *shiftas* were themselves very fierce, *kufanoo* men. The thing could not be explained.

IT was a day or two later that Angus and Cantwell, riding at the head of the caravan, came suddenly upon the great cañon of the Blue Nile. The trail disappeared over the edge of an all but perpendicular cliff. The two men drew up. It was midafternoon, but already the bottom of the six-thousand-foot gash in the plateau was buried in black shadow. They could see a perfect inferno, a wilderness of broken country below. A section of the earth twenty miles wide, reaching as far in either direction along the course of the river as the eye could follow, had been gouged out as with a sharp and mammoth chisel in the hands of the gods. And a fearful litter of mountains, cliffs, rocky buttresses and giant pyramids had been thrown back into the vast hole every which way, in crazy, insane wantonness.

Angus could faintly distinguish the grass roofs of tiny villages, perched precariously upon the tops of cone and mountain, rising to a great height from the cañon floor, but still so far below that they appeared like the thatched dwellings of elves seen in a dream. He had come across nothing to compare with this in grandeur in all his journeys through the southern country.

He caught his breath at the vastness of the spectacle:

"Unbelievable!" he gasped.

"It's sure one hell of a place to cross," returned his companion, who seemed unaffected by the wild beauty of the sight, entirely absorbed in the one overpowering desire to get ahead. "It will take three days, possibly four, to cross."

But Angus did not hear him. His mind was league upon league away, stimulated to a strange activity. He was, at the moment, viewing in that gorgeous spectacle of riven peaks, gigantic cliffs and stupendous crags. He saw in that magnificent wilderness idyllic vistas, a place of many mansions, marble halls—"painted ships upon a painted ocean"—"the topless towers of Ilium." Elusive and half-remembered flights of imagination returned in dazzling array, like the coveys of wild pigeons coming to roost in the flat-topped acacia trees along the cañonside beneath his feet.

Angus sat his mule, oblivious to the startled exclamations of the men as they arrived at the brink, exclamations of awe and profound wonder. Of all that company, only Cantwell was unaffected, unmoved by the scene. His obsession for speed, speed and yet more speed had driven everything else from his mind. He saw only the inconvenience and delay of crossing. And Angus wondered vaguely how a man could become so callous, so lost in the contemplation of a single idea as to be impervious to such a wild manifestation of the utter abandon and illimitable power of natural forces. He gave it up with the half-formed thought: "But then, I have

It was a crocodile-infested stream, and one carrier was seized and dragged beneath the muddy waters.

never been a father on the trail of a willful and disobedient daughter." And as he dismounted to lead his mule down the rocky and winding trail, he could not bring himself to believe that Mary Leonora was to blame.

"She has a mind of her own," he mused. "That I saw. But she is so—so—" No, he could never believe that she was the deliberately rebellious sort, the thankless and selfish type of person that rides roughshod over the feelings of parents. "There is, without question," he decided, loyally, "some real cause, some intolerable situation, that as yet I know nothing of."

AS the days passed, Angus was not sure whether he liked Cantwell or not. There were many admirable qualities about him. He was a handsome specimen of the Anglo-Saxon, strong of mind and body. He was a pleasant-enough companion riding along the rough trails or in camp in the evenings. He was capable, masterful. A bit domineering—but many successful men became that way, Angus knew, as they reached middle age, the shady side of forty. And there was certainly not a trace of weakness in the man. Angus concluded that if it hadn't been for Cantwell's ruthlessness he could have grown to regard him with real admiration, because of his strong qualities.

"It will be my job," he thought, "when the caravans meet, to steer this show, to see that matters are adjusted without bloodshed. And it will be a job of work, too." Angus made up his mind to lead the conversation around to that point at the first opportunity to find out, if he could, more about the tactics Cantwell proposed to follow.

But soon after crossing the Blue Nile, the regular delays attendant upon Abyssinian travel descended upon them in a cloud. Three mules, falling by the trailside on the steep climb up the escarpment from the bottom of the Nile cañon, had been shot by Cantwell himself. An hour's rest would have enabled them to make the top, which the interpreter pointed out, but Cantwell would not hear of it. Taking his rifle from the gunbearer, he had shot them one after another.

Angus was on the verge of knocking the man down when he returned at the shots and saw what had been done. Angus was not sentimental. No experienced African traveler is. And he believed that Abyssinian pack-mules, because of the hard life they are subject to on the rough and rocky trails, are better off dead. But, paradoxically, the cold-bloodedness of calmly shooting three hard-working animals merely to avoid an hour's delay, struck him as inhuman. Just in time he had thought of the meeting that lay ahead. He must not break with Cantwell before that. So he made no comment, but drawing deeply on his pipe, turned and continued up the incline.

THAT evening in camp upon the plateau of Gojjam, he led up to the subject:

"Those two men with your daughter seemed to be all right. What do you know about them?"

"Never saw them," Cantwell answered, "but I know the breed. She met them somewhere out West. Sent for them to go with her on this trip. They're like all the rest from our God-forsaken Western country, cattle-rustlers, ex-bandits."

"I imagine they'll fight when we meet," Angus observed casually.

"They wont get the chance." Cantwell's face was set in grim lines.

"From what I saw of them, I think we'll have our work cut out for us."

"We'll work through the local chief, stay in the background, keep out of the picture —when the time comes we'll step in."

Angus, who knew the ways of half-savage chiefs, knew the fallacy of such an idea. And as he watched Cantwell, sitting before the fire in heavy sheepskin coat, eyes fixed upon the flames, chin out-thrust, thin-lipped mouth set in its ruthless straight line, he wondered if Cantwell too was not fully aware of the impossibility of drawing the line as to slaughter, once a pack of barbarians had been loosed. It would be like expecting a pack of hounds to corner and hold a fox without killing.

"Cantwell," Angus began, leaning on an elbow and becoming more confidential and intimate than he had permitted himself to be heretofore, "Cantwell, you and I are together in this thing. And there must be no misunderstanding, no wrong interpretation when it comes to a showdown. We must both thoroughly understand the course of action. You will have to give me your plans in detail."

Cantwell considered. He picked up a stick and rummaged about among the coals: A hyena at a great distance across the plains, boomed his deep throaty cry. Two or three jackals answered in the thin, yapping call of their kind: The mules stood quietly at the picket-line. A low minor chant was going on full swing at the men's fire. Overhead, the firmament was ablaze with constellations. The moon rode toward the zenith, a silver captain marshalling the legions of the stars.

"McPherson, there is much that I haven't told you. You have been to me merely an employee, hired for his expert knowledge and ability to give service in the attainment of my ends. I like you, and I think you are the kind that may be depended upon in an emergency—depended upon not only to come through in a fight but also to keep silence and to look at things in a broad-gauge way. What you have just said is right. There shall be no misunderstanding between us."

And Cantwell looked up, spreading his hands in a gesture of complete and open confidence.

"FIRST, I'll tell you why my daughter came here. Then you can put yourself in my position and judge whether or not I am justified in my determination.

"She has always been high-spirited—willful. I am that way myself—some. And I see now, I should have been more firm with her as a child. That part is perhaps my own fault. It may be that you can understand a father's indulgence. Anyway, of late years she has gotten completely out of hand. There is no use going into details. The last straw is this wild absurdity—this mad, rowdy, running off to a savage land to hunt for treasure! Without giving myself any encomiums, I may say that many fathers would have let her run, pulled tight the purse-strings and calmly waited until she called for help. But McPherson, I cannot do that. Mine is not the disposition to sit by and watch an only child make a fool of herself—"

Cantwell paused and looked somewhat appealingly at Angus. And the Scot found himself now at a complete loss. The man was apparently sincerity itself. Angus thought of the story Nick Marr had told him in the little room at the Greek's hotel in Addis upon that first eventful day. Nick also had apparently been sincere. Angus had never thought of questioning the truthfulness of his story at the time. But now that he had heard something of the other side, there were strange angles to that tale —chief of which was, perhaps, the fact that Nick Marr had seen fit to tell him, a mere stranger, the long and intimate story at all. Could he have deliberately gone out of his way to deceive the only other white man in Addis because he knew Mary Leonora's father would shortly arrive? What was to be gained by that? Or was Nick's story true and its telling merely the result of an old man's garrulity, spurred on by a couple of drinks? Angus did not know.

HE asked: "What did you mean when you mentioned 'a hunt for treasure'?"

"Just to prove to you how foolish the whole thing is, I'll show you what brought Mary Leonora to this outlandish country. If she wasn't so young, I'd be concerned about her sanity. Come to my tent."

Cantwell lit the candle lantern and brought out a heavy leather case. He unstrapped it and drew forth a folded sheet of heavy paper. Angus, outwardly calm and deliberate, but in reality consumed with curiosity, bent over.

"It was this preposterous document that seemed to set my daughter afire," Cantwell snorted. "Look that over and tell me if you don't think she needs my care!

This is a copy I made from memory. The original was done on parchment, and was unquestionably very old. The romance of the thing carried her away. You see, she found it in a tiny steel packet riveted into an old shirt of mail that had been in the family for generations."

A crude map and many words done in the old English script covered the sheet. The picture of a savage warrior, a black, wearing the lion-mane headdress of an Abyssinian chief adorned one corner. A tall spear of the long-bladed Galla type stood upright in his right hand. A small round shield hung upon the left forearm. Beneath were the words:

"Prester John, Hys Countrie."

At various places on the map were drawn little cones with inscriptions such as:

"An exceedinge highe mountayne"—"an hill whiche reacheth to the clouds"—"an immense rockye bulwarke."

At one point along the winding course of a river was the crude picture of a unicorn, with the information:

"Strange beastes doe dwell hereabout."

Through the center ran a line, winding and twisting like a snake in agony, and beneath was the legend:

"Cristoforo da Gama, Hys Marche."

Three spear-heads had been drawn close together near the center of the paper pointing to the same spot. Below this place ran the sentence: *"Ibi Requiescat Aurum"* which, translated,of course means: *"Here lies the gold."* Done in Latin perhaps to bring confusion to enemies, into whose hands the drawing might have fallen in those brisk and bloody times.

Below the map was a long paragraph in the old script:

> *"The gold in these caves is sufficient to purchase the one halfe of the worlde, for every yeare they put intoe the same exceeding great summes and hee never saw them take any out. There are many of these caves, being all of them in the sydes of highe mountaynes because they have no walled cities or castles wherein they may keepe such kinde of things. When the season of rain approacheth, they digge and delve the earth very well, till the molde be fine, that the water whiche falleth may wash the same and the gold may remayne clean. Moste commonly they seek it in the night, by moone light, for then they see it glister. And they doe emploi the said weightie gold in great quantitie with the whiche they bedizen their females.*

"There," Cantwell exploded triumphantly, "what do you think of that for medieval nonsense!"

BUT Angus was gazing abstractedly into the African night through the open tent door, speculating upon the old knight who had made the crude map and had written the curious script. An English member, perhaps, of Cristoforo da Gama's expedition—one who had intended to return and wrest the treasure from the savages. He had, in all likelihood, met a violent death before again reaching the kingdom of Prester John. Angus could picture the wearer of the mailed shirt, a man of doughty deeds, Knight Templar, feudal baron, Norman or Saxon lord of the marches.

Cantwell spoke again: "Have you ever seen anything more preposterous?"

Angus shook off his dreaming mood; he studied the paper carefully:

"I would give much to own the original," was his comment.

Cantwell was surprised and disgusted.

"Why, what good would that do you? This is an exact copy—I made it myself. If there is any treasure there—this is just as useful as the parchment."

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of treasure. But I should like to own that parchment. You see,"—and the young man hesitated, at a loss for words,—"my own ancestors were that sort; adventurers, wanderers, Scottish highlanders, bonny fighters; I suppose that's why I have been ivory poaching for the last three years—" And Angus took out his short pipe, filled it clumsily in his embarrassment and fell silent.

"But don't you think rushing over here on a wild-goose chase of that kind is about the craziest thing you ever heard of?"

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of that." Angus looked again at the paper:

"The old lad who wrote it," he observed, "was a little bit of all right. The natives do get their placer gold in this country in that way, you know. 'When the season of rain approacheth'; the beggars do 'digge and delve the earth very well, till the molde be fine, that the water which falleth may wash the same and the gold remayne clean!' I know they do it that way to the westward, near the Sobat, and I imagine they do in the northern country which is the part this map deals with. And when this old chap wrote, I can well believe that the Portuguese castle at Gondar was not yet built. He says: 'They have no walled cities or castles wherein they may keepe such kinde of things.' And by the way, old Christoforo's

route on this chart took him to the locality of Gondar—you can see that. Which is really where they went. It's there the old castle built by those hardy sportsmen now stands. You know the history of that expedition, don't you?"

"I know very little about such things," Cantwell answered impatiently. "What's past and done has never interested me much. I live in the Twentieth Century. . . . . Go ahead—let's have it; I'll tell you beforehand I have not the slightest confidence in any buried treasure damn' foolishness."

"Oh, the treasure part of it probably amounts to nothing. The old Spanish and Portuguese were colossal liars. They saw treasure in every far-off impossible country. Treasure was in everybody's mind, and the early explorers gave the people at home what they wanted when they sent back reports. But that Sixteenth Century expedition of the Portuguese to Abyssinia was one of the most romantic adventures in the world's history. Old Vasco da Gama—this is the way I remember the narrative—may be wrong on some points, but the general outline is correct enough. Well, old Vasco, having found his way around the Cape of Good Hope to India, returned home. The old sportsman swaggers in with tales of the riches of that country—fairly true, too, for those times. But he found Europe agog, absolutely floored, by reports of a Christian King, called Presbyter John—shortened to Prester John—who, the vague rumors had it, was hived off somewhere in Africa a year or two's journey south of Egypt, battling nobly to repel the inroads of a horde of savages and Moslem Arabs.

"Europe was just then wallowing up to the eyebrows in religion. Saving souls, especially the souls of savages with golden bracelets and anklets of silver, was the only pastime worthy of merit. Kings were engaged in the noble—and lucrative—business. The church fanned the flames. Fat cardinals, lean friars, acolytes and novices blew upon the fire. Heathen countries that no European had ever seen were handed over in continents to proselyting adventurers, by the Pope.

"Vasco's discovery of a sea passage to India opened up a new world, and it is not to be wondered at that Cristoforo, with a company of four hundred knights and men-at-arms, should take ship with his brother Vasco for the coast of the Red Sea, there to disembark and push inland in search of —or as the old chronicles had it: 'to aid and succor' the beleaguered Prester John. You must admit that that company of adventurers were a sturdy group of stout hearts—to stand upon the burning sands and watch the ships sail away into the purple sea—cutting off their only link with home—leaving them upon a great continent which was then indeed a dark and mysterious land filled with strange monsters and cannibals.

"They fought their way inland and found the Abyssinians to be Christians—after a fashion, as they are today. Their king was not called John, of course, but that made no difference. They promptly named him John, and the old mystery of Prester John's whereabouts was solved. They allied themselves with the Abyssinians, fought off the Arabs and built six castles at Gondar—frowning, magnificent examples of the Sixteenth Century stronghold. Only one of them, I think, is standing today; the others are in ruins.

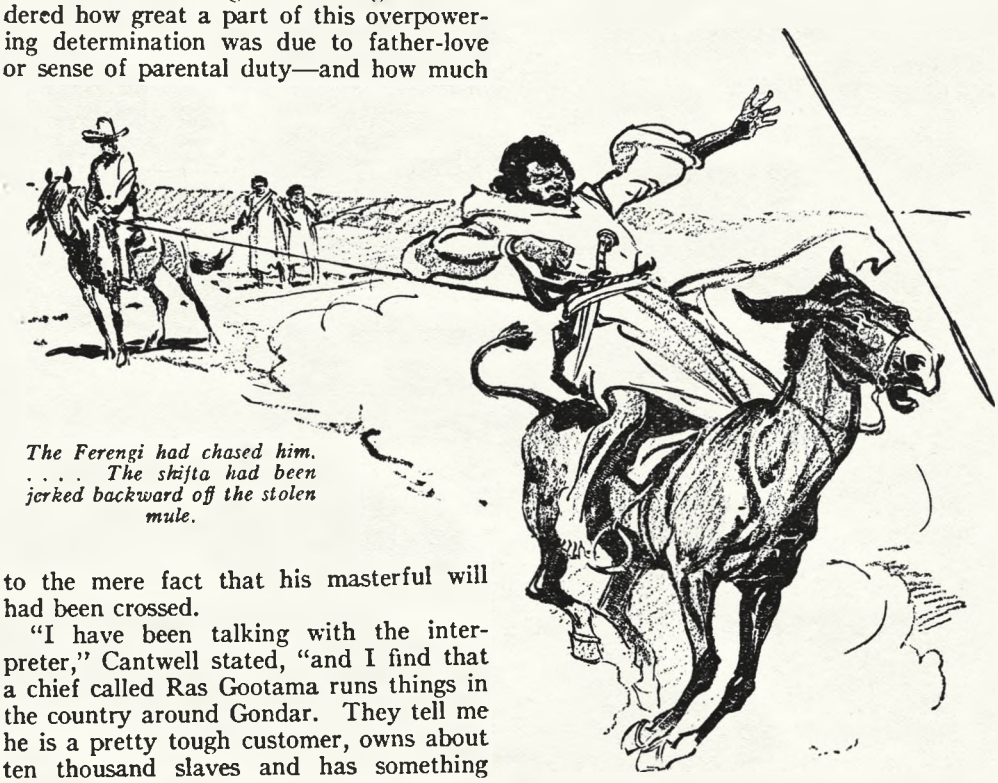
"Well, the Arabs were repelled and driven out; Cristoforo was killed; but the friars of the expedition,—oh, they were there, as they were with every exploration party in those days—the friars, after a few years, must have employed the same ruthless tactics that Pizarro used in Peru. Naturally, the people didn't like it. They rebelled and threw the Portuguese out—bodily. In fact, thereafter all Europeans were forbidden to enter the country—until quite recently. Which is the reason that Abyssinia is so little known.

"As to treasure—I don't think the Abyssinians ever had any treasure—but they *might* have known of the gold deposits to the westward along what is now the Sudan border. However, if they did, as this old lad says, wash placer gold and pile it in caves in 'high mountaynes,' it's probably been fought over time and time again and scattered all over the world. No, I have no more confidence in treasure than you have."

CHAPTER V

CANTWELL, however, showed little interest in the romantic old narrative. The fact that a great Medieval fortress had been constructed deep in the interior of an unknown and savage wilderness by a small company of adventurous knights so long

ago struck no answering chord in the imagination of this strong-willed man. He could not divert a single thought from the business at hand; his entire world seemed to begin and end in the desire to overtake the other caravan and to seize, forcibly if need be, the one whom he had termed "a harum-scarum daughter." Angus wondered how great a part of this overpowering determination was due to father-love or sense of parental duty—and how much



The Ferengi had chased him. . . . . The shifta had been jerked backward off the stolen mule.

to the mere fact that his masterful will had been crossed.

"I have been talking with the interpreter," Cantwell stated, "and I find that a chief called Ras Gootama runs things in the country around Gondar. They tell me he is a pretty tough customer, owns about ten thousand slaves and has something like fifty thousand warriors, spearmen, at his disposal. He has never been able to acquire guns to arm his men; Ras Tessayah, back in Addis, of course, is not going to allow such a powerful feudal baron, living so far from the central authority, to become stronger if he can prevent it. Gootama should be just the one for us to make a deal with. That machine-gun will simply knock his eye out when he sees it! With that wicked little piece of ordnance he can saunter over and butcher a few hundred of his neighbors any time he wants, add territory to his holdings and make himself supreme lord of the northern half of Abyssinia—and from what they tell me, Gootama has brains enough to understand its value. He's just the man for us!

"So—I've been thinking it over and have come to the conclusion that it would be a mistake to work with any other chief. None of them is strong enough, and there is some question in my mind as to their willingness to attack a white caravan—from what the boys say, the others are weak sisters. But Gootama is hard boiled. Why, do you know, they say his people are so beaten down that they prostrate themselves—flat on their faces, mind you—when he rides through a village. That may be a bit overdrawn, but when a man attains that reputation with Abyssinians, he's strong!"

ANGUS now realized fully what he had been suspecting for some time, that he had a Tartar on his hands. When he had decided to accompany Cantwell, he had not known the ruthlessness of the man—and had not doubted, for a moment, that when the time came he would be able to handle the situation. His intention had been to prevent loss of lives and terminate the mixed-up affair, if not amicably, at least decently. But Cantwell's peculiarities were rising, a mighty bulwark, in the way; his iron and unchangeable determination, his utter disregard for consequences and his consuming hatred for the two old cowboys—those likable and quaint charac-

ters whom he had never even seen, but had marked down because of their chivalrous aid to Mary Leonora in her stand against his unbending authority. And now—most serious of all—his intention of allying himself with one who, from native gossip, was the most barbarous and powerful of all the great Abyssinian chiefs. Angus was struck with the resemblance between the natures of the two: the one a product of civilization and education, the other a descendant of savages, raised in a savage environment—both savages at heart.

Angus knew the situation had gotten completely out of his hands. Cantwell had, at the first, signified his intention of carrying out the job alone if Angus refused to go along; and Angus could see no way now of blocking the proceedings. His only chance to prevent a bloody encounter with all the accompanying horrors of a massacre seemed to be by persuasion alone. And with a man of Cantwell's temperament, Angus knew what a broken reed to lean upon persuasion would prove.

Following his intention of postponing a meeting with the other caravan until Gootama's village was reached and an understanding with that barbarian consummated. Cantwell procured, with the assistance of the interpreter, some days later, a guide who agreed to lead them by a shortcut over the mountains to Ras Gootama's stronghold. On this route they should, with luck, arrive at the chief's stockaded village two or three days in advance of the other party.

Cantwell had said nothing of this to Angus until the guide was brought into camp. And this fact alone, without the evidence plain in the older man's increased dictatorial and arrogant bearing, was enough to convince him that his employer felt entirely independent, now that he was drawing near to the feudal lord of the north country. And he knew that Cantwell could be practically sure of the wholehearted assistance of the barbarian ruler. Angus dared not risk interfering too soon, and so he made no comment when informed of the new route.

FOR ten days the caravan followed a break-neck mountain trail. There were places where loads had to be taken from the mules and let down by pack-ropes tied together. A deep, flooded river barred the way one afternoon. Cantwell would not hear of delay. A line was gotten across by almost superhuman efforts. The baggage was strapped to long, heavy poles, about two hundred pounds to a load, and ferried over by two strong men, the weight of the load and the taut line enabling the men to keep their feet and avoid being swept away by the rush of current. It was a crocodile-infested stream, and in spite of shots continually fired into the water above and below the place of crossing, one carrier was seized and dragged beneath the muddy waters. Cantwell was highly elated when the mules had been hazed across and camp made.

"Now there is nothing in the way between here and Ras Gootama's village—according to the guide. Our troubles are over. The loss of one man is nothing to worry about. We can get all the men we need from old Gootama. He'll eat out of our hands when he sees the present I've brought for him." Angus held his tongue. Silence was becoming a habit.

THE next morning, about eleven o'clock, when the caravan climbed to the top of a small plateau a sight burst upon their startled eyes the like of which has seldom fallen to the lot of even the earliest explorers. Grass, burned yellow by the sun, stood almost to the bellies of the laboring pack-mules. Dim blue mountains shimmered in the distance like the jagged teeth of some fabled dream-monster. Not a bird or a living thing appeared to mar the vastness and loneliness of the scene. A gentle breeze, cool and refreshing, blew from the west, and the high tawny grass rustled and whispered mysterious and untranslatable things, emphasizing the solitude of the tenantless plains; it was a forlorn and deserted wilderness, the abode apparently neither of man, beast or bird.

And then—smoothly, deliberately, in the same split second, moving with the calm inevitability of Doom itself—rose from the grass on all sides a host of tall bearded warriors. Long-bladed spears in right hands were poised. Round rhinoceros-hide shields stood to the front on left forearms. Snow-white *shammas* drooped from ebon shoulders, falling in loose and graceful lines like the folds of Roman togas. Not a word was spoken; not a sound interrupted the steady whisper of wind in the grass.

Cantwell, thrown completely out of mental gear by the suddenness and menacing appearance of the dark apparitions,

jerked his gun from the hands of the gunbearer at his side and was in the act of cocking and raising it to his shoulder when Angus fell upon him from behind, bearing him from his riding mule to the ground. The older man struggled and muttered fierce snatches of sentences through closed teeth;

"Not without a shot—get three or four at least—let go! Keep off, I say!"

Angus managed to pinion his captive; and then:

"Take it easy, Cantwell! Forgot to warn you that this is nothing but the usual greeting of an Abyssinian chief—sort of test, entirely friendly—just a bluff. Lucky you didn't shoot, though!"

The great throng of spearmen gave not a sign of having so much as seen the struggle of the two Ferengies. Cantwell rose to his feet, and Angus handed the gun back to the gunboy. Cantwell was still tense from the effects of the shock and mental jolt. But Angus saw no evidences of the after-effects of fear. The older man was not to be blamed for jumping to the conclusion that he had but a few ticking seconds to live. Indeed, he was, if anything, to be congratulated upon the speed with which he had prepared to go into action, and Angus knew for sure that not the slightest trace of cowardice or weakness dwelt in the man.

The warriors, at a signal, rushed forward, now shaking spears and yelling like black emissaries from the Plutonian shore. Angus whispered words of caution, and the two white men remounted and sat in attitudes of cool nonchalance.

The leader, a man six feet three or four in height, stepped to the front and delivered a long harangue. The interpreter summed it up in a few words;

"He say he is come from Ras Gootama. This is escort to lead us to the *tukul,* the 'ouse of the chief. We follow thi-is one an' hees *zebanias.*"

NOW a band of some twenty slaves, shades blacker than the warriors, heretofore unnoticed in the throng, stepped into the lead. And with much capering and fantastic crow-hopping, they struck up a wild tune on bamboo reed pipes. They were slave musicians of Ras Gootama—an aggregation of Nubians or Shankallas captured by the northern chief in one of his swift forays into the low, hot country beyond his western borders. Prancing ahead, the slaves led the procession, dancing and blowing on bamboo pipes like crazed black buffoons, gradually working themselves up to a frenzy of excitement.

Angus could recognize in some of the pantomimic sounds and contortions the low, creeping gait of the leopard when stalking his prey, the lordly pose of the greater kudu, the high leap of the lechwe, and the deep earth-shaking roar and proud carriage of the lion. But the warriors of the honorary bodyguard minced forward, looking neither to the right nor the left, an air of daintiness and grace in their movements strangely in contrast to their hardy, warlike appearance.

About noon the head-man of the bodyguard halted, planting his tall spear upright in the ground. A stream of water ran through the plain here, and a line of flat-topped acacia trees straggled along its course. The planted spear was the signal to pitch camp. Angus was familiar enough with Abyssinian customs to know that the caravan was now entirely in the hands of the large escort, and until their arrival at the stronghold of Ras Gootama, they would be expected to conform to the headman's suggestions.

When the double green tents went up beside the stream, and chop-boxes were opened in preparation for the noon meal, Cantwell was surprised to note that not one of the savage host displayed the slightest curiosity. He had expected them to be dumfounded at the tents, boxes, small rawhide trunks, and all the paraphernalia strange to them. He knew they could not have seen more than two or three white men before, if indeed they had seen any. Looking-glasses, table forks, tin cans—a hundred knicknacks should have aroused their curiosity, he thought. He spoke of this, and Angus observed:

"Yes, I have often wondered why it is that Abyssinians show so little curiosity about the outside world. It was one of the things that struck me at first. They seem to be self-sufficient, and I have an idea that they are thoroughly satisfied with themselves and their way of living; their distrust of, and determination to have nothing to do with, the rest of the world, civilization, progress as we know it, is a peculiarly strong trait."

The thousand or more warriors of the escort waded the stream and camped upon the other side. Each carried, somewhere in the folds of his *shamma,* a small

skin bag containing ground *tef,* or native millet flour, mixed with dried peppers. Perhaps every fifth man had a flat round disk of thin iron and a gourd of dark barley beer which he unslung from a cord over the shoulder. Cantwell noticed for the first time that those men carried no spears, and it occurred to him that they were noncombatants—slaves of the warriors; for they started fires, and putting the flat iron disks on the coals to heat, mixed a batter of flour and water, spreading it thin like a huge pancake. This was the only food of the warriors. And Cantwell, who had delved into Abyssinian history, understood why the dark warriors of that ancient kingdom of Prester John had borne through the ages the reputation for being the most mobile and self-sustaining of any troops in the world, not excepting the Japanese.

CANTWELL and the interpreter after lunch held a long, animated conversation with the chief of the escort. Angus strolled over in time to hear the last half. The head-man who, Angus observed, was called *"Fitaurari,"* leader of the advance guard, by his men, was giving in graphic style rumors and reports of the other caravan—reports that came, they said, almost daily by runner to Ras Gootama. Angus was not surprised at this, for he knew it was impossible for any caravan to enter a great chief's domain without accurate news of all its doings being forwarded. The interpreter was translating:

"One night, three *jeeb*—three hyenas—come to eat the *buckalows*—th' mule—of this other Ferengi *hamla.* The two Ferengies of the w'ite hair, they are slip"—(sleep). "The *zebania* who is by the fire for scare off the *jeeb,* he is slip too. The *jeeb,* they creep, they crawl through the grass. It is veree quiet. There is no sound. One *buckalow,* he see the *jeeb.* He say—" Here the man snorted loudly through his nose. "Then it is quiet, one-two-three second. Then *'bang! bang! bang!'* One Ferengi of the w'ite hair is sitting up in his bed in the tent. There is in his hand the short gun w'ich he carry in the day at his belt. The three *jeeb* is all dead; one, he fall in the fire and roll on the feet of the *zebania,* who jump up and yell. He is a great chief, that Ferengi of the w'ite hair. My fren'"—indicating the *fitaurari*—"is know this, for his people learn it from the men of the Ferengi *hamla."*

ANOTHER long and excited conversation followed. The head-man of the savage escort discoursed at great length with many gestures. When he had finished, the interpreter turned, eyes gleaming.

"Oh, these two ol' Ferengies—they have al-so kill the *ambassa*—the lion. They have fought the *ambassa kufanoo*—the veree bad lion. One day the Ferengi *sitt,"* —white woman,—"she is walk with one w'ite hair man ahead. The *buckalow* is way behin'. The other Ferengi who kill the *jeeb,* he is long way back. They are not expect to meet the *ambassa.* The Ferengi and the woman are walk slow. They are talk." And here the youthful interpreter saw fit to inject his own idea of polite conversation. "They say to each other, 'It is nice day. The sun shine. There is much meat in camp.' They are not look for *ambassa.* Sud-denly—the *ambassa* stand in the *mongah*—the trail—in front. W'ere he come from they do not know. He is there veree sud-denly. His tail is switch; his eye is burn like hot fire.

"The short gun of the w'ite hair Ferengi, w'ich is too small for kill the *ambassa,* is in his hand—oh, so quick-ly. He w'isper something. He wave the arm for th' woman to get behind. She shake the head —yellum—no, and stand still. The *ambassa,* he crouch. He is big black-mane; the tail is lash to one side and then to the other. He make the deep grunt—oh, he is mad to see them Ferengi so near. It is veree *kufanoo* to be so near to the *ambassa* with onlee the lit-tle gun from the belt, the gun w'ich will not kill the *ambassa.* It is then Sallassy, the one w'ich speak the English, is look ahead and he see. Oh my, how Sallassy yell.

"Then the Ferengi who is behin', he seize the big gun from the gun-bearer. Oh, how he is whip that *ferass*—his hor-r-se. He ride like the rush of wind in the thorn tree w'en the storm is come in the time of the big rain! But his hor-r-se see the *ambassa* and turn." And the interpreter found time in his excitement to retail his ideas of the pony's thoughts.

"The hor-r-se, he see the *ambassa.* He turn. He think, 'I do not care to go near to the big black-mane. If I do, I will be eaten. No, I will not go near to thi-is *ambassa,* please.'

"The old Ferengi, he is quick-ly jump off with the big gun. But the *ambassa* throw up his tail, and now he come for the woman—oh, how he come—my fren' say

"There!" Cantwell exploded triumphantly. "What do you think of that for medieval nonsense!"

The Ferengi with the woman, he throw her to the ground. *Bang—Bang!* It is the shot from the other Ferengi with the big gun. *Bang—bang—bang—bang!* This is fast shots from the lit-tle gun. The hind feet of the *ambassa* go way up in the air." Here the boy illustrated a crude cartwheel. "The big black-mane roll over, like the stone down hill, until he is al-most at the feet of the Ferengi and the woman. Blood is come from his mouth. He is finish out—dead."

"Jolly close call, that," commented Angus. "Decent of your daughter not to run back and provoke a charge when there was a chance of the lion going off without. Damn decent, I should say."

"Damn nonsense!" Cantwell answered dryly. "Those men were along to protect her. She should have cleared out. If the man got killed—nothing but his own fault."

Angus looked curiously at his companion. There was no sign of the intense relief at the lucky outcome he had expected to see. "What an unnatural person!" he thought. "What an unreasonable, illiberal old wolf he is!" Angus turned and walked away. Disgust, deep and sincere, enveloped him in a cloud.

UPON the fourth day after meeting the escort of Ras Gootama, a high conical hill appeared in the distance. It rose from the wide plain in long steady sweeps, graceful and gentle upon its lower reaches, but becoming more precipitous near the top. Upon the crest of that distant elevation stood what looked to be a great pile of rock, a sheer-sided cliff of dark lava. But as the shimmering reflection of the sun relaxed for a moment, Angus could make out dimly through the glass the massive towers and keep, the surrounding wall, the regular outlines of an ancient fortification. The interpreter, after conferring with the chief of the escort, explained:

"It is the for-r-t of the Ferengies who came here—oh, a long time ago. My fren', he say it is not been use, this for-r-t, for so veree long that he does not remember w'en. It is a veree great thing, thi-is for-r-t."

And Angus knew that they were gazing upon the Sixteenth Century Portuguese castle, the only relic of the desperate venture "to aid and succor" Prester John. Seen from a great distance, it gave the impression of civilization. It was hard to believe that beyond, just over the hill, there should not be a railroad, green, well-tilled fields, brick houses, roads and automobiles. But he knew that the old stronghold was half in ruins, aloof, rising upon its hill in the wilderness, in solitary grandeur—a crumbling monument to the military prowess and religious faith of a handful of gallant adventurers whose intrepid hearts had

been wind-blown dust for three interminable centuries. And he knew that somewhere near, Ras Gootama, proud and ruthless ruler of this wide country, dwelt in his crude, stockaded stronghold in the center of an extensive group of grass-roofed, mud-and-dung-plastered *tukuls*. He knew that the magnificent example of the hardy builders of the castle had been lost, and today the Abyssinians dwelt just as they had before the heroic time of Cristoforo da Gama: The warriors wore the same garb, carried the identical type of weapons, ate the same food, lived in dwellings of the same design, thought and did the very things day by day that their ancestors had when Europe was struggling through the mists and fogs of the Dark Ages. And Angus knew that here, in this remote wilderness at least, the form of government had not changed one iota. That even the monetary system was the same as that mentioned by Alvarez, chronicler of the Sixteenth Century expedition: bars of rock salt passing as coin of the realm.

THE caravan camped that night on the open plains, a short march from the old castle. Just before sunset a runner arrived carrying in a split stick a letter written in Amharic on a piece of sun-dried goatskin.

> To the Dejasmatch (general) of the Ferengie caravan:
> God is good. Those of my enemies who are not dead dwell in my *tukuls* as slaves. Let it be peace. I welcome you to my stronghold.
>
> Ras Gootama, Conquering
> Lion of the Simien.

Angus heard the translation with amusement.

"The old lad hates himself. Probably puts on no end of swank. Take lots of handling, that blighter."

And the next morning about eleven o'clock, the head-man of the escort planted his spear beside a stream that skirted the hill. Above, the great castle loomed, a frowning bulwark of stone, dark with age. Its bastions and enfiladed surrounding wall stood solid, enduring through the centuries, in its day a challenge to the hosts of Mohammedanism, and now nothing but a monument to one of the most romantic gestures in history. Angus selected a site for his tent, and Ali directed its pitching, bossing the half-dozen whose job it was, with energetic oaths in Somali, Arabic and Amharic—a hodgepodge of vituperation that brought grins to dark faces and good-natured laughs from bearded lips. Ali knew how to get things done quickly around camp; Angus' tent was always the first up.

Herds of humped cattle and a few goats straggled across the open country, but the native village could not be seen from this side. It lay upon the crest of a conical butte that rose, almost sheer-sided, beyond the eminence crowned by the great castle.

The interpreter came with the *fitaurari*. The boy always proudly referred to that petty chief as, "my fren'." "My fren', he say we will wait here. He is send a man to Ras Gootama. Thi-is man will retur-rn w'en the sun is there!"—pointing to the horizon. The *fitaurari* stooped, and plucking a leaf from a low bush, pushed it part way up one nostril, from which it dangled down over his lips. Upon ceremonious occasions a person should look his best. He changed the upper folds of his *shamma* to the other shoulder as a mark of respect, and stood listening in dignified silence until the interpreter had finished. Both bowed low and retired.

Cantwell, during the last few days, had been laboring under pressure of some inner excitement. Outwardly he was cool and collected, but his eyes held an eager, burning light that Angus thought was not good to see. During the last day he had scarcely spoken to the younger man, and had given orders to have his meals served in his tent. There he ate alone in grim silence, an implacable thrust to his chin, that unpleasant gleam in his eyes. Angus, observing him from a distance through the tent door that noon, was reminded of a feeding hyena by the way the food was bolted.

"Looks to me," Angus thought, "like a man on the ragged edge of going native."

Ali came to Angus quietly and whispered:

"Gaytah! The Ferengi is unpack in his tent the *tabanjah*—th' gun w'ich shoot so many time." Angus was not surprised to learn that Cantwell had taken the machine-gun and a heavy wooden box of ammunition into his own tent. And he thought best to make no reference to the gun. Cantwell was putting the light but deadly weapon together. Angus decided the time had come to lay the foundation for a sane and peaceful settlement, and at once he sought out his employer.

"Cantwell," he began, speaking slowly and in the most friendly tone he could summon, "we meet Ras Gootama in the morning. Before we go into any arrangement with him, I'd like to talk things over. I think I have a better understanding of these people than you. I've been in the country three years, and—"

Cantwell looked up coldly, belligerently:

"It's not necessary. I know exactly what I'm doing. This is my caravan. This is my,"—he held up the barrel of the gun and said slowly, with deep meaning,—"this—is—also—my—machinegun—I—believe. You are in my employ. When I want you, McPherson, I'll call." Cantwell laid down the gun-barrel and picked up his automatic pistol. He held it innocently in his right hand, but the muzzle somehow seemed to remain pointed in the neighborhood of Angus' second shirt-button. Slowly a deep red mounted from the younger man's neck to his face, his forehead. An all but ungovernable rage rose in him. He heard Cantwell as from a great distance:

"These automatic pistols are dangerous weapons. They're liable to go off when you clean them."

"Have you gone completely out of your head?" Angus managed to force the words through a throat choked with anger.

"Perhaps." But Angus knew by the calm calculation of the tone that this was no case of insanity. He stepped back, let the tent-flap fall and strode away.

HERE was a fine mess. In a few days the other caravan would arrive. They were doubtless even now marching toward the stronghold of Ras Gootama under an escort of warriors as powerful as the one that had so startled Cantwell, completely in the power of the barbarous northern chieftain. And Cantwell's clearly expressed intentions, and now his refusal even to talk of reconsidering, brought home to Angus the peril of the two old men with Mary Leonora. Angus saw his only card, persuasion, torn from his hands. It would be war, and warfare of a treacherous, brutal and abominable kind, to which there could be but one outcome for those light-hearted old cow-punchers. And this odious business would actually be the work of a white man!

Angus, followed at a distance by Ali, went for a walk. He wandered aimlessly through the rocks of the steep hillside, climbing toward the castle, thinking, suggesting to himself ways and means to prevent a pitched battle. But he could arrive at no feasible solution. Plan after plan was considered and discarded—always the ruthless figure of Cantwell, now appearing before him as the incarnation of relentless hatred, rose to overturn them.

"He is the devil himself," Angus mused aloud, as he stood beneath the grim walls of the ancient castle.

Ali had closed up in the meantime. The Somali heard the remark and pricked up his ears.

"The *Ferengi*—he is the *shaitan?*" the gun-bearer questioned eagerly, in low tone.

"Oh—aye," Angus returned thoughtlessly, absent-mindedly, mildly surprised to note the presence of the lean brown gun-bearer. And then he became absorbed in studying the defenses of the old ruin.

The stone causeway leading to the wide entrance where the great portcullis had once stood guard was crumbling into decay. The arched doorway, wide enough for five horsemen riding abreast to enter, yawned gaping and vacant. The sheer walls made of stone blocks rose above. At the corners, round watch-towers were thrust higher, their upper sections showing narrow apertures, long, thin slits, through which to shoot. Along the top of the high walls at regular intervals were comparatively small square blocks, topped with gargoyles, figures of strange outlandish animals; there had been, with the Portuguese expedition, a fairly proficient sculptor, for the figures were as well done as the majority of those decorating medieval castles in Europe.

Angus entered at the main door. The twisted remnant of the great portcullis lay upon the stone floor, the flat thick bars with their sharpened points rusted almost into dust. He paused dreamily while his mind pictured the heavy iron as it had stood when barring the entry of Arab or savage hosts. He could see a company of bearded and bronzed knights, crowded within the darkened hallway holding parley through the bars with some powerful Mohammedan raider and his barbarian chiefs. The picture rose clearly in his imagination. White officers, with a few Abyssinian chiefs, stood grouped behind the grim commander of the garrison. Hauberk and pike glittered above the ranks behind. Burnished helmets gleamed and bright corselets rattled. Mailed shirts rus-

tled and whispered with the slightest movement. Interpreters leaned against the flat bars of the closed portcullis, alternately listening and turning to translate the arrogant threats of the investing Arabs. And those haughty raiders sat their small, high-mettled steeds gracefully, disdainfully. Curved scimitars clashed in scabbards at every nervous movement of the gayly bedizened horses. Tall lances flashed and glittered in the sun. A sheik held out the Koran in left hand, the scimitar in right; which should it be?

And Angus could see the spasmodic crossing of themselves by the Portuguese priests at the side of the stern commander of the fortress; he could almost hear the defiant, sonorous reply of that doughty leader pronounced to the muttered accompaniment of words of excommunication from the priests:

"Never! Ye sons of Belial. Ye hirelings of the devil. Ye emissaries from Satan! Never!"

And with a slightly amused air Angus drew himself up and put that reply into his own words:

"Toddle along, old sportsmen. Carry on, and best of luck!"

CHAPTER VI

CAMP was astir early in the morning. The mules were packed; and the men, having washed their *shammas* the evening before, were in gala attire. But just before starting, a body of horsemen dashed over the hill from the direction of Ras Gootama's village. They reined plunging steeds back on haunches; the leader dismounted, and coming forward, bowed low with the word:

"Fenistuly!" (Good morning!)

A long palaver between the newcomer and the chief of the escort followed. It was very formal, very precise, and both men carried themselves with the greatest dignity. The interpreter, who hung about just behind them, turned.

"Th-is one who jus' come—he say to my fren' that he is sent by Ras Gootama for take the caravan to the village. It is time We mus' go."

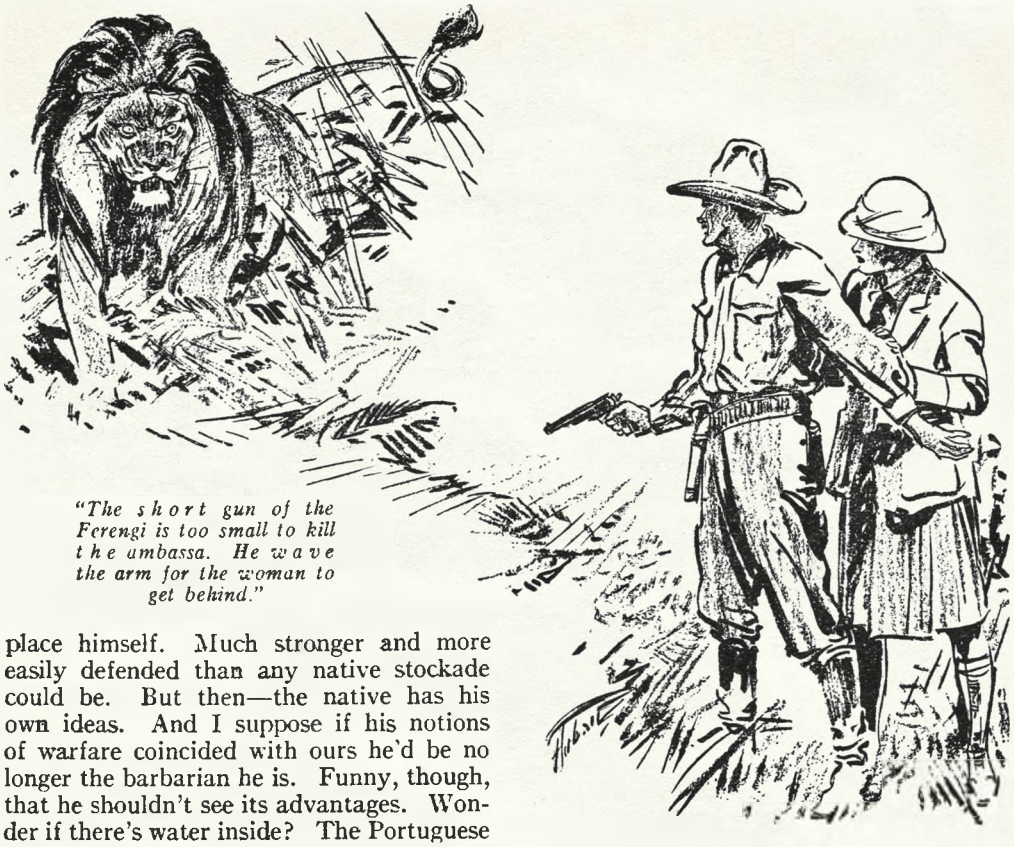
The last few loads were adjusted, and Cantwell ordered the interpreter to blow a blast on his brass horn, the signal for the caravan to get under way. The mounted visitors formed a compact body ahead. The pack-mules strung out, and packers and *zebanias,* with their ancient fusees swinging from shoulders by rawhide sling-straps, belabored the plodding animals.

An intangible feeling of electric excitement pervaded the caravan. For this village was known, somehow, to be the goal, the place toward which they had been traveling for forty days. Angus mounted and followed. His mind was busy with thoughts of the unpleasant scenes that he knew lay ahead. He accused and blamed himself for not taking matters into his own hands earlier in the game. Now it was too late. Once the party had been taken in charge by the strong escort, high-handed tactics were out of the question. If he had only known earlier that Cantwell could never be brought to listen to reason! But he had missed his chance. Such uncompromising ruthlessness, such determination, such downright savagery, in a white man, was something entirely beyond Angus' experience. His opportunity was gone, and now there was nothing to be done until, perhaps, things should break in such a way as to present another chance. There was the remote possibility that he could, in a private conversation with the despot of this northern country, so play upon the consequences that Ras Gootama would be afraid to attack a white caravan. This, Angus thought, was his only card.

Ali trotted beside his masters' mule, the heavy elephant-gun over his shoulder. The Somali sensed from his master's preoccupation and the somewhat set expression of his mouth that things of importance were passing through his mind. So, when a reedbuck leaped from a brushy covert and dashed away over the grassy plain, the Somali forbore to point. The gun-bearer's eyes gleamed for a moment, as they always did when game was sighted, but he glanced at Angus' impassive face and remained silent. He had been with this *Gaytah* two years, and knew when not to talk.

AS they filed over the brow of the hill through a low swale a half mile to the left of the castle, Angus roused from his meditation, pulled up and sat contemplating the ancient fortress.

"The old pile," he mused, "is not too far gone in ruin to make a capital stronghold still against the spears of these natives. Surprising that old Gootama didn't build his village around it and occupy the



"The short gun of the Ferengi is too small to kill the umbassa. He wave the arm for the woman to get behind."

place himself. Much stronger and more easily defended than any native stockade could be. But then—the native has his own ideas. And I suppose if his notions of warfare coincided with ours he'd be no longer the barbarian he is. Funny, though, that he shouldn't see its advantages. Wonder if there's water inside? The Portuguese lads of course had a well or something. But that must be filled to the top now, with the wind-blown dust of three centuries."

Cantwell was far in the lead, conversing through the interpreter with the leader of the escort. Angus could see the three, riding abreast at the head of the line of mules. He knew that Cantwell would be seizing the opportunity to impress upon the representative of Ras Gootama the importance of the Ferengi caravan, and especially, of its owner and commander-in-chief. And Angus knew that by the time they arrived at the chief's village, the leader of the escort would be primed with information for his master, a detailed report which would go far to help that barbarian make up his mind to ally himself with Cantwell—and also, perhaps, to expect trouble from the other party.

From the crest of the low pass between the hills, the village suddenly came into view. It stood, as Angus had expected, upon a steep butte. The grass *tukuls* of the inhabitants clung to miniature terraces cut and smoothed from the side of the hill. The flat top of the butte was given over entirely to the dwelling of the Ras, and the mud-plastered *tukuls* of his immediate and extensive bodyguard. A stockade, twenty feet or more in height, encircled the top. A dense crowd of villagers was gathered upon the hillside. Word of the arrival of the Ferengi caravan had, of course, preceded them, and the entire population was there to see the pale ones from another world, representatives of a race about which the most conflicting reports had reached this isolated wilderness. Were Ferengies really as terrible in war as they were said by some to be? Were they conquerors whose touch meant death and decay for every African tribe? Demi-gods, compared to whom the African is nothing but a child, a slave—as the Shankallas were to the Abyssinians?

OLD men in the crowd took this occasion to whisper strange and unbelievable things of white men's doings, rumors of their magic and devilish prowess. Others replied, denying that Ferengies were as good fighters as Abyssinians. They cited the Italian invasion of their country back in Menelik's time, and told with many strenuous gestures of the annihilation of that poorly led and sadly equipped European army. They forgot to mention that

there had been two hundred thousand of Menelik's warriors against a scant fourteen thousand Ferengies; and that when attacked, the invaders had been caught in mountain passes, divided, surprised and so overwhelmed by the vastly superior numbers. The final conclusion arrived at by most was that Ferengies were fierce fighters—as proved by the fact that they had conquered so many savage races; but that Abyssinians were even more terrible in war—as proved by Menelik's victory. Yes, they agreed, there could be no reasonable doubt—Abyssinians were the greatest fighters of all. And it was also quite evident that Ras Gootama, their own chief, was the most dreaded scourge in the world, a man whom no ruler, not even the Ferengi king, would dare to antagonize.

More mounted warriors poured down the hillside, sweeping to meet the caravan with a tremendous rush. The small Abyssinian horses dashed headlong, necks curved and bowed, giving them the appearance of reserve strength and great spirit—but in reality held in that position by cruel bits so long of shank, so severe with iron ring beneath the animal's chin, that a slight touch upon the rawhide reins would almost break the jaw. Gaudy red and yellow saddle-cloths flapped in the wind. Crupper, tail-piece, breast-strap and headstall were plentifully decorated with silver disks—pounded thin from the large Maria Theresa thalers, coins imported from the more civilized parts of the empire. Each horseman carried two weapons, one a broad-bladed thrusting lance, the other a slim and businesslike throwing spear. The leaders of squads, petty chiefs, affected also the long curved scimitar, probably adopted from the Arabs of the Sudan.

They arrived with a whirl and a rush, riders brandishing spears and holding aloft the small round rhinoceros-hide shields carried on the left arm. Only the big toes of bare black feet gripped the small iron stirrups, but the riders swayed easily with the rhythm of pounding hoofs. The girths on two saddles, girths which are never more than narrow straps of rawhide, parted. The saddles turned, and two riders went to the hard ground in a tangled mass of *shammas,* saddles and bright saddle-cloths; the rest paid no attention whatever, those behind leaving it to their horses to leap the fallen men. The leader of the contingent—evidently a picked group of Gootama's warriors—reined his foam-flecked charger to its haunches directly in front of Cantwell. In a loud, far-carrying tone, although not more than five or ten feet away, he delivered a long speech, Cantwell and the rest sitting patiently until the end.

THE interpreter explained the gist of the long oration:

"He say Ras Gootama is his chief. He say"—all Abyssinian interpreters insist upon innumerable repetitions of "he say" all through their broken conversation. "He say Ras Gootama is the greatest chief in the world. He say Ras Gootama is the most powerful king in the whole world." And here the interpreter gave his own opinion upon that delicate question: "But I don' think Ras Gootama can whip the Ferengi king. I have seen the Ferengi *zebania"* (soldier) "in the Sudan. I think Ras Gootama is the greatest Ras nex' to the Ras of all the Ferengies, but I do not think he can whip the Ferengi king and make slaves of the Ferengies. No, I do not think so. Thi-is man say Ras Gootama is sweep all the tribes before him like the big grass fire w'en the rain do not come for long time. He say Ras Gootama own many slaves, oh, so many slave I do not know how many, he say. The *ambassa*—the lion—do not come to the country of Ras Gootama. The *ambassa* is afraid of the spears of his warriors. No, they do not come here any more. Ras Gootama have the lion child—the little lion—w'ich he keep in his *tukul* like the slave. W'en thi-is lit-tle lion is grow big, he will send him back to his own people, and thi-is lion-child will tell his tribe how many spears is flash around the village of Ras Gootama, and the *ambassa* will not come here forever. I think this is good plan," the boy continued judgmatically. "Now I will tell him you are chief of many Ferengies. I will say you are big fren' of Ras Tessayah in Addis. I will tell him Ras Tessayah is like the brother of the other Ferengi who fight the *zohon* and is not afraid of—"

"No—no!" interrupted Cantwell decidedly, "do not say that. Tell him I am chief of this caravan. That it is I who fights the elephant and I bring along my slave, the other Ferengi, to work for me. Say that I am the only one powerful enough to own a Ferengi slave. No one else in the whole world has a Ferengi slave. Tell him one white slave is worth a thousand black slaves because of his great magic. Tell

him that—and make it strong." And Cantwell indeed looked the part of a great ruler. Distinguished enough in appearance to have attracted attention in any company, he sat his big riding-mule, straight, stern, uncompromising, regarding the major-domo coldly, regally, his patrician features with the outthrust chin and thin, straight mouth, the very picture of the spirit of imperial Rome.

A deep impression was made by the interpreter's statement. The major-domo stood in his stirrups and craned his neck to see that strange sight—a Ferengi slave. For Angus, unfortunately, was riding near the tail end of the caravan, head upon his chest in deep and unpleasant thought. This would be news for Ras Gootama, the late arrival thought, great news. Perhaps his master would decide to purchase the Ferengi slave—or demand him as tribute. Anyway, it would be great news. He saw the light gun in its scabbard upon Angus' saddle, and noted Ali following with the big double-barrel.

"Is it the custom to allow a slave to have guns?" he inquired.

"Those are the other guns of my master," lied the interpreter glibly. "He is a great and generous chief. He allows his slave to use them, but he cannot shoot until his owner gives permission. Such is the custom of my master."

"We do not allow our slaves to carry guns," criticised the other.

"You have no guns," commented the interpreter disdainfully—a neat bit of repartee which he made mental note to retail around the camp-fire that night.

The humiliated one created a diversion by issuing a command that brought his warriors around in loose formation, facing in the direction of the village. He did not like that interpreter.

In the enthusiasm of his loose and imaginative panegyric upon his chief, the man had almost forgotten his principal errand. Now he informed the interpreter that the caravan was to camp where it then was at the foot of the butte; the white chief was to ride up the hill with the interpreter, to present credentials in person to Ras Gootama.

Angus was surprised to see Cantwell, with his gun-bearer and another upon whom he had conferred small favors during the past two uncomfortable days, driving before them the mule which carried the machine-gun and much of the ammunition for that dangerous weapon. They halted by the trail, and Cantwell took his rifle from the gun-bearer and stood by, watching while the two tightened the load. Angus rode up.

"Cantwell," he said, with unaccustomed grimness, "surely you're not taking that gun into Gootama's stronghold?"

"That'll be about all from you, McPherson," was the only answer. And Angus caught the look of triumph in the steely eyes.

The young Scot understood then that it was to be war between them. Time for compromise was past; persuasion was a dead issue. From now on it was to be a trial of strength. Angus was on the point of bringing matters to a head over the machine-gun. For a few seconds the idea of preventing at any cost his employer from taking the weapon, hung in the balance. But fortunately, in that tense and critical instant, his mind worked true, and the vital issues of the problem were not clouded by the lure of a temporary advantage that might have been gained: Ras Gootama's warriors were all about them, two thousand strong. Cantwell had established himself solidly with the major-domo —how solidly Angus had no way of knowing.

The younger man bowed with mock solemnity, in elaborate but feigned submission. Cantwell laughed. It was a nasty sound, accompanied by a crooked pulling down of one corner of the mouth. And in the midst of the mounted contingent, accompanied by the interpreter and the man convoying the machine-gun mule, Cantwell set off. Angus led the caravan to a suitable camping place, surrounded by the *zebanias* on foot, ostensibly a convoy of honor—in reality, Angus knew, a strict military guard.

WHEN Cantwell and his mounted escort arrived at the stockade upon the crest of the butte, two lines of warriors were standing, one on each side of the open gate, drawn up in semi-military formation. They fell in behind as the party rode through.

The stockade, Cantwell had time to notice, was embedded in a foundation of loose stones, piled to a height of six feet. From the top of this crude pile, small logs, set as closely together vertically as could be, rose ten feet higher, their bases buried and anchored in the stones, and their tops

sharpened. Where the logs met the stones, a row of sharpened stakes lay horizontally, points to the outside, a rough and threatening *cheveaux-de-frix*. The palisade was bound together with thick vines and lengths of tough, climbing creepers. It was unusually large for an African stronghold, a quarter-mile in diameter. Its immense size and the number of *tukuls* within were testimonials to the power of its owner.

Cantwell, as he approached the gate, had wondered at the shouting and hallooing that issued from the interior. This clamor had been audible for some distance. Now, as he entered in the midst of the mounted escort, a venerable priest in snowy *shamma* and the white turban of his office rushed excitedly to the leader of the horsemen. Hurried words passed and that dignitary turned to the interpreter, explaining the situation with voluble words.

The interpreter, awed and greatly impressed by the sight of the spear-carrying throng within, explained that a very unusual and serious thing had happened, and they had been ordered to halt and wait until it had been settled. This most unusual circumstance was greatly to be regretted. A villager had just come to Ras Gootama complaining that a goat had been stolen. This was such a heinous and almost unheard of offense in Ras Gootama's well-governed domains, that that exalted and most punctilious of rulers could not allow his overwhelming desire to greet his visitor to interfere with the swift execution of justice. So great was Ras Gootama's love of justice, the *aboona* (priest) had explained, that he would allow nothing in the world to stand in the way of its immediate fulfillment: The visitor must wait until the thief had been found and punished.

CANTWELL already knew the native mind well enough to understand that here was the baldest affectation, a scheme to create in the mind of a white man the impression that Ras Gootama was a noble and just ruler, one to whom justice meant everything, a man willing, at any hour of day or night, to drop everything and attend to matters of governance.

In the middle of the enclosure Cantwell saw a platform covered with leopard-skins and surmounted by a sun-shade of cotton cloth. Seated upon a couch on this dais, cross-legged, was a black-bearded and barefooted but gaudily arrayed Abyssinian. His burnous was of deep purple, and the ceremonial lion-mane headdress gave him a bizarre and savage appearance. Two huge coal-black slaves with drawn scimitars stood upon the platform behind their master, while upon three sides of the dais, dense lines of spearmen were standing, silent, immovable, their black shields glistening in the sunlight. A vast throng of shouting vassals and retainers stood back at a distance. In front of the platform a naked youth, not more than twelve years of age, bowed before the potentate, knees on the ground and head touching the earth. A tall priest bedizened and glittering in flowing robes of white, brass or copper beads in heavy strings reaching from neck to waist, a ceremonial mitre or similar object in his right hand, stood beside the boy.

Ras Gootama raised his hand. A dead silence fell. The interpreter turned eagerly to Cantwell.

"Now the sahib will see the mos' wonderful thing. It is gr-reat magic this thing w'ich is now to be done. The thief will be found—oh, veree quick-ly."

A jet-black Shankalla slave handed the priest a drinking-gourd. It was passed to the boy, who stood up to drink. The crowd watched eagerly, expectantly. The boy drained the gourd, and soon Cantwell thought he saw the lad reel slightly. A low chant, led by the priest began. Ras Gootama sat grim, and disdainful.

The boy looked about in a dazed way, tottered, stumbled, recovered, and then fell. He was lifted to his feet by the *aboona*, gently, gingerly, as if his body were sacred. Another drinking gourd was held to his lips. After this the boy straightened perceptibly. His actions became erratic, and he made short rusbes to the left and to the right. The *aboona* watched him closely, and when his eccentric capers showed that his mind was completely dazed by the potency of the mysterious liquid, the *aboona* thrust into his hands a long staff with an ivory handle.

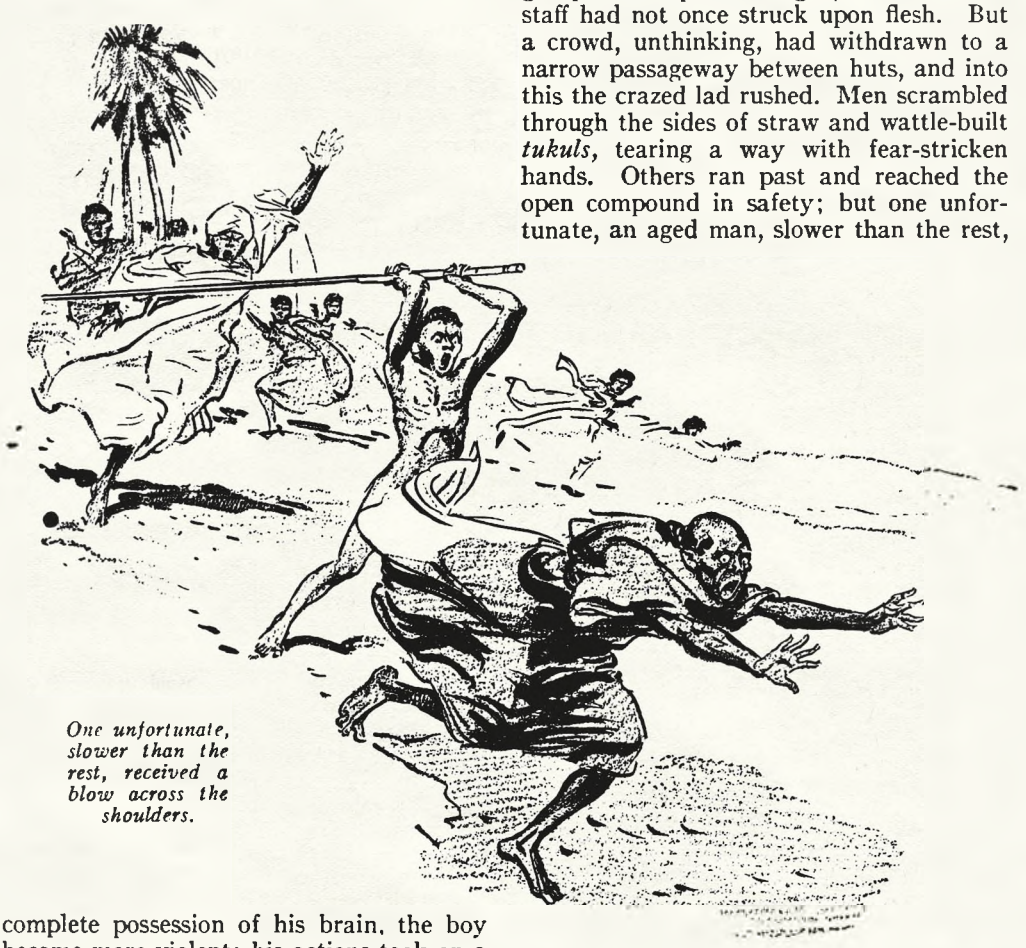
This was a signal for the crowd to scatter. The interpreter, trembling with excitement, whispered:

"Now he is make the talk with God. God is tell him who is the one w'at has stole the goat. Soon he will go fin' thi'is one who stole the goat. You watch!"

The boy, now quite evidently out of his head, stared about in a bewildered way. Flecks of foam appeared at the corners of his mouth. He glared like a trapped animal. Seizing the staff more firmly in

both hands, he ran in a circle swinging the ivory-handled rod. The crowd drew farther back, many taking refuge in the grass-roofed *tukuls*, an air of superstitious fear and apprehension in their movements.

As the effects of the draught took more complete possession of his brain, the boy became more violent; his actions took on a wild and desperate swiftness. He struck blindly, swinging the staff in a wide arc. He muttered and babbled incessantly. And now, in an abandonment of erratic vacillation, he ran here and there, striking, beating the air, turning suddenly, falling to his face, rising, leaping high and dashing headlong. It was plain that the draught had been some brain-paralyzing concoction, and Cantwell was reminded of stories he had heard of the frenzied actions of cocaine-fiends.



One unfortunate, slower than the rest, received a blow across the shoulders.

The great compound was now in pandemonium. Ras Gootama, and his two giant slaves with bare scimitars, alone remained impassive. The multitude was howling and chattering, mad with excitement.

The boy dived into a *tukul*, found no one there, rushed out again, laying about him with the long staff. The crowd melted at his approach, fleeing in terror. Two or three other *tukuls* were entered; small groups were put to flight; and still the staff had not once struck upon flesh. But a crowd, unthinking, had withdrawn to a narrow passageway between huts, and into this the crazed lad rushed. Men scrambled through the sides of straw and wattle-built *tukuls*, tearing a way with fear-stricken hands. Others ran past and reached the open compound in safety; but one unfortunate, an aged man, slower than the rest, received a blow across the shoulders. Instantly he fell to his knees, moaning, a hopeless expression upon his black face. A great shout of relief shook the very palisade; men danced in ecstasy, overjoyed that they had been spared. Talk and laughter burst forth; there was a decided hysterical reaction. The boy was seized from behind and led away.

THE wretch upon whom the wrath of the gods had descended was dragged before Ras Gootama. The potentate nodded to one of the giant black Shankallas. That powerful one, his skin gleaming like a raven's wing in the sun, ran his thumb along the edge of his curved scimitar;

a happy grin split his face almost from ear to ear. He approached the now vociferously protesting victim; an arm was thrust forward by those holding the unfortunate man.

Swish!

The man's hand, severed at the wrist, dropped to the ground. An iron caldron, which Cantwell had not noticed before, mounted upon a sort of rustic base of saplings, was pushed forward by a half-dozen men. Steam issued lazily from its wide top and a smell of boiling fat reached him. The hideous stump, red and gory, was forced in, and the unfortunate man fell back limp, in a dead and merciful faint. He was borne through the gate to his own *tukul* outside the palisade. The interpreter turned to Cantwell. There was an air of satisfied pride about him.

"Is a thief found in thi-is clever way in the country of the Sahib? I do not think so. It is a secret known only to our *aboonas*. The Englishi in the Sudan, w'ere I have been, they do not know this way."

"H'm!" Cantwell grunted.

"I have never seen thi-is way not to fin' the thief," the youth went on. "For God is the one who tell the boy w'ich man he mus' hit with the stick. It is always sure way to fin' who did something very bad."

But Cantwell was interested in the matter only as it reflected upon the character of Ras Gootama. And Cantwell was well pleased. The chief was merciless, as he had expected. He was also in complete control of his people. There could be no question of their refusal to obey orders. If Ras Gootama said, "Attack a Ferengi caravan," the thing would be done. Therefore Ras Gootama alone remained to be wooed and won over to the proposition. And Cantwell thought, with great satisfaction, that this would not be difficult.

A man hurried across the compound from the dais. He bowed low before the leader of the mounted escort. The interpreter informed Cantwell that the audience would now take place. They moved forward to within twenty yards of the platform with its leopard-skins.

"You mus' not be upon the mule any more," he directed.

Cantwell, following the example of the leader, dismounted. Ras Gootama rose and came forward, smiling a bit grimly, Cantwell thought, and extended his hand. The great chief of the north said a few words to the interpreter.

"He say he is glad you come to his country. He say he is good fren' of the Ferengies. He say you mus' forgive the waiting, but he have jus' heard there is a thief in his village. He is so mad at thi-is thief that he mus' have him punished at once. He say he love justice veree much, and he will not have a thief in his village."

Cantwell made the obvious complimentary reply. He was burning with the desire to get down to business with this man. He ordered the interpreter to say that he had great news to impart, news of a most startling character: information of a mighty thing that was within the grasp of Ras Gootama. He was very anxious to tell the secret. Might he suggest that they retire to Ras Gootama's *tukul* where they could be alone?

The bearded chief gave orders in swift succession. Slaves and retainers hurried toward a big *tukul*. Several of the bodyguard lifted the couch from among its spotted skins and carried it toward a large grass-roofed hut. Ras Gootama was all smiles, bland and deliberate. No signs of eagerness or curiosity marked his bearing.

Inside the large round dwelling with its straight sides, mud-plastered and thick, its conical roof of long grass laid in deep and careful thatch against the torrential rains of summer, a dim twilight filtered.

There was plenty of room, Cantwell found; for unlike most Abyssinian *tukuls*, the main compartment was not divided to accommodate the favorite saddle-mule of its owner. That long-eared member of the family was evidently cared for by one of the numerous retinue in other quarters. The couch was borne through the door upon brawny shoulders and set down against the wall. Ras Gootama seated himself upon it, and motioned Cantwell to a low stool-like affair hewn from the trunk of a tree and covered with a dried gazelle-hide. He spoke to an attendant, and everyone but Cantwell, the interpreter and Ras Gootama left the *tukul*.

CANTWELL turned to the interpreter. He spoke swiftly.

"There is another Ferengi caravan not many days away coming to this country. Tell him that." Cantwell was well enough versed in the use of interpreters to refrain from giving too much to be translated at a time.

The comment came back from the chief: "Messengers have brought reports of

this caravan. I heard of them when they crossed the Abbai, the Blue Nile. My *zebanias* are already in charge of them. They will arrive at my stronghold in one day."

Cantwell was greatly relieved to know that the two white men whom he termed "bandits and ruffians" were now more or less completely in the hands of this barbaric chief and his spearmen. Hands behind back, Cantwell rose and paced the hard dirt floor impatiently. His sun helmet was off, and the high, arching brow, the head, bald and shining, the strong features that Angus had thought as clean-cut as the profile on an ancient Roman coin, caused a flicker of wonder to cross the chief's visage. Ras Gootama was studying his visitor. Accustomed to appraise his own men shrewdly, he made a guess regarding the character of this unusual white man.

"He is a great chief in his own country," the Abyssinian thought, "and he is strong and brave as the lion. I think he has killed many lions. He has come to fight the *zohon* —the elephant. He is even as I, bold and accustomed to rule. I will make this man my friend. Much can be gotten from him."

THEN the white man spoke:

"I have heard of the invincible Ras Gootama. He is known all over the world as the greatest of rulers, a man whom none dares to cross, one who governs his people with a hand of iron. In my country I too am lord of many, and I know that men must be ruled by power and ruthlessness. And I have known for long—who hasn't? —that the Abyssinians are terrible fighters. There is but one unfortunate thing about the Abyssinians—they have no modern guns!"

When this was translated, Cantwell saw the Ras straighten with attention. He had expected that reference to guns to start hopes in the Chief's breast, for Angus, during the early days of the trip, had told him that guns, above all, were the most desirable things in the world to an Abyssinian. He continued:

"And therefore I have brought to you—not many guns, not mule-loads of crude and ancient guns, such as those used by the *zebanias* of Ras Tessayah in Addis, guns that are no good. Such cumbersome weapons would have been seen and seized by the soldiers of Ras Tessayah. No! I have brought instead—just one gun."

AT this information Ras Gootama's face showed disappointment and grave displeasure. This white man had done much talking about guns and had led him to believe that he brought many. Now, after his host had been keyed to a high state of anticipation, the Ferengi admitted he had brought but one. But Ras Gootama remembered the reports of his men—that the white man carried two guns and his Ferengi slave two more. There was a way—

Cantwell was working up to his climax:

"I knew a good deal about your country before I left the land of the Ferengies. I knew that ordinary guns would not do for one so great as Ras Gootama—and I knew that many guns could not be transported through the territory of Ras Tessayah. I was determined that Ras Gootama should be the best-armed chief in all Abyssinia, if not in all the world! What did I do?" Cantwell paused dramatically.

The bearded autocrat leaned forward upon the couch. He knew now that some big revelation was about to fall. He was as eagerly excited as a child. Cantwell felt himself to be in perfect control of the situation, knew he had played his cards admirably and that the aid of this powerful tyrant was within easy reach. Slowly and carefully he explained the virtues of the modern machine-gun.

"What is it that gives the Ferengies command of most of the world? It is not the strength of their *zebanias,* for the warriors of many savage races are bigger, stronger. It is not their numbers—for a small force of Ferengies can conquer great hosts. It is not their gods, for the Ferengi gods are no more powerful than the gods of other peoples. The white races have conquered every tribe in Africa except the Abyssinians. Why is this? I will tell you. It is because of the machine-gun!"

Ras Gootama had thought about these things many times. And he had been at a loss for the answer. Cantwell continued:

"With one of these marvelous weapons you can make yourself master of all Abyssinia. Ras Tessayah, far to the southward, could not stand against you. The Ferengies themselves would stay away from your country forever."

Cantwell waited until this had been translated. He saw that Ras Gootama was deeply impressed.

"The machine-gun which I have brought will shoot almost forever, continually—as fast as you feed it cartridges. It is like a

fire rushing through the high dead grass. When this gun speaks, men fall like the fruit of the wild fig-tree when the *totos*, the monkeys, shake the branches. Nothing can stand against it—"

RAS GOOTAMA interrupted: "Have you brought cartridges for this gun?"

"Many cartridges," Cantwell assured him. "I have brought enough cartridges to enable you to wipe out all the warriors in northern Abyssinia." This information opened up a new train of thought. A tentative plan for a sudden and devastating descent upon the territories of a rival chief in the province of Tigre half formed in Gootama's mind. Cantwell proceeded:

"Now this other Ferengi caravan I have mentioned—it is composed of two white men and a young white woman, my daughter. The two men are known in my country as brigands, bandits—in yours as *shiftas*. These are very bad men, very fierce men. They would not hesitate to shoot down Ras Gootama himself."

The bearded barbarian smiled incredulously. The idea of two Ferengies coming into his country, into his very stronghold, with hardihood enough to start trouble with him, Ras Gootama—why, the thing was preposterous. He said as much, adding:

"My warriors are as the leaves of the trees." He snorted contemptuously. "I shall have these two Ferengies brought in to me at once!"

"No," advised Cantwell. "I have a better plan. There must be no fighting while my daughter is with that caravan. I want you to order your *zebanias* to escort her here—all is so far friendly between your warriors and those Ferengies, and they should be able to bring her ahead, giving the two white men to understand that it is one of your customs. Then, when the white woman is safe, your warriors must wipe out the caravan; those two Ferengi *shiftas* must not be allowed to escape!"

Cantwell saw hesitation in the face before him and made his proposition quickly:

"For this great service to me, the machine-gun—that gun which mows down men as the curved knives of your villagers cut down the *tef* and barley in the time of harvest—that gun with all its boxes of ammunition, shall be yours. I, who am a great chief in my own country, have promised. The promises of Ferengies are never broken, especially the promises of great Ferengi chiefs!"

BEFORE committing himself in so grave an affair, however, Ras Gootama demanded to be shown this wonderful gun. He had never heard of such a thing. But he had heard enough of Ferengies not to be surprised at anything they might be able to manufacture. Even the telegraph or the radio would not have surprised him. For when a people have performed one single miraculous act, miracles are to be expected from them daily.

Cantwell led the way outside; he had foreseen this demand, and the light machine-gun was quickly unpacked from the mule. It was very simple. Cantwell put it together without trouble and filled the belt magazine.

"Now," he said to the interpreter, "tell him to clear the people away in front of that section of the stockade!"—pointing to a part of the palisade with no *tukuls* in the way.

Ras Gootama was examining the gun curiously. There was a smile of disbelief on his face. He was beginning to think that this white man was a big talker. For how could such a small, light affair perform all the wonders credited to it?

Cantwell adjusted the tripod, pulled back the action, crouched behind and sighted at a point on the ground short of the stockade; there dirt would fly up when the shots struck.

"Ready?"

Ras Gootama, smiling incredulously, nodded.

Br-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r!

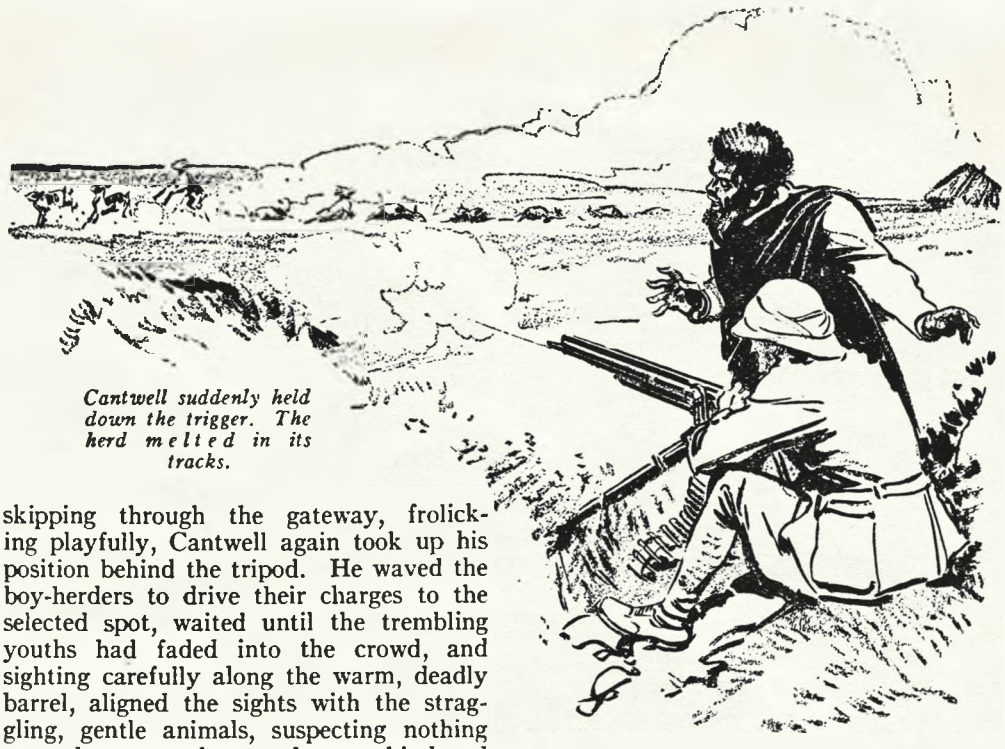
Cantwell played the lead back and forth along the ground like water from a hose. Spurts of dust leaped, the whine of bullets richocheting from the hard ground and tearing through the timbers of the stockade, filled the air. It was as if a nest of angry bees were catapulting through the air. The great throng scrambled further back, hastily, wonder and fear upon dark faces. This, surely, was the work of the *shaitan*. A subdued exclamation, long-drawn-out and expressing the deepest awe, issued from the crowd:

"Ay-ay-ay-ay-ay-ay-ay-ay-ay!"

Cantwell stopped after the first burst. To the dazed interpreter he spoke, crisply:

"Tell him to run in a herd of goats if he has any doubts about the killing power of this weapon!" Cantwell considered this a great idea, a masterpiece of salesmanship.

When a band of forty or fifty goats, after some delay, came scampering and



Cantwell suddenly held down the trigger. The herd melted in its tracks.

skipping through the gateway, frolicking playfully, Cantwell again took up his position behind the tripod. He waved the boy-herders to drive their charges to the selected spot, waited until the trembling youths had faded into the crowd, and sighting carefully along the warm, deadly barrel, aligned the sights with the straggling, gentle animals, suspecting nothing more dangerous than, perhaps, a kind and hearty meal. Cantwell suddenly held down the trigger. The herd melted in its tracks as the muzzle swung along a horizontal line. One or two wounded and struggling victims tried feebly to rise, but fell back. It was far and away the swiftest and most satisfactory slaughter that Ras Gootama had ever beheld, even in his happiest dream.

The marksman turned in his seat upon the ground, swinging to face Gootama. He surprised that proud chieftain, for once, in the undignified attitude of crouching, leaning forward, mouth open and eyes gleaming, the perfect picture of one who cannot believe his eyes—one who still doubts what his senses have told him are true beyond the shadow of a doubt. And there was, in that bearded face, also an expression which denoted the apex, the very height, of desire and eagerness to own that devilish instrument—at any price! In that backward glance Cantwell knew that he had his man; that ten, twenty, forty thousand black warriors would soon be at his disposal.

CHAPTER VII

CANTWELL dismounted the machine-gun. He appeared to be making ready to repack it upon the mule—but in reality he had no intention of taking the gun to camp or, in fact, of himself, returning to the caravan. Ras Gootama spoke hastily—this Ferengi with the little mechanical assassin must never leave the stronghold until that instrument of *shaitan* had been purchased, traded for or obtained in some other manner. In a long harangue, filled with flowery allusions to the greatness, the magnificence, the wealth, the power of his bosom friend, the chief of all Ferengies, Ras Gootama invited Cantwell to remain by his side—forever. His heart, he said, had been touched by a feeling of the most altruistic and disinterested love for the white man.

There was a shade more truth in this statement than Cantwell realized. The barbarian would have said as much anyway under the circumstances, no matter what his personal feelings might have been. But Gootama actually sensed between them a strong bond of sympathy. They were kindred spirits. Here was a Ferengi after his own heart; a strong man, a ruthless man, a man whom the effete Ferengi civilization had not ruined, had not even touched—in a word, a brother savage; and—he had the gun, the white man's invincible medicine!

With much ceremony Ras Gootama led the way into his big *tukul*. *Tej*—the national drink, made from fermented wild honey—was brought. Slaves filled cups of buffalo horn, invariably spilling some in

cupped palms and draining that first themselves as an assurance against poison, a regular custom at this village.

Ras Gootama was genial. Beside the Chief's real admiration for this white man, there was always in the forefront of his mind the pleasant picture of a herd of goats melting in their tracks, almost at the same instant, in the twinkling of an eye. The vague plans for a mammoth foray into the adjoining province of Tigre with the machine-gun as a quaint and exotic surprise for those simple villagers reacted upon his mind as a powerful stimulant.

UPON his happy idyll Cantwell broke in; he spoke sonorously:

"If Ras Gootama is not afraid to ally himself with me against these two *shiftas,* —these brigands who have led my daughter from her *tukul* in my own country, it is time to send the messenger to the warriors escorting their caravan. What is the decision of the great Ras Gootama? Will he accept afterward, as a present, the little steel dispenser of sudden death?"

The barbarian leaned toward his guest. His face was affability itself.

"It is a great honor to be the friend, the brother, of the chief of all Ferengies—a very great honor." He would see that his children told their children about it. In the minor matter of the little gun—now that his white brother had brought it to him, he could deny his brother nothing. The friend of his heart had but to state his desire, be it *zebanias* (warriors), slaves, cattle, horses, women or all of them—no sooner would they be asked than given. And no sooner would the great white Ras disclose his plans for the annihilation of the other caravan than those plans would be put into execution!

For the first time in many days Cantwell laughed. The sound had a hard, metallic ring, and reminded Gootama of the noise made by the entrails of the little gun when a certain part was pulled back preparatory to slaughter. Indeed, here was a man after his own heart.

"A messenger must be sent at once," Cantwell unconsciously assumed the dictatorial tone of leadership. "This messenger must instruct the commander of the escort to bring in the white woman *ahead* of the caravan. He should be able to do this without a fight, on the plea that it is a custom of Ras Gootama, and upon assurances of ample protection—an indication of the great friendship of the northern ruler. Or he can leave hostages. But he must do it somehow—by kidnaping the woman as a last resort. Once the white woman is safe at the stronghold, plans for wiping out the caravan can be arranged—a childishly simple chore with the aid of the little gun."

The messenger was brought, instructed minutely and made to repeat his orders time and again. He left the grass-roofed hut on the run.

"They are camped but a short way beyond the great *tukul,* the stone fort of the ancient Ferengies," Ras Gootama informed Cantwell, "and the woman will be here tomorrow—perhaps tonight."

Cantwell at last relaxed. All chance of failure, the one thing his spirit could not abide, had been definitely removed. Angus, sitting in his camp-chair before the green tent at the foot of the hill, could not interfere now—and would soon be a prisoner, anyway, as surely as a ring of spears and a host of warriors—or if it came right down to it, even rawhide packropes—could make a man a prisoner. Cantwell knew he had but to say the word, and Ras Gootama would issue the order to bring the Scot before him dead or alive, whichever was preferred. Cantwell decided there was no rush. He would attend to that little matter in good time.

In a saccharine and cloying speech Cantwell stated that he could not bear to be separated from his new brother, and so had made up his mind to send to camp for his things; his cot, bed, chair, the small trunk. He would take up his quarters in the *tukul* of Ras Gootama. And now that his daughter would soon be here also, he might decide to live with his brother for many days—perhaps a month—before setting out upon the long journey to his own country.

Ras Gootama was immensely pleased. The white chief could give him pointers in the operation of the machine-gun. He might even be persuaded to accompany the expedition to Tigre. Ras Gootama painted the proposed foray in attractive colors; there would be much satisfactory slaughter. And Gootama passed Cantwell a doubtful compliment by adding:

"Unlike most Ferengies, my brother does not counsel against such joyous amusements. He is a *man,* and that is why I have for him such high regard."

Cantwell actually contemplated that shocking picture of butchery without loathing. "If I were ten years younger," he mut-

tered under his breath. For it is true that civilized man can outsavage the savage, just as woman, capable of rising to greater heights than man, can by the same token sink to lower depths.

RAS GOOTAMA, heart overflowing with good will and generosity, ordered a great raw-meat feast to be prepared at once. Row upon row of narrow "tables" were erected, radiating from the dais like spokes of a wheel. They were made of bamboo poles lashed together with small vines and rawhide. When finished, they stood about two feet high, three or four in width and forty to fifty feet in length. The tops were covered with green leaves. The guests would sit cross-legged upon the ground at these tables.

In an incredibly short time the preparations had been completed. Ras Gootama proudly led the way to the raised platform, seated himself upon the divan, carried back again from its place in the *tukul,* and Cantwell was motioned to a seat beside the ruler of the northern highlands.

THE etiquette of such banquets was strict and well understood by the people. First the warriors of Ras Gootama's bodyguard, some two thousand, filed in and seated themselves at the long, low tables. When they had finished, the villagers would enter. Next would come the slaves. Only women would be barred. Spears and shields had disappeared, and the white *shamma*-clad lines waited quietly for the arrival of slaves working in pairs bearing quarters of raw meat, red and gory, slung on poles.

As the meat passed down the lines, each warrior in turn deftly cut a huge portion from the big chunks, fresh killed and dripping, which he then held in the left hand with fingers spread wide.

Other slaves followed with cups of various kinds; buffalo-horn, gourds, crude pottery and an occasional vessel hammered from metal. Following these came slaves with large earthen jars of *tej.* The amber-colored liquid was poured unceasingly, but in spite of the great quantities consumed, the warriors, much to Cantwell's surprise showed no sign of intoxication. The prodigious quantities of raw meat perhaps counteracted the effects of the *tej.* More slaves passed between the low tables distributing endless reams of flat, dark native bread. Bowls of hot pepper-sauce were placed at intervals upon the bamboo tables, and into these the bread was dipped.

A tall basket of plaited withes, piled high with bread and raw meat, was placed before Cantwell and Ras Gootama. When this was done, a dozen stalwarts hastily divested themselves of *shammas* and, tying the ends of these together into a long strip, so held the cloth screen that Gootama and Cantwell were invisible to the feasters squatting before them. The interpreter, whom Cantwell kept constantly at his back, explained:

"It is not good that the common people should see a great Ras eat. It is bad luck. It has been known for a long time in our country that the Evil Eye is veree strong w'ile a chief is eating."

Ras Gootama fell to, thoughtfully handing a sharp knife to Cantwell. But the white man only toyed with the raw beef. He was well aware that raw meat in the tropics is almost sure to carry the eggs of tapeworm; and Angus had informed him that the reason the caravan men once a month took a strong and debilitating dose of medicine prepared from the berries of a certain tree, was to rid themselves, as well as might be, of the insidious worm.

THE precious machine-gun, mounted upon its tripod and apparently ready for business, sat in state at the foot of the dais, between the squatting warriors and the divan. Cantwell had seen curious glances of awe and veneration cast in its direction by the feeding host. But now, while the chief ate, the gun was hidden from Cantwell's sight; the spreading *shammas,* close and thick, effectually concealed it.

As Ras Gootama ate, champing his food with gusto, Cantwell became aware that the buzz of talk formerly filling the air had ceased. He thought little about it and continued to toy with his food until Gootama, chewing a large hunk of flesh, sat back with a sigh and announced that he had finished. Instantly the surrounding *shammas* were rolled up; and there, waiting, stiff and straight as if on parade, stood Angus. And Cantwell knew that he had been waiting since the noise of conversation at the tables had ceased.

Angus cast not a glance at Ras Gootama. His eyes bored through Cantwell. He was unarmed, and there was not a trace of color in the set, determined face. Only the tight lips moved when he spoke:

"Just one word with you, Cantwell!" The voice was that of a captain of cavalry giving the orders for the day, clean-cut, concise, straight to the point. His stiff bearing and resolute expression were entirely impersonal. Cantwell knew what he was going to say almost word for word before he opened his mouth:

"You have sent for your things. Now that you intend to go through with your devilish plans, I can do no good here. Consider our connection terminated. You have your damned machine-gun and ammunition." Angus gave the weapon at his feet a light contemptuous kick—to the superstitious horror of the black throng. "The caravan is yours. My gun-bearer is my own. We leave your employ at once."

For the first time Angus took his eyes from the hard features of the white man and glanced at Ras Gootama. That potentate was staring straight into his face, and Angus saw in the black eyes—recognition. The thought flashed across Angus' mind: "I've seen that chief, somewhere—can he be a friend?" A bright flame of hope sprang in his breast—but only for an instant; and then came to him suddenly the recollection: a black crowd proceeding along the streets of Addis Ababa; a bearded chief sneering upon a mule; a flash of sunny hair beneath the brim of a helmet; a small, khaki-clad arm rising and bringing down a riding-crop across that face, once, twice!

BUT the face of the Scot betrayed no indication of recognition. From the intensity of the hatred on Ras Gootama's dark features Angus expected in the next breath to hear a low order—a muttered rumble from that beard—a short sentence in Amharic that would mean, for him, the knell of doom. The giant scimitar-bearing negroes behind Gootama would then eagerly leap—pleased and happy at the job. And Angus knew that, unarmed, he would have no more chance against those executioners than a babe. His mind worked like lightning; the machine-gun at his feet! In a flash he pictured himself seizing that weapon, swinging it to cover the crowd—but this pleasing picture faded in the same split second. Angus was, in regard to that destructive mechanism, hoist by his own petard.

For in what had seemed at the time a far-sighted piece of strategy,—while the encircling *shammas* concealed his actions,—he had disabled that deadly weapon. Stooping quickly, he had drawn back the latch and lifted the metal cover-plate with the point of a cartridge, removing the cover-pin and cover-pin spring. And to make sure, he had wrenched loose another small but important-looking gadget, hastily replacing the cover-plate. The gun was useless without those parts, and the little pieces of metal were in his pocket. There would be no possible chance of replacing them in time.

RAS GOOTAMA'S eyes burned, the pupils round and big like the eyes of a hunting leopard. Cantwell's ruthless chin was thrust forward, his features cold and unmoving as so much granite. This, thought Angus, was surely the end of the string. And then, standing straight, he thought of his boyhood in the highlands: the great hall at Gleneyre, and Cluny McPherson in kilt and tartan gravely saluting the impressive row of long-dead highland warriors in their ornate frames upon the wall. He thought of the doughty deeds of that valiant and chivalrous company. Ah! There was a chance that he too might arrange to go out in a manner that would meet even their critical approval. Angus spoke in Amharic directly to Ras Gootama:

"I see,"—bowing stiffly and speaking ironically, "that Your Highness has recognized me. I am the Ferengi who almost had the great pleasure of shooting you with your own gun in Addis Ababa—" Angus, in the pride of youth, was realizing a last thrill of satisfaction from his words. "I am sincerely sorry to have been robbed of that great pleasure. But perhaps"—bowing again, in the old grand manner—"Your Highness will condescend to meet me in single combat, a pleasing form of amusement, very sporting, but somewhat overindulged in by my ancestors. I shall be only too happy to face you with spear or scimitar, mounted or on foot, as your serene Excellency shall dictate." Here, Angus thought, was the place to cast the glove: and curiously, he felt a keen regret that he had no glove. Well, the challenge would have to stand as it was—

But even as he finished speaking, a commotion arose at the outer edge of the line of low tables. A tall runner, spear in hand, stumbled through. He prostrated himself at Ras Gootama's feet. He was in a state of exhaustion; his breath came and went in

A dozen warriors sprang upon Angus and bore him, fighting desperately, to the ground.

mighty wheezes; the sweat had long since dried upon his dark skin in white, salty encrustations, like the dried lather on an exhausted horse. Between sobs for breath, the man gasped out his information.

The two terrible Ferengi *shiftas*—brigands—with the caravan had refused to allow the white woman to be brought in peacefully. There had been a great argument. The leader of the escort, one of Ras Gootama's favorite chiefs, had attempted to steal the woman—according to his orders. One of the white-haired Ferengies had promptly shot him. Oh, many men had been killed then. Spears had flown; scimitars had flashed in the air; and the little guns, the short but fearful *tabanjahs* in the hands of the two Ferengies, had chattered like the barking of a herd of *jingaros*—baboons—when they see the *ambassa,* the lion, lying in the long grass. And always, above the war-cries of Ras Gootama's *zebanias,* had risen a weird chant, the battle-song of one of the white brigands; high, tremulous, invoking the aid of his gods.

Ras Gootama cut the man short:

"Was the woman killed with the rest—answer!"

The messenger touched his head to his chief's foot while Angus murmured:

"Sounds like a jolly good show. Wish I'd been there." Cantwell, listening eagerly, did not hear him.

The man rose fearfully. There was terror in his face—dread of his chief.

"The Ferengies were not killed, Master. Many of your warriors lie still in the waving grass. But the song of the white man, the chant to his god, protected them. They beat off the attackers and are now within the great stone *tukul*—the fortress upon the hill. There they have taken refuge. The place is surrounded by your warriors. None of the Ferengies, either the two terrible ones, or the woman, was seen to be wounded. But they cannot escape."

CANTWELL, while surprised to find Angus facing him, steady, tight-lipped, uncompromising, when the cloth screen had been removed, was not sufficiently disturbed to drop his complacent mask of calm assurance. With perfect self-control he had listened to the somewhat stilted and formal remarks of the younger man. "An Old World method of telling an employer to go to hell," he had thought, with some amusement, a half smile, crooked and disfiguring, changed his patrician face into the semblance of a satyr's deformed and ugly visage.

But when Angus had directed his gaze and then his conversation to Ras Gootama, Cantwell had been perplexed at the inter-

preter's hasty translation of the ironical and very youthful speech. He knew nothing of that encounter in Addis Ababa, for Angus was exceedingly close-mouthed about his own affairs, especially those that might reflect credit upon himself. Cantwell could not account for the young man's precariously hostile attitude toward the powerful chief in his own stronghold, surrounded by his vassals and retainers. But Cantwell had soon realized, with a feeling of triumph, that Angus was unconsciously playing directly into his hands: "If he continues far in this vein," Cantwell had thought, "the barbarian ruler will conveniently take over the job of arranging for his demise. Enough rope, and he'll hang himself!" And so, with pleasurable anticipation, Cantwell had listened silently.

But at the report of the messenger, Ras Gootama sprang from the gaudy divan. The pole floor of the platform shook beneath the sudden shock of his bare feet. The black crowd was visibly awed by the savage rage that reverberated in the deep voice:

"*Mindinoo!*" (What's this!) And in a series of Amharic gutturals he lashed the late banqueteers.

"Spears! Shields! What are you delaying here for? We'll wipe those Ferengi *shiftas* from the face of the earth! *Ferass!*" (My horse) "*Tolo, tolo!*" (Quick) And he bounded from the platform, was on the point of passing Angus, remembered, and stopped:

"Bind this man! Guard him until I return! If he tries to escape, spear him!" A dozen warriors sprang upon Angus and bore him, fighting desperately, to the ground. In a few swift seconds he was bound hand and foot with knotted *shammas*. Men yelled, whooped, and a concerted rush was made past the tables in the direction of the straw huts for arms. Cantwell, shouting, got the Chief's ear. Hurriedly he directed the interpreter:

"Tell him I need two men to carry the machine-gun and ammunition. Quick!"

Ras Gootama, in his towering rage, had forgotten that implement of *shaitan*. He stopped, turned, retraced his steps. One of the two giant Shankallas at his master's heels lifted the gun; the other seized the wooden ammunition box. Ras Gootama was himself again. He glanced at Angus lying bound, disposed a half-kick, half-stamp with bare foot upon that defenseless body, turned, grinning mirthlessly, to Cantwell:

"When we return with the *shiftas*—" he said meaningly, with outthrust chin toward the bound victim; and then passed on, followed by the two enormous blacks with their burdens. Cantwell paused. Leaning over, he addressed Angus:

"Sorry to see so promising a young man get himself into such a mess!" The tones dripped sarcasm as Cantwell bent lower: "Seems to me I told you that I always get what I want, regardless of cost, money, or —blood!" The last word was literally spat out.

"Pleasant fellow," Angus returned with cheerful sarcasm. "Most enjoyable acquaintance, ours. Hope to see you soon again—over the gun-sights. Cheerio!"

CANTWELL swung round on his heel and hurried after Ras Gootama and the machine-gun. He was perfectly satisfied, secure in the belief that Angus could do no harm left here bound and under guard. Cantwell himself would appropriate his two guns, and Ras Gootama could be depended upon to do the rest—as soon as the pressing business at hand had been disposed of. The other caravan, driven into the old fortress, was bottled up. They could hold out no more than a few days, at most. Lack of food, water or ammunition would whip them if nothing else. Then he could dictate terms—his own terms. He would force Mary Leonora to give herself up—on the promise that the caravan would be spared. After that what difference did it make to him if the warriors of Ras Gootama surrounded and butchered them in spite of any pledge, treaty or such bosh that might have been agreed to? This was a one-man country. It had never known any law but the booming voice of its chief, and that one man was his bosom friend; besides, Cantwell alone of all Gootama's forces, could operate the machine gun. In this game he held all the trumps, a perfect hand. And he flattered himself that he had, upon occasion, made even a poor hand win. It would be too easy to be interesting, from the standpoint of the game itself. But in this affair, the stake was what he wanted, and the sooner and easier Mary Leonora was broken to his will, the better.

The concluding installment of this unique novel is easily the most engrossing of all. Watch for it in the next, the August, issue.

Out we come, the steer buckin' and bawlin', me on top of him screamin' like a treed panther.

Bill Acts Like a Lady

By BUD LA MAR

The joyous tale of a rodeo rider who undertook to impersonate a cow-girl—by the author of "Scandalous Bill to the Reskue."

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

THE trouble with this here Wild West show business is that some *hombres* connected with it are gifted with too darn much edikation. Now you take this here ramblin' outfit entitled the D Z Ranch Show, with which I was connected in the capacity of bronk-rider; there is not the shadow of a doubt in my mind that it would be better off if somebody would, accidentally, in an offhand manner, drop a fist full of prairie-dog poison in Dandy Barnes' coffee. Dandy Barnes is no cowboy. He is not one of the rough-neck crew that sets up and tears down. He is an advance agent and publicity man, and I am in a place to state that if fancy idears was worth a dollar apiece, John D. would have to take a back seat.

Nobody on the show is safe from the galoot's meddlin' ways and locoed advertisement schemes—not even Miss Loulou Delmont, the beautiful lady buckin'-horse rider. In fact I am sure that it was him who caused her to quit and enter matrimony with a farmin' gentleman.

Miss Delmont was featured heavy on that there opera. Not because she done a lot, but because what she done needed no finishin' touches whatever. All her contract called for her to do was to ride one bronk at every performance. We had a nice little spotted pony that she used for the occasion which I don't hardly believe he could of bucked off a loose saddle, but he made a good show and satisfied the public. Anyway they never watched him—not so long as she was on him, smilin' at the stands. She could of rid a goat and got by with it; she was that kind of a girl. Short brown hair, all mussed up in the most attractive way you ever see, eyes, nose, mouth—well, I will not attempt a description. I will just remark in passin' that every male on the show, down to old Hot Dog Harry, the cook (the dummed old toothless billy-goat!) was crazy to have her change her title to Missus. Yeah, me too.

Howsomever, she don't show no more preference for the good-lookin' trick ridin' kid than for the Wild Man of Borneo. We're all her friends but no more. To an earnest proposal from me, she just remarks with a laugh: "Bill, I will not marry a

driftin' cowboy. When I picks me a man, he will be the proud owner of a safely anchored domicile. And when the time comes, I will faithfully promise to never cast an eye on a tent, only possibly in a nightmare."

What can a man say to an argument like that? That he'd quit ramblin' and settle down? Sure, he could say that and maybe mean it at the time. But when spring come and the grass began to show green and he got to thinkin' about places he'd like to see—where would he be then?

SOMETIME in the summer, we reach the far outlyin' unexplored sections of Iowa. Crops look good and the people don't mind turnin' loose from a few nickels to see us do our stuff. Business is fair, but we all know that the minute Miss Loulou turns in her resignation, the show is on the ge-fritz until we can blossom out with a new female wild-horse rider, and they aint to be found in that neck of the woods where a horse and a saddle is plumb strangers to each other. We watch that girl like a bunch of hawks. She takes a likin' to a young fellow from Decorah, and we finds out about it. We form a vigilance committee and convince the young man that Loulou is not the girl for him.

The next morning, Charley Bell, the salty peeler from Montana, makes the follwin' statement: "Romance busters! By gad, I feels like a drownded skunk. That young fellow was all right; he would of give Loulou a good home, and that's a damn' sight more than any of you fallen arches can do, myself included! And if she finds out what we did to the choice of her heart, what she'll do to us will be nobody's private business! It'll be somethin' to class along with the battle of Waterloo and Custer's last stand, with us bozos on the massacreed side. From now on, she can love, honor and raise Cain with my most sincere blessings. Don't call on me for any more midnight hazin'."

We don't see any more of the native son while we play that particular locality, and considerin' Loulou's friendly attitude, we figure she has not learned of our interference. Just the same, movin' day don't come too soon to suit us. In fact we're all right anxious to drift along. The next spot is a pretty good town, and Dandy Barnes, the publicity man, has several thousand colored bills printed advertisin' Miss Loulou Delmont, "The world's champion lady bronk-rider." She has received a whole lot of attention hereabouts, and the whole territory is crazy about her. The rest of the show just trails along behind her, attractin' about as much notice as a tick in a herd of sheep. Not being jealous-hearted, we don't mind that as long as our wages are received regular and we enjoy three meals a day.

But openin' day in the new town brings forth developments of an alarmin' nature. The bunch of us is eatin' in the cook tent when Lucky Jack, the owner, and Dandy Barnes, bust into the peaceful scene lookin' like orphan sheep pursued by a flock of wolves.

"Oh, Lord!" moans Jack, rollin' his eyes around in a sorrowful expression, like some rube had short-changed him or something. "Oh, Lord!" He sits down on a chair and begins rockin' back and forth wringin' his hands. "She's gone, boys, she's gone! Thousands of people waitin' to see her, and she's gone!"

We have all stopped eatin', regardin' Jack and not knowin' what to make of it.

"Who's gone?" demands Texas Cotton. "Quit your lamentin' and let us know who in hell has went and upset your stomick!"

"Shet up!" says Jack, forgettin' to rock for a minute. "You ongrateful buzzard! Loulou's gone, that's who! Now laugh, you pink-eyed albino, and I'll scatter your insides all over the State of Iowa!"

Dandy is flutterin' around like a horsefly with the itch. He looks pale and swallows three glasses of water without catchin' his breath. "Yeah, she's flew the coop," says he. "She left this behind." And he hands us a note which Cola Joe reads aloud. It reads as follows:

"Good-by, you dish-faced comedians. Next time you see me within a mile of your opera of punkin rollers, you'll wonder who is the old woman hangin' to the arm of the man with the long white whiskers. Which same will be the gentleman that you so kindly tried to murder the other night. Hopin' all your children turn out to be trick ropers. Loulou Delmont."

The silence that followed the readin' of this highly flatterin' epistle was only broken by the buzzin' of flies expressin' their opinion of Hot Dog Harry's cookin'. A hell of a note! That's what it was and we all fell to discussin' the situation in a heated manner. The pow-wow was goin' on full blast when Dandy Barnes hit the table a resoundin' whack and yelled above the

noise: "Hold everything, you bowlegged rannies! I've got it! Trust old Dandy to find a way out of a tight pinch. What would the world do if it wasn't illuminated by the intelligence of a chosen few? What for instance would you do, Sam? Or you Jack? What—"

"Shet up!" yells old Jack, flinging his hat on the ground. "Shet up, you illuminated talkin'-machine. Shet up, daggone you—or say something!"

"Bill," Dandy says timid-like, "don't drink too much of that stuff—you can't act like a lady, loaded full of that."

Dandy lit a cigarette in a careless manner and glanced around our expectant faces till his eyes rested on me. He considered me for a minute and said in an oily tone of voice: "Bill there would make a stunning lady bronk-rider!"

THE silence followin' that remark was death-like. The flies even quit buzzin' and settled down on the grub. Every eye was fixed on me. I gasped a couple of times, then I busted loose.

"If I thought you meant that, you pore misfit, sore-backed, louse-ridden missin' link," says I. "If you could just convince me that you meant it," I spit out at him. "I would hamstring you, dig your eyes out and show 'em to you, wrap both your legs around your chicken neck and fling your busted carcass against a stone wall till what brains you've got was splattered all over a forty-acre field! And by golly, that would only be a beginnin'! The rest would be too ghastly and horrible to tell in company."

"No, you wouldn't!" pipes Lucky Jack. Aint I to be considered at all in this? Who's to lose from that locoed female a-leavin' the show? Answer me that, you brainless, pin-headed fool! No, you can't. Shet up, then! If Dandy works out somethin' worth takin' up, that's what we'll do if I have to blow hell out of everybody on this show! Go ahead, Dandy, rave on."

Dandy throwed his cigarette down and began explainin'. "Boys," says he. "We just as well look at this thing from a business standpoint. If we open up this afternoon without a lady buckin'-horse rider, we're sunk. I've advertised one all over the country and the rest of the show is only background. I can get another girl in a week's time, but until then we're up a stump. And we can't afford to turn down the crowds that's already flockin' this way. Bill, I don't mean to insult you, but you're smaller than the rest of the boys and I think I can get you fixed up so that your own mother would not know you, only we'll have to work fast. Will you do it? You wouldn't turn us down in a case like that, would you?"

"You're dum right he wont!" puts in old Jack.

I figured out Dandy's proposition, and it didn't look so unreasonable. I could see where I'd have a lot of fun. Actin' lady-like would be a novel experience. Thinkin' of it caused me to grin. "By golly," says I, "I'll do it! But where will you get clothes for me?"

"Never mind," answers Dandy. "If you're willin', come on with me. We'll have to hurry." Him and me rushed out of the tent, the boys yellin' after me: "Good-by, darling!" and "Pull your skirts down, you're a big girl now!" and other sarcastic remarks not at all flatterin'.

We walked off the lot and Dandy hailed a taxi. "Hotel Morrison," he said to the driver. "And step on 'er!" We sailed

through the city and reached the hotel. I was pushed into an elevator, shoved out of it and down a long hall. Dandy knocked at a door and a fluffy-headed blonde lady with a Fourth of July complexion let us in.

"Meet my cowboy friend, Bill," says Dandy. "Bill, this is Miss Jane Lamoureux, the leadin' lady of the 'Fast Steppers,' the company playin' at the Palace, downtown."

"So happy, dontcha know!" exclaims the lady, placin' one hand on her hip and throwin' said member clear out of joint. "Charmin' of you, Dandy. A real cowboy! Yes? What? You know I'm awful glad to meetcha! Our revue consists of a cowboy number where the girls wear ridin' skirts and what-nots. Very stunnin'."

"That's why we're here," puts in Dandy. "We're in an awful fix, Jane, and you must help us out." He explains the situation and the lady has a good laugh over it. Apart from her funny line of talk and all her airs, you can see she's a good sport and a trouper.

"Why," she laughs. "This is goin' to be a knock-out! A wow, dontcha know! I must tell the girls about this." And she dances out, like the floor was hot or she was on springs or something. Pretty soon a whole flock of females drift in.

MISS JANE sits me down on a chair facin' a window and she gets out a box full of little do-funnies and pencils of different colors. She smears grease all over my face, paints my eyebrows and otherwise plumb spoils my manly lookin' features. My mouth is also painted bright red and the shape of it is changed here and there. My cheeks acquire a rosy color and the girls keep exclaimin' as the transformation takes place: "Isn't he swell!" "Perfectly darling! A born female impersonator!"

Think of it! Me, old Bill Slocum! A man who has rid Sundown, and Dakota Chief and other tough bronks. It is almost too much to bear! But I am greatly outnumbered and I just sweat under the paint and grit my teeth, wishin' I was out in the sunlight and not a fence in sight.

When the paintin' process is over a girl hands Miss Jane a nice big black wig and she fits it over my head very careful. "Now take a look at yourself," says she and she holds a mirror in front of me. Did I look good? You dum betcha! By golly, I was surprised. You could never tell it from lookin' at me now, but I sure made a stunnin'-lookin' flapper in that outfit. Don't it beat hell what a little paint and powder'll do to some people's faces!

Finally, they handed me a pair of ridin' skirts, some silk stockin's and a sort of shirt without any tails on it. I went into the next room and got all dressed up. There was only one detail that didn't fit in and that was the footgear. Of course I had to wear my own and even if they was nice fancy boots, they looked a little large and clumsy for lady's boots. There was nothing I could do about that. I put on my hat over the wig and Dandy and me left the hotel. We told the girls good-by and that we'd return the outfit later. They said they was goin' out to see me perform that afternoon. I was wishin' they wouldn't. In fact I did not crave an audience of any kind.

"We don't need to rush back to the grounds," says Dandy. "We got an hour before grand entry. We'll take an open taxi and ride around town; it's good advertisement."

Maybe it was good advertisement, but after a couple of blocks of slow drivin', with people castin' admirin' glances at me, I began to feel like stampedin' out of sight and I am sure I did not need all that red paint on my face. Beside the thoughts of facin' the boys rigged in that locoed unheard-of outfit started to work on me and I craved fresh air, plenty of it. Finally I got pretty panicky and began lookin' around wild-eyed for a way of escape.

Dandy noticed the change on me and he seemed worried. "Listen," says he. "Aint no use of you feelin' bad about this. The boys wont dare razz you; they got to treat you like a lady or the crowd'll catch on and tear things up. All you'll have to do is to ride old Spots and you can do it with a mane holt and no saddle."

That was another thing! They could dress me up in female clothing, but, by the great sufferin' baldheaded hootnanny, they could not make me ride that crowbait of a knotheaded old maid's pet! They could maybe strap my dead body on him but that would be the only way to get me there.

"I'll tell you," says Dandy. "Let's get a drink, maybe that would help you."

"That's the only smart idear you ever had in your whole worthless life," says I in answer. "Promote, you bob-tailed flush and promote plenty!" He saw I meant it and done as he was told. It did help a lot. Made me feel mellow and not at all

Shucks, I've lost my confidence—I am now clawin' for any kind of a holt on that slippery, twistin' bunch of explodin' dynamite!

nervous like I was, and as we drove slowly back toward the show grounds, I contemplated his slender, well-dressed form thoughtful-like and said: "Dandy, you're in a hell of a fix, if you only knew it."

He looked surprised. "What makes you think that?"

"Well," says I, "just consider a minute." There I stopped talkin' and took a long-drawn-out drink. "Facin' you, Dandy, is a man which thinks no more of human life than a savage tiger. Maybe less. You have succeeded in gettin' that man into an uncommon situation which might turn out disastrous. Have you give a thought, Dandy, to what will happen to you if everything don't go accordin' to schedule?"

He looks still more surprised and gulped a couple of times. I have a suspicion he was a little bit scared. Dandy was a hustler, but in the more dangerous fields of endeavor he was a flop. All us boys knew it and I was only playin' with him on account I thought he should be made to pay for all his darned locoed schemes.

"Bill," says he timid-like. "Don't drink too much of that stuff. It's pretty powerful. You can't act like a lady loaded full of that."

"You don't say!" I exclaims. "I can act like a lady climbin' a bob-wire fence with a wildcat under each arm! Who says I can't is a liar!"

Well sir, that shut him up and we arrived at the ground where a big flock of folks was millin' around the bally platform, waitin' anxious for the gates to open. The boys was some astonished at seein' me lookin' so pert in this camouflage and old Lucky Jack was downright pleased at my appearance. "They'll never know the difference," says he. "What do we want with high-priced temperamental lady riders when we can fake 'em just as good or better?"

He did not know it, but I was also gettin' temperamental. I walked into the sleepin' tent carryin' my bottle.

When the band struck the first notes of the grand entry march, I felt like a visitin' queen a-horseback. I sallied into the arena, in front of the boys, smilin' and wavin' at the people from the back of my saddle horse. They cheered with great gusto, which was very pleasin.' We all lined up facin' the stands, the band stopped and Lucky Jack rode out in front and made his announcement with the usual line of bunk:

"Ladies and gentlemen! Before you stands the greatest array of saddle artists ever brought together to place before an audience the sports of the Western cowboy as practiced on the range. These fearless cowboys will ride the man-hatin' outlaws now imprisoned in the strong wooden pens in front of you. These horses, folks, are hopeless for general ridin' and workin' pur-

poses. They would get the best of lesser men and kill them without a show of mercy! First I want to interdooce to you that fearless queen of the range whom you will see master an outlaw buckin' horse. Miss Loulou Delmont!"

The band went *"Brrrrrooom!"* and I loped out and waved my hat, settin' my saddle-horse on his rump, two feet from the fence. The crowd cheered and shook handkerchiefs and I rode back to the chutes.

"Don't be so wild, you skinny pelican!" whispers Jack as I rides past him. "Who ever heard of a woman upendin' a saddle-horse just to pass the time away!"

I didn't care a hoot for his ridin' me. If I had to be a lady, I was goin' to be one accordin' to my own notions and idears. Not no apin' female. I was goin' to be original!

A big black steer was drove into the chute and a surcingle cinched on him. Accordin' to the program, it was the clown's steer. We allus used that for an openin' number on account it was sure to draw a laugh. And if you can make a crowd laugh at the beginning of a performance, they're with you till the end. But I saw where I could improve that number and just as Hank Barnett was fixin' to climb over the chute to mount his ox, I beat him to it, grabbed the hand-holds and yelled, "Turn him out!"

The chute men jerked the gates open, and out we come, the steer buckin' and bawlin', and me on top of him screamin' like a treed panther and kickin' him in the neck every jump. Nobody hereabouts had ever seen such a wild woman in action. The fringes on the buckskin skirts swooshed and fluttered and the hair of my black wig streamed back in the wind. The old steer never got such a ridin' in his whole life, and aimin' to satisfy, he turned on all he had, which was plenty. Me and him took a round trip around the arena, tearin' the earth as we went. Back in front of the stands, I turned loose and jumped off, run a few steps to keep from fallin', throwed both hands up and let out a blood-curdlin' yell. The spectators could hardly be held in check. They had come to see a cowgirl do her stuff and they was gettin' more for their money than their wildest dreams had caused them to hope for. Accordin' to the demonstration they put on, this was a highly pleasin' form of entertainment and I aimed to give 'em more of it.

LUCKY JACK was pleased, in a way, but also he was worried. He grabbed me by the arm as I was headin' back to the chutes. "You done enough for now," says he. "Go sit down somewhere in plain sight and just look sweet. You close the show with a saddle bronk and if everything works out good, we'll pack 'em in here tonight and clean up."

"All right," says I. "But if you aim for me to stomp that Spot horse, you're out of luck. I want Sod-Buster."

Jack looked thoughtful for a minute, then he says: "You can have him, but I claim you're a dum fool!" and he rides off to look after the rest of the performance.

I will here drop a few words havin' to do with Sod-Buster. He was a big raw-boned, fiddle-faced bay—the slickest proposition this side of Cheyenne. Eight years of show life and he had never refused to buck once. A back-breakin', hard-hittin' hell-bender and as full of tricks as a Sioux Injun. There was a standin' state of warfare between me and that rip-snorter. To date, we had fought it out four different times; I stuck him twice and he bucked me off twice. This would be the rub and if I rid him rigged out in this outfit, he could never again hold up his head in the company of sure-enough buckin' horses.

I TOOK a seat by the corrals and waited for my turn, devisin' ways and means to ride the old hellion and make him look cheap. The boys rode their bronks and bulldogged steers. The trick riders and ropers spread their stuff. Sidney Potts, the Australian whip-cracker and knife-thrower, stuck his axes and cleavers all around the graceful form of his better half and as the performance drawed to a close, I developed a sinkin' feelin' in the pit of my stomach. I did not feel as light-headed and brave as I did an hour before. Dandy Barnes' bug juice had wore off and left me feelin' limp and dejected.

Ridin' Sod-Buster in a Little Red Ridin' Hood outfit was goin' to be no picnic. Maybe the clothes don't make the man, but I never saw an opera warbler dressed in a tin suit singin' Mammy songs and doin' a good job of it. Howsomever, it was too late to back out and when the outlaw was led out to be saddled, I drug my boot-heels acrost the arena, feelin' not at all happy and prayin' for a sudden cloudburst to stop the proceedin's.

Good gosh, that horse looked big, and

mean, and right anxious to get into action. He stood still while the saddle was cinched. The old bronk was not to be fooled into fightin' his head or otherwise wastin' his strength. He looked at me from the corner of one of his sunken eyes, where the blindfold had slipped a little and I am sure he recognized me under all that paint and crazy raiments.

I grasped a stirrup, inserted my left foot in it, got holt of the horn and swung on, bein' careful not to make any sideway pulls.

Lucky Jack made his announcement and give it to 'em steamin' hot. They took it bleary-eyed and open mouthed, hypnotized by excitement and expectancy.

Texas Cotton put my right foot in the stirrup and grinned: "Two to one you don't, you sweet little daffodil!" I adjusted my rein and grunted between clenched teeth: "Go to hell; I aint bettin'." He give a light tap on my boot-top and backed away to a safer location, smilin' his silly grin.

CHARLEY BELL, who is earin' down and snubbin' from a saddle-horse for me, looks up and demands to know if I am ever goin' to be ready. "Just a minute," I answers. And I screw down tighter, takin' a last look at the crowd. The faces look dim and distant. I can feel the horse under me bunchin' his muscles for the first earth jarrin' leap. Sod-Buster! He sure earned that name.

"Let him go, Charley!" And I humps my back to take the first shock. The snubbin' rope slides loose, the blindfold falls to the ground and Charley rides off, givin' us a clear field. Hostilities is on immediately. Lord, but that horse can buck! And me with clumsy ridin' skirts, long black hair blowin' all over my face and a dejected feelin'!

Bang! My backbone absorbs the first shock and my hat is jerked off. Bang! The wig slides sideways, blindin' me complete. Shucks, I've lost my confidence; I know I can't ride him now. Bang! Good-by, wig! My own natural hair is fannin' the wind and it's red, not black. Did I catch a gasp of surprise from the crowd? Well, maybe. They would naturally be astonished at that but bein' on the receivin' end of the doggondest poundin'-up I ever got in my life, I can't be bothered with slight details like that. I am now clawin' for any kind of a holt on that slippery, twistin' bunch of explodin' dynamite.

It wont be long now. . . . . I am standin' on my head, almost, and nobody can ride a bronk in that position. Off to one side. A wild kick over my head from my late mount. Missed me about two inches! Hittin' the earth was hard, but I am thankful for the feel of solid ground under me.

The silence is heavy with the promise of a sudden storm. Mutterin's begin driftin' down from the stands; they are full of threats. But Lucky Jack is a showman; he takes off his hat and announces the show over, then he gives the band a signal, and they bust out in a lively march, every man of 'em playin' just as loud as he can without bustin' his instrument. There is a few cries of "Fake!" but they are hushed up by the ear-splittin' music. The mob is still filin' out and gatherin' out in front when Jack gives the word to tear down. We're movin'. Cowboys join with roughnecks in the work. The big teams are hitched to the wagons and in less time than it takes to tell it we are foggin' down the road. There will be no show for two or three days, no unloadin' until we're clear out of that part of the country.

AS for me, I am conductin' a search for an *hombre* named Dandy Barnes. I jumps from wagon to wagon, liftin' piles of canvas, openin' trunks and even lookin' for him in the cage of Jasper, the pet grizzly bear. Aint no use; the ornery smart Aleck has faded, changed himself into a breath of fresh air.

I hunts up Lucky Jack and demands what wages I have comin'. The old boy sees it's no use askin' me to stay. He pays off. From then on until we reach the next town, I strolls from place to place, lookin' for somebody to just smile at me. My eyes is blood-shot and I am heeled. Why don't somebody laugh? Was you ever in a cold rage, Mister, when you crave action? Killin' is easy then. But the boys are too smart to accommodate me. They know I'll cool off and I guess they also know I had enough to ruffle up my feathers.

You never see such polite people. "Would you care for a cigarette? Hot, wasn't it? Wasn't that fine-lookin' corn acrost the road?" We reached the next town and I drug my saddle off. Later, I bought a long green ticket.

But listen, Mister, promotin' gents with locoed idears aint safe breathin' the same air with me. I can smell 'em a mile away!

Free Lances in Diplomacy

By CLARENCE HERBERT NEW

Illustrations by William Molt

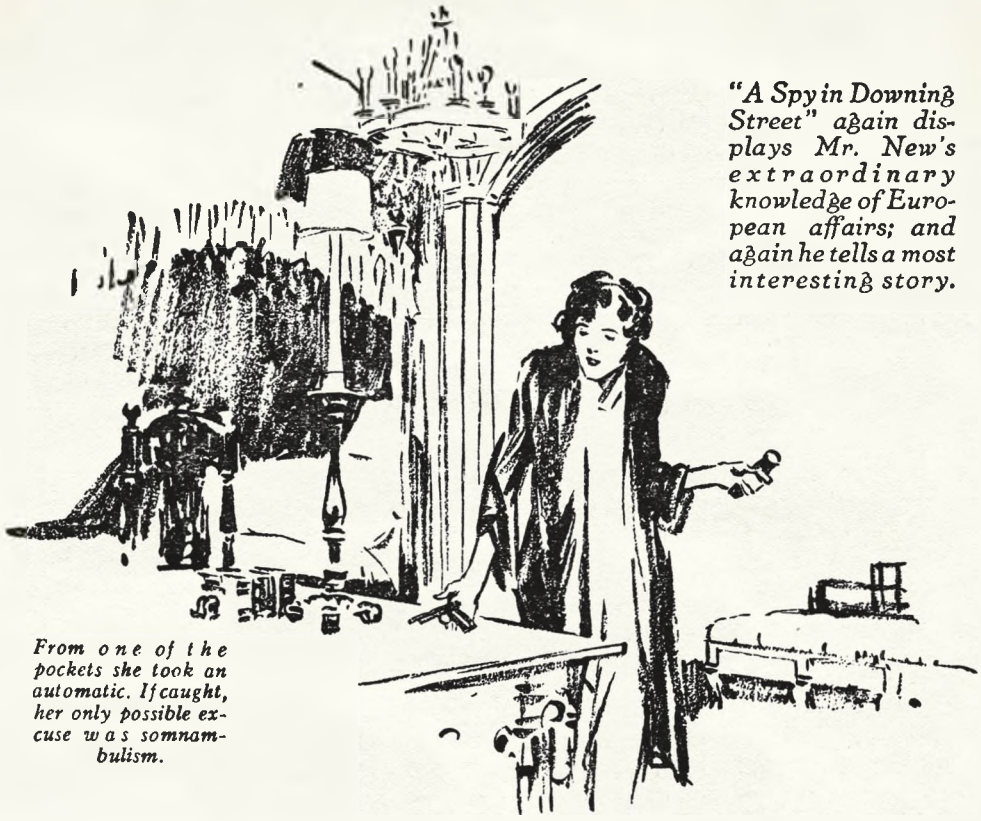
THE week-end house-party at Windsor was more limited in number than one usually found when accepting one of the royal invitations—and for that reason considerably more intimate. There were, in fact, only the half-dozen most influential men of the Conservative party, with their wives and daughters or nieces. After dinner in the smaller room in the Prince of Wales Tower, the party had adjourned to the Green Drawing-room for cards, until Their Majesties retired to their private apartments, shortly after eleven. The Earl and Countess of Dyvnaint were lodged in the suite usually assigned them in the Victoria Tower, with Earl Lammerford and Baron Abdool Mohammed on the floor above them. From the private corridor of the south or guests' wing, there were doors opening into the Long Gallery and a smaller door in the seventeenth century walls of the Victoria Tower permitting access to a narrow corridor of the royal suite when the steel grille on the inside of it happened to be unlocked.

Waiting but fifteen minutes or so after reaching his own suite, the Earl knocked upon this little door, which was nearest his own. Being admitted by His Majesty's secretary, he went through a narrow passage in the walls and into a study lined with books. As the evening was chilly, a cheerful fire of cannel coal burned in the open grate. Behind a desk near the fire a gentleman in court costume looked up with a smile as he came in and motioned toward a large chair upholstered in pigskin near by. This gentleman was slightly under medium height, wore a dark Vandyke beard much streaked with gray. His eyelids drooped a little, but when open displayed eyes with a humorous twinkle in them.

"Sit down, Trevor—the cigars and glasses are at your elbow. Doubtless you will have surmised why this private conference was suggested. Gladwin's cabinet is riding for a fall—not because he hasn't been as good a premier as one should expect in the circumstances, but more from the fact that he selected his associates with the coalition idea very strongly in mind and now discovers that the more radical of their own followers are bolting them—forming rather more diffic'lt combinations to get on with at all. This situation he might get around by trimming, somewhat, under ordin'ry conditions—but appearances indicate an approaching crisis in Eastern Europe, and his cabinet is not closely enough held together to handle both questions. Obviously, then, his government must resign very shortly. Which brings us to the immediate necessity of having another cabinet in readiness to succeed this one—a ministry of strong men whose ideas are sufficiently in accord to permit of their working solidly together. You understand the whole situation, of course, and a great deal more which doesn't appear upon the surface. Now—will you get together such a cabinet—and head it?"

"This question has come up twice before, sir—the objections, today, are still the same. I have widely varying commercial interests scattered all over the globe, necessitating frequent journeys to near or very remote cities. As a cabinet minister, I would be tied down in London altogether too closely to permit of proper attention to my foreign affairs. And there are, as you know, other matters—"

"I was about to mention them. The only knowledge we've ever had of your activities under the rose have been in the way of results—sweeping and exceedingly valuable effects. Such reward as the Crown could give you for this work has been given—inadequately, I admit, but there is more to come. Let us consider those services. No government knows just how you have produced the results—it is better that none should know; but there's one feature be-



"A Spy in Downing Street" again displays Mr. New's extraordinary knowledge of European affairs; and again he tells a most interesting story.

From one of the pockets she took an automatic. If caught, her only possible excuse was somnambulism.

yond argum'nt: You and your associates have worked at the risk of your lives, every moment—must have had some paralyzing experiences which one would prefer not going through. You've been doing that for upward of twenty years—today we are neither of us young men. We have earned the repose of a quieter and far safer life. In the cabinet you would have abundant opportunity for directing secret diplomacy in your own most effective way through the Foreign Office without actually doing the work yourself. We come now to the point of necessary absence upon your own affairs. Some day you'll not be able to do all this traveling; you'll delegate most of it to trusted subordinates. Why not start something of the sort now, while your brain is still active enough to direct effectively at long range?"

"H-m-m—your argum'nts are quite to the point, sir—in fact, I've been looking ahead a bit to the time when I shall be forced by bodily infirmities to do as you say—though my physician is of the opinion that I shall be perfectly fit for many years yet, he may be a trifle too much of an optimist. Suppose I go over your suggestions with the Countess and my two most intimate friends—possibly reaching some decision by tomorrow evening? There is one point which I fancy we should avoid for a good many reasons—too much limelight, too much lessening of the secret influence which I think I have in many quarters: I should not accept the premiership. The more you think it over, sir, the more you will see why. Suppose, however, that I could persuade some such man as John Craithness to accept it—upon the understanding that he and I work entirely in accord as to general policies and the selection of other ministers—any reasonable objection upon my part to be final. Craithness respects himself—means to have others respect him also. It is a question whether he would be willing to act with me if there were any tacit understanding that I was his superior in office. Yet we are close friends; he would serve with me sooner than with anyone else, and I fancy he might see excellent points in my retaining the veto power. Between us, we're fairly sure to fill up the cabinet slate with men of similar kidney. Some such portfolio as Chancellor of the Exchequer or Privy Seal would give me a certain amount of leeway in occasional necessary absences, yet would

place me on the Government Bench if there were need for me to answer any question on the floor of the House."

"That seems to me a very workable suggestion, Trevor—should produce a far stronger cabinet than any of the recent ones. If you are able to arrange your affairs and carry it out, I shall consider the country very much in luck. You are known in every corner of the globe as a man of affairs, exceedingly popular from your own personality. Aye—your name alone would strengthen any cabinet. Very good! You will see me, then, tomorrow evening about this time, and advise me as to what decision you've reached. Might ride through the Great Park with Craithness in the morning—capital opportunity for threshing out the matter. What?"

UPON returning to the south wing, Trevor went up to the suite occupied by Earl Lammerford and Baron Abdool Mohammed, and told them of the proposition which had been made to him, outlining the difficulties in the way of his acceptance—which didn't appear to strike them quite as forcibly. Lammerford explained why:

"We've been risking our lives and fortunes for the last twenty years in doing what it seemed there was nobody else with just the right sort of ability to carry out. With the exception of Nan, we're getting to middle age—have earned the right to a less dangerous sort of life. We are men of ripe experience who should be exceptionally valuable in Parliam'nt. There are men in the Foreign Office who need but our experienced suggestions to make them very nearly as efficient as we've been. With a Foreign Secretary who would place such men under our orders, it seems to me that the combination should be effectively workable."

"Aye—but occasions will come up when it will be safer for the Crown if one or all of us handle the matter personally—which might mean absence from London for weeks or even a month or two, and our own personal affairs will necessitate occasional absences."

"Even so, if two or three of us are within a few hours of London while Parliament is sitting, it's a simple enough matter for one of the lot to look after the absent chap's duties, one way or another—not?"

"Oh, my word, Lammy! You'd go as far as that? Eh? What a whale of a sell upon Parliam'nt an' the country! An' yet —it *might* be done—with so little risk that it's negligible. Wonder what the penalty would be—in case of exposure?"

"Fancy there's no precedent by which one might be imposed; such a thing has never been done since English governm'nt was established. The obvious reaction would be a storm of protest an' ridicule that would force the resignation of the entire cabinet—an' yet I've an idea which might get around even that. You an' Craithness would have the selection of the cabinet between you. What objection do you fancy he might raise about giving portfolios to Abdool an' me?"

"Faith—I can't imagine his havin' any! He likes you both as well as he does me, I fancy; there'd be no question whatever as to ability with either of you."

"Very good! We, Nan and Raymond Carter are known by everyone to be inseparable friends of many years' standing —known to look at public affairs in practically the same way, hold the same opinions upon International policies. Well, it would be quite all right an' permissible for one of us to deputize either of the others to act in his place in case of necessary absence. In fact, I fancy Craithness would willingly agree to our doing so in advance—if the speaker an' the House would stand for it."

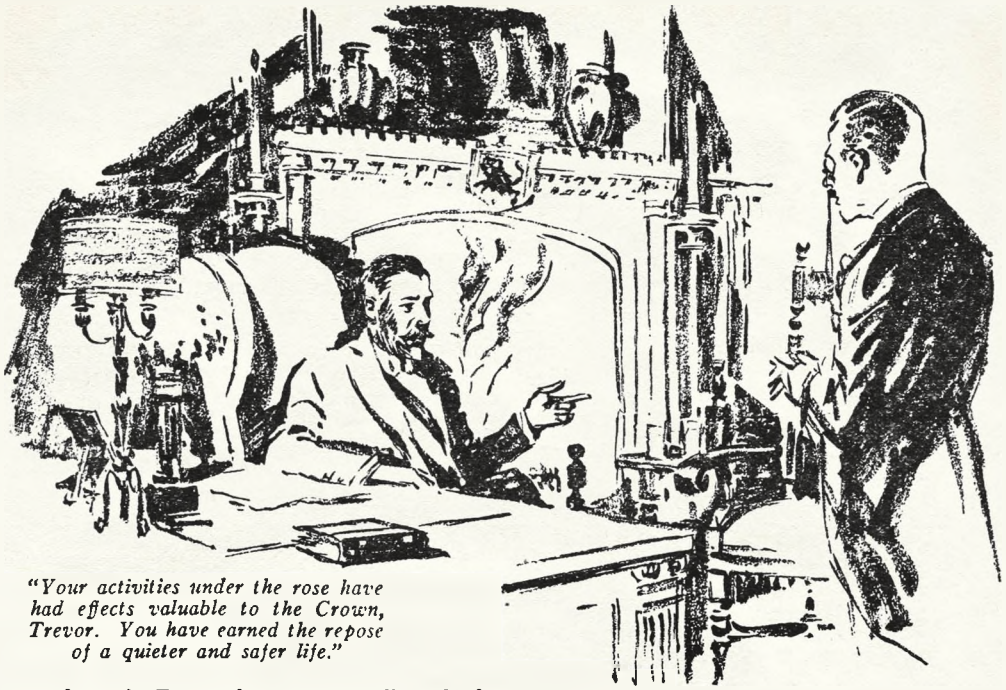
"Aye—but it's three to one they'll do nothing of the sort! Suppose the Opposition move a vote of censure against the conduct of my departm'nt? They'll insist upon havin' me up from the Governm'nt Bench to answer 'em. Same with either of you two. What?"

"Well—in such a case I fancy we'd best humor 'em. Eh?"

TREVOR began to chuckle—then fairly shook with laughter.

"The thing has its humorous side, you know. There's no question as to our bein' able to pull it off, because we've successfully done it before—upon at least two occasions which I recall—when suspicion in either case would have meant death, I fancy. There's one little point to be considered. We're none of us Members—an' there'll be no general election when Gladwin's cabinet resigns. Too much risk an' uncertainty in the present condition of things. Yet we'd have to be elected before we could serve in any ministry."

"That's merely a detail. The constitu-



"Your activities under the rose have had effects valuable to the Crown, Trevor. You have earned the repose of a quieter and safer life."

ency down in Devon have repeatedly asked you to stand for 'em; Sir Archie Tredgar will resign his seat in a minute if you'll do it. Of course you can make it up to him in other ways. Much the same conditions exist among my neighbors in Cornwall—there'd be very little contesting my election. As for Abdool, he has more influence than anybody dreams among the foreign element in the East End—no trouble about returning him, either."

IN the morning Trevor's man took a note along to the suite occupied by the Honorable John Craithness and his charming niece—and in consequence, Craithness was ready to join the Earl after breakfast when the horses were brought from the Royal Mews to the Upper Ward. Riding out through the Home Park, they soon reached and turned into one of the smaller bridle-paths in the Great Park. Craithness had sat in the House for the past sixteen years from a Somerset constituency which never showed enough opposition to give another candidate much of a chance. He had held a portfolio during one ministry—was an able and magnetic speaker in the House—had more influence even among the other parties than anybody would have believed until a test vote happened to show it. Potentially he was a growing power to be reckoned with, if matters broke just right to give him a crucial opportunity—and Trevor was perhaps more aware of this than anyone else who knew the man. When they were secure from observation or eavesdropping, Craithness inquired:

"What is this, old chap—a conference of conspirators? There's a deal of gossip, you know—even at Windsor. It's supposed that you've been asked to form a cabinet upon two or three different occasions, and there's quite a little amazement at your repeated refusals—the thing is so eminently what you are fitted by experience an' political knowledge to do."

"Political knowledge, my eye! Never had any head for state affairs, d'ye see!"

"Aye—you've always said that, and nearly everybody swallows it. I happen to know better—and it's mostly intuition, at that. Some day, you'll accept this cabinet proposition. Question is—what do you want of me? Advice?"

"Would you be willing to accept the premiership, John?"

"Fancy I don't quite understand. You're the man they want for that! I might consider a subordinate berth—because I'd really enjoy being in any ministry of yours."

"Point is—would you consider a very slightly subordinate premiership—leaving the final veto power with me? I can't very well be prime minister. Too much limelight, too closely watched all the time, too little chance for bein' away a few weeks when it's necess'ry."

"H-m-m—that would be putting me in

rather a dummy position, Trevor. Held responsible for anything that happens without being given my own rope to hang myself."

"With any other portfolio you'd be subject to the premier's known wishes in the handling of your department—much more of a dummy than you would be as premier yourself. I'm going to lay a card or two on the table, John. Your intuition is right. I do know a good bit more about international affairs than I'm supposed to—never mind how I get the information. His Majesty is well aware of this fact—it's because of it that he wishes me to control the ministry whether I head it or not. If at any time we were not quite in accord upon any policy to be carried out, I'd give you enough inside facts to support my side of the argum'nt. If you still failed to recognize their bearing upon the subject, I'd simply ask you to accept my views an' convince you with the results. Nobody ever would know that we'd held different views upon the matter or that you were not in supreme authority. Our political opinions are so nearly identical that I can't imagine any serious disagreement.

"Of course the salary of five thousand pounds which goes with the premiership would be little or no inducement because you're still a wealthy man in spite of the war-taxes—though it's generally supposed that you're not; but the berth is one of honor—power, world-wide influence. Rose will make a charming hostess in Downing Street. My position is this: If you can't see your way to accepting the portfolio, I'll probably chuck the whole proposition. There's no other man of my acquaintance whom I'd trust with inside information as I would you—none with whom I'll risk working. If we can't make a go of it—assisted by Lammerford an' Baron Abdool in some of the other departm'nts, I'll simply tell His Majesty that I'm unable to get the material I hoped for."

"Seems rather a pity to do that—you're so entirely the man for the job! What berth would you reserve for yourself?"

"One giving opportunity for occasional absence, yet permitting of my addressin' the House upon occasion. Privy Seal very likely would do that."

"Aye—quite appropriate, too. Makes you leader of the Lords with the privilege of submitting questions from the Upper House at any time. I say, old chap! Fancy I'm sporting enough to take you up—on the tacit understanding that if we find it impossible to agree upon certain points, I step down and you take my place as head of the Governm'nt."

"It must be honest disagreement in spite of all the proofs I show you as a basis for my side. You're not to let me down for a mere fit of pique? . . . . Stop a bit! I know you'll not do that, John! My apologies for the question. Very good! Gladwin will be asked to submit for a division one of the Governm'nt bills which is morally certain of defeat—and his cabinet resignations will follow. Most of them are sick of the job—the flood of criticism in the news-sheets, and the general lack of confidence shown in them. I happen to know that it will be a relief to Gladwin, who is a much bigger man than he's been given opportunity to show."

THIS was the inside of the proposition—the wheels which the general public had no chance to inspect. When the Gladwin ministry was voted down on one of the Government measures, and resigned, it was announced almost immediately that His Majesty had prevailed upon John Craithness to form a new cabinet—the slate being already filled. When the names were published next day, there was a feeling of general surprise—particularly in the case of Earl Trevor and his two most intimate friends. The rumor got about that Trevor had been offered the premiership upon two different occasions but had refused from what he considered lack of the requisite political knowledge. His popularity, however, and that of his friends, was so great that the appointments were approved even by many of the Opposition. As Privy Seal, leader of the House of Lords, it was felt that Earl Trevor was in the most appropriate berth which could have been given him. All of the other berths appeared to have been filled with equally good judgment—in fact, the whole cabinet was pronounced by the press to be the strongest in office for many years, provided, of course, that it could manage to secure working agreement with the Liberals, the Laborites and the radicals.

A fortnight after the new ministry had taken office, Earl Trevor called at Number Ten Downing Street in time for tea, which Rose Craithness was dispensing with a charming air of hospitality, in the drawing-room, to a couple of members from northern constituencies and three young attachés

from the Foreign Office. With her was a slightly older girl of dark complexion and rather intriguing appearance who was spending the week-end—the two having become chummy at a famous castle in Wales, the previous year. Stopping long enough for his tea and a pleasant chat, the Earl stepped along the hall to a room used by the Premier's secretary as an informal office—the place being unoccupied at the moment. Picking up the telephone on Sir Joseph's desk, he was put through to the Foreign Secretary across the street—asking to come over for tea, and joining the Premier and himself later.

The Earl had been chatting with Craithness for half an hour when Sir Austen appeared with a somewhat serious expression on his face. (He and the Chancellor of the Exchequer had been the only members of the Gladwin Ministry to be reappointed.) In his hand was a brief-case which he said he had gone back to the Foreign Office to get.

"Just been having tea with Miss Rose, Your Excellency—charming hostess, you know—one of the most so we've had here at Number Ten. Her friend is rather a striking girl too. Is she by way of being a connection of the Darbyshire Vanderpoels—old Dutch family who came over with William and Mary?"

"Why—I've not heard that she is, Sir Austen. She and Rose were together for a month or two at Llangowerth Castle in Wales, last year. Became quite chummy. Then she went across to visit relatives in the States—only returned a month ago."

"Seems a bit older than Miss Rose."

"H-m-m—I noticed that too, although she says she's twenty-six. One can't tell much about these dark-complexioned girls until they get on a bit. Miss Ella may be in her thirties—or twenty-six, as she says. She seems to be unusually well-educated—"

"It was that feature about her which sent me back across the street for this *dossier,* Your Excellency—the education and a resemblance to some one I vaguely remembered having seen on the Continent. Wouldn't you consider the resemblance in these photographs a bit striking?"

CRAITHNESS took the three prints handed to him and examined them closely.

"Well—I'm not an expert at this sort of thing, you know; but I'd certainly say that Ella Vanderpoel sat for these photographs or was taken without knowing it. I see that one is an instantaneous snap on Unter den Linden, with the Brandenburg Thor in the background. But the name on the back is Elsa von Dettingen. On this other picture it is Olga Shamokin. What's the story, Sir Austen?"

"The original of these photographs was a chorus-girl of eighteen at the Imperial Opera in Petrograd during the first year of the German War. Mixed up with some of the commissars during the revolution—in their secret service after the Armistice. Spent two years in Berlin and other German cities as Elsa von Dettingen—probably still in the service of Moscow, though I fancy she'd change over if she thought it for her interest to do so. She was in London two years ago as Ella Vanderpoel—had most unquestionable letters to some of the best county families here—supposed to be of the old Dutch aristocracy, with enough of the family fortune left to live anywhere she pleases in more or less luxury. It just happens that she was seen in Moscow by one of our F. O. men a few months ago. He was of the opinion that she is still drawing Soviet pay—there was some rumor that Stalin and the rest of them expect a crisis in eastern Europe rather shortly and are using every means at their disposal to find out what the actual line-up among the various states will be in such an event. My impression is that the woman—for she must be over thirty, now—is in London to obtain, in any way possible, documents or information which will give Moscow or Berlin knowledge of our secret understanding with the Continental Powers."

"You think a case of mistaken identity is unlikely?"

"Had I found her in any other place than Number Ten Downing Street, I might have a little more doubt until I had obtained more positive information. But consider, if you please, the unhoped-for luck upon which she must be congratulating herself over being a guest in the Premier's own household! Why, there are three of my younger F. O. men out there in the drawing-room with her now, supposing they're safe in expressing almost any opinion, in a place like this! I think they're to be trusted—because we don't admit babbling fools to the service. But those Members are much more talkative—see no reason why they shouldn't be."

"H-m-m—we appear to have laid ourselves open to criticism, Sir Austen."

"Nothing was further from my thoughts, Your Excellency! There was absolutely nothing to arouse your suspicion! I simply thought you should know what we had across the street concerning the woman, when I recognized her in the drawing-room. I really beg that you'll not take it as a personal matter at all!"

"Oh, it's not that, old chap—I don't! And I'm under obligations to you for posting me at once. It's a situation which must be remedied at the shortest possible notice. If we start within the hour, Rose and I can motor down to Chequers in time for dinner, taking Miss Vanderpoel with us. I hesitated about having her here when Rose asked me, because I'm aware that guests are seldom invited to stop the night in this house. For dinner—oh, yes, frequently. Of course the reason for not having anyone about the place but Governm'nt people for more than a few hours is obvious. It has almost established an unwritten precedent in this connection."

TREVOR had been listening to them —now he made a smiling suggestion.

"I'm not sure, Your Excellency, but that your having this woman here without knowing anything of her history may not be, in the end, a very good thing for His Majesty's government. I see no reason why you should put yourself out—and most certainly let her know that you've discovered her identity—by rushing her down to Chequers so unexpectedly. Let her complete her visit in ignorance that you know anything about her past history. But borrow a couple of Sir Austen's best secret service men to watch every move she makes in this house—prevent her from snooping anywhere outside of her own room and Rose's. Rose will have to know—in order to prevent her carelessly leaving anything about. H-m-m—might be a joke with far-reaching results if you let Miss Vanderpoel accidentally come across some penciled memoranda giving the impression that we are in a good deal closer accord with the United States, Rumania an' Jugo-Slavia than we appear to be on the surface. What? If she found such a paper an' managed to translate the very simple code, it most assuredly would find its way to Moscow—Berlin might get a glimpse of it *en route* if they paid enough for the privilege."

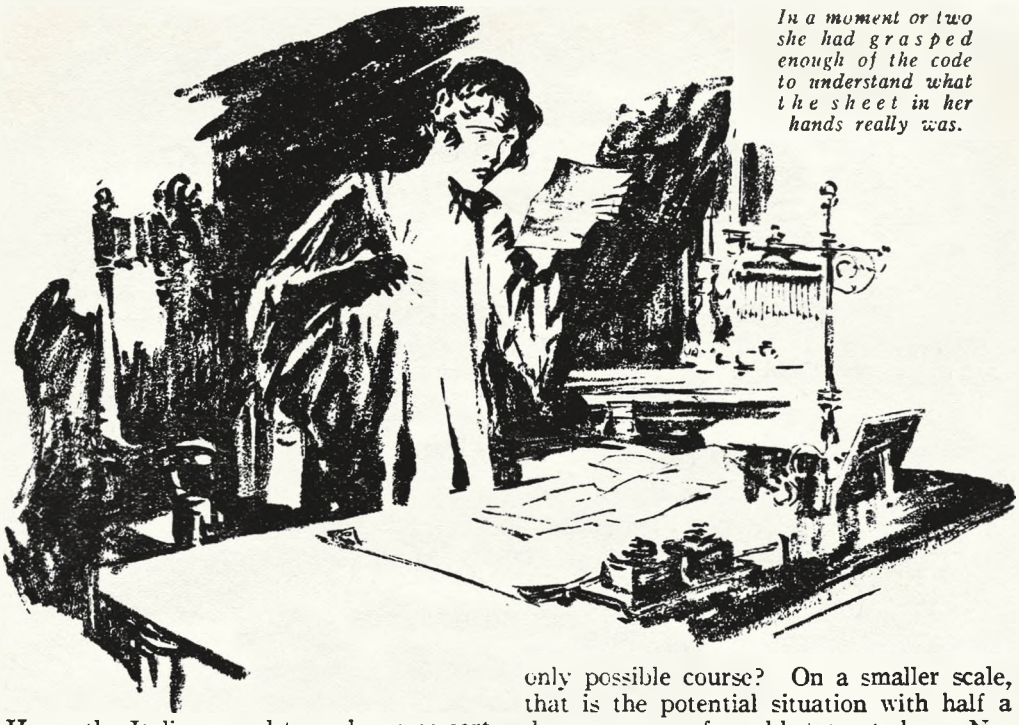
The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs chuckled with appreciation. Even the Premier smiled.

"My word, Trevor—that suggestion is a corker! Even without the memoranda, we'll stand a much better chance of finding what the woman is after if our men catch her prowling about at night—or any other time. I'll drop a hint to our young chaps in the drawing-room and then send Miss Rose in here to you. Possibly I'd best remain with the others until she returns."

IN a few moments Rose knocked at the door and came smilingly in—making a little intimate face at the Earl, who pulled up a chair near the desk and handed her the photographs. Even after the facts had been given her, she almost failed to understand the dangerous importance of them. Knowing her well enough to sense this, her uncle quietly said:

"You'll not be missed in the drawing-room for half an hour, Rose—suppose we ask Uncle George just how the present situation in Europe appears to him? I fancy he's in position to know much more than even I do about it. Eh, George?"

"Merely because you've not had my opportunities. First place—Russia is spending millions to sovietize China and the Trans-Caucasian states, with the view of exploiting them at an early date and gradually bringing about chaos in India an' Persia. On the west, she means to have Lithuania, the Dantzig Corridor and Bessarabia, very shortly. Germany says she will not mix in any fight between Poland, Rumania and Russia over these little buffer states—because Russia might win, and German influence in that country is increasing every day. To offset this menace, France is supposed to have concluded secret treaties with Poland, Rumania and Jugo-Slavia—probably to the extent of armed assistance if necessary. Mussolini had an understanding with the Bratiano government in Rumania, but now believes French influence supreme—and has concluded a war-treaty with little Albania. He has Tripoli, Eritrea and Somaliland in Africa—is insisting upon equal influence in Morocco with France, but wont get it. The young sultan of Morocco who has just succeeded to the *musnud* is a mighty progressive bird—a most valuable ally to France in Africa. Il Duce is beginning to doubt the feasibility of bringing about his pet idea of a modern Roman Empire. With Turkey standing pat, he's practically surrounded now—Greece is negligible, but will sign a French treaty if she gets the chance.



In a moment or two she had grasped enough of the code to understand what the sheet in her hands really was.

Hence the Italian mood to make some sort of a deal with Moscow and Kemal Pasha. The disarmament proposition at Geneva is becoming less and less practical. I've been thinking during the last few months that the British Empire should have a secret defensive treaty with France—who, with our assistance and the possible backing of America, could probably defy all other political combinations today."

Craithness shot a keen glance at His Lordship after that last remark—nodding slightly in approval. But Rose appeared to be comprehending for the first time something of the vast network of intrigue underlying all political life.

"Does Your Lordship seriously mean that there is as much chance for another war in the near future as what you say would imply? I can scarcely believe it!"

"Consider the facts I've just given you, Rose, and then figure it out for yourself. Suppose the Central and Eastern powers coalesced in one powerful economic and fighting-machine—seizing one buffer-state after another—crawling irresistibly westward in a great tidal-wave of conquest. Would you have England—France, Belgium, Holland, Spain—sit quietly down, minding their everyday affairs, until they were conquered—absorbed, compelled to submit under tyrannical foreign rule until they were taxed into poverty and became actual slaves? Or would you consider armed opposition to that tidal-wave the only possible course? On a smaller scale, that is the potential situation with half a dozen groups of world-states today. Nobody wants war. But if the world permits the human race to multiply as rapidly as it is now doing—breed from the more debased and brutish strains rather than the best ones—no human power can prevent war by legislation or international agreement."

"But—but this horrible spying business! This distrust of those supposed to be one's intimate friends! Of course you can't be right concerning Ella Vanderpoel!"

"I recognized her the moment she spoke to me in the drawing-room, Rose—though she's not aware that we ever met. I called up Sir Austen from Sir Joseph's room at the end of the hall, merely said he was to come across for tea with you, at once. Not another word. He'd no idea whatever that I'd anything else in mind. Yet he recognized the woman at once from her pictures, and went back to the vaults of the Foreign Office to be sure. His men will have conclusive proof within a day or two."

"But—then I must ask her to leave the house at once! I can no longer treat her as a friend or guest! Seems a pretty rotten thing to do—if you ask me!"

"It would be much rottener if she obtained information here that precipitated another frightful war within the year—wouldn't it? And—asking her to leave the house is just about the last thing you can do—you've been a political long enough to grasp that, if you think a bit. Don't let

her know by word or look that you suspect her—yet be very careful that you leave nothing about which might be of use to the Governm'nt employing her. In a little while we shall discover what her game is—what she's after. Play the game, Rose, for your country's sake—as your uncle and the rest of us are doing. Eh? What?"

SHE kissed him—and then went soberly back to the drawing-room, realizing for the first time in her life something of the powerful forces which control international affairs under the surface. From the day at Windsor, when it was more or less certain that her uncle was to be Prime Minister, she had been looking forward with all a young woman's pleased anticipation to presiding over his household in one of the world's most dingy but famous dwellings, meeting great men every day, chatting with those who stood for world-power at her dinner-table. The difficult, treacherous side had never occurred to her because she supposed that such things never touched the great "politicals." And now—she was suddenly confronted with the fact that she could no longer say whatever came into her mind without considering the possible consequences. Even men of her own party—men and women above suspicion—she must treat with an underlying reserve, just as she now began to realize they treated everyone with whom they talked.

Back in the Premier's study, Trevor—lounging in a big chair—was quietly studying the atmosphere of power and leadership about Craithness as he stood by the fire, with one elbow on the mantel, lighting a fresh cigar. The smoothly shaven face and thick gray hair suggested the head of Augustus Cæsar in the Vatican.

As Trevor was a man whose infinite tact had gone far toward placing him where he was in the world, there had not been a word or suggestion since that day at Windsor to remind John Craithness of the authority held in reserve by his friend. He had really forgotten it—and had gracefully assumed the power of his office as if born to it. Party leaders who came to this study of his for a conference found the same cordial frankness of manner which had marked his personality as a Member of the House—but also felt intuitively the authority which went with his position; the position he took invariably was logical to a point where it held their respect.

Trevor guessed something of what was running now through Craithness' mind, and smiled at the idle question with which he masked it.

"Wonder what ever became of Gladstone's old leather chair, with the horsehair stuffing pushing out through the cracks? As a boy, I saw him sitting in it, more than once—in this corner by the fire. The room was lighted by gas in those days, but he had a paraffin student-lamp as well."

"Fancy the chair would still be down at Hawarden, near Chester. I believe it was sent there when he went out of office in 1894."

"This room has seen some famous men in its day, George—Palmerston, Disraeli, Gladstone, Salisbury, Rosebery, Balfour, Lloyd-George. What they did and said affected half the world. Disraeli made us an empire. Lloyd-George helped steer us through the greatest war in human history. Even those who seemed to be merely targets for public criticism did their bit—if one cares about turning up the secret archives. Wonder what they'll be saying of this ministry a hundred years from now?"

"Hmph! I'll not even express an opinion for a year or two. We know little, as yet, of what we're up against."

"That idea of yours about an understanding with France, now? I've had something of the sort vaguely in mind—but the objection seems to be that these new alliances of France with the buffer states may draw her into a Russian or Balkan war at any moment. With the agreement you suggest, we'd be drawn in very shortly after. Not?"

"Aye—possibly a year or two before we'd otherwise go in. We can't see France smashed, you know. Another neighbor just across the Channel would be a damned sight more of a menace than she'll ever be. An' that little delay would make an immense diff'rence in the amount of life and money losses. Irresistible force at the start would stamp out any such war within a few months. Temporizin' with it would start a conflagration all over Europe. The chance for war between England, France an' the United States is negligible—the sentiment against it in each country is overwhelming. Neither of the three can see one of the others smashed without risking the same thing in her own case afterward. Those three nations control the world as long as their interests hold them together—I fancy no other combination could defeat them."

"Wonder if we could turn the tables on the Vanderpoel woman and dig some information out of her?"

"Well, first, John, suppose we block out that memoranda for her to steal. Eh? What have you in this room in the line of Governm'nt data which we must be sure she does not get?"

"H-m-m—I can think of nothing save a few documents in the top drawer of my desk over there—those I'll put in my sleeping-room safe. You see the furnishers and decorators were only out of here a couple of weeks ago—papers have had little time to accumulate. There are of course hundreds of them slipped between the pages of my books, but nothing bearing upon recent political affairs. You fancy she'll try this room first, if she gets the chance?"

"Never a doubt of it—this is where your conferences are held. By Jove! Something just occurs to me which may be well worth trying out! We're by no means sure of bringing about a defensive treaty with France or a closer understanding along those lines with the United States. But—if we can convince Moscow and Berlin that such treaties actually are now in existence? Eh? Wont it be almost as effective with those two governments as if the treaties actually did exist? Wont they be much less likely to assume the offensive if they suppose that the three greatest powers in the world are solidly behind the little buffer states?"

The Prime Minister looked at his friend in wondering appreciation.

"My God! And you're always saying that you've no head for state affairs! I believe the reaction would be precisely what you suggest, by Jove! Such memoranda, stolen from this room at Number Ten Downing Street, would carry a thousand times the weight that it would if found anywhere else in the United Kingdom! My word! That's what I call turning the tables upon this Vanderpoel woman until she becomes a pawn upon our side of the chessboard! One point occurs to me, however: The memoranda she finds must be convincing enough to stand a good deal of discussion and skepticism in Berlin and Moscow. Have you anything in mind along that line?"

"Well—let's block it out between us—we've no time to lose. This is Sunday, and her invitation was for the week-end—with possibly a day over, if Rose urged her stayin'. Preferably the memoranda should be upon a sheet of the Downing Street station'ry—a bit rumpled. H-m-m—something like this, I fancy." And he wrote:

Understanding with Quai D'Orsay: strictly defensive alliance except when sudden offensive might end hostilities within a few months. But accord in view that French and British Continental interests identical as against Central and Eastern powers. Accord in regard to Oriental alignment and interests held over for future conversations.

Understanding with Washington: Exchange of views on mutual interests concerning international affairs with tacit assurance that States will not view without definite action hostilities tending to destroy Britain or France as independent world powers. These assurances given by sixteen Senators of party now in power, with some agreement among opposition. Participation in late war cited as evidence of good faith. Our embassy to be given more or less definite assurance by State Dept.

"While you're glancing over that, John, I'll put it into a simple code which the girl herself will be able to translate with but a few minutes' study. Everyone in the secret service has a deal of practice in decoding—is expert at that sort of thing."

THE Premier read the memoranda through, twice—then his lips puckered in a low whistle of admiration.

"If you'd worked all night over that, George, I doubt if you'd have given it a more convincing tone or wording. It implies the French alliance as something already accomplished, and the 'gentlemen's agreement' with the States as of practically the same force. . . . . Let me glance at your coding? Aye—quite sufficient to fool a person of limited intelligence, yet I can almost read it at sight. I'll leave a few letters which convey no valuable information in this top drawer, and slip this memoranda between them—then lock the drawer. The lock is so rudimentary that it can be picked with a pocket-knife or a bent nail. Now we must caution the F. O. chap on duty tonight that he's to let her slip into this room and stay here an hour if she likes. Not longer than that, or she may get suspicious of a trap—he can walk along the hall and stop a second by that door when he fancies she's been in here long enough. If she tries any further prowling, he can chase her back to her room—giving the impression that he takes her for Rose. By Jove! You don't fancy she may have been in here last night, do you?"

"Look at the papers in that drawer. Do you remember just how you left them?"

"Aye—perfectly. I've cultivated that sort of observation until it's instinctive. These papers haven't been touched since I locked the drawer, yesterday."

"I've really no idea she's been in here yet, because, if she does get anything, she'll try to leave the house at the earliest possible moment, before the loss is discovered. Last night was her first, here—she would have had to remain until tomorrow or else draw suspicion upon herself by leaving before she's expected to. Still, she may not have got as far as the desk—been prowling about with no reward for her trouble. Who dusts this room? When was it last done?"

"Day after the decorators left. Rose has in a scrub-woman who uses a vacuum-cleaner and dusts around—but she never leaves the room while the woman is in it."

"Very good. What books have you taken from the shelves since she was here?"

"None—as yet. Been far too busy even to look up a reference—and Sir Joseph wouldn't touch them without permission. There's a reference library which goes with the house—on another floor. Rose keeps her own books in her room."

"Then I'll tell you in a moment whether anyone has been snoopin' about in here. One of the places no scrub-woman ever dusts is the narrow edge of the shelf in front of the books. Then—although goin' through the lot would be a hopeless job for one with limited time—any spy would look through some of the books for papers slipped between the pages. As you can see by drawing the end of your finger along the shelf, not a single book has been disturbed. Now—we'll look at the door of your big safe. . . . . No evidence whatever that it has been tampered with. If that woman stays in her bed tonight, we may be owing her an apology after all. If she prowls about in the small hours, there'll be no further question as to her identity. Do you know, I've almost a mind to stay the night! Can you put me up?"

"I was about to suggest it. We'll let the F. O. man go to bed and you can take over his job if you feel so inclined. I'd like to do it myself, but I fear I'd be clumsy enough to make a noise."

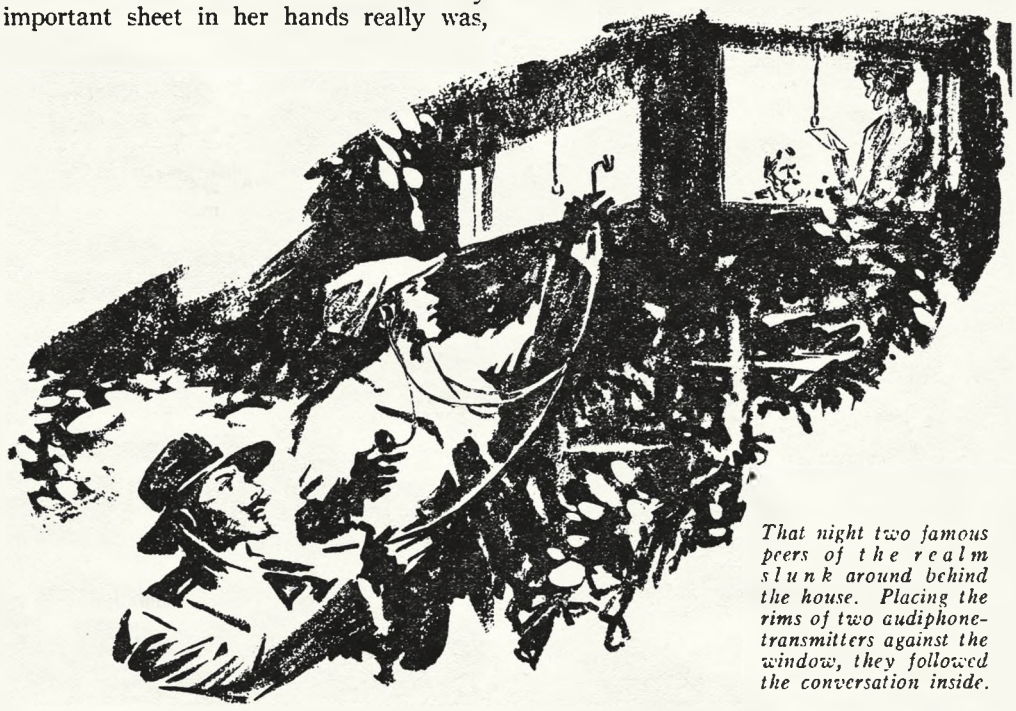
NOW, a woman who is constantly keyed to the nervous pitch of expecting detection or suspicion every moment cannot appear normal even if a good actress. The first accomplishment anyone in the secret service cultivates is the assumption that detection is impossible and relaxation into the normal manner of a person who has every right to be where he or she is at the moment. Subconscious alertness is always necessary—but it need not be nervous apprehension. Ella Vanderpoel, or whatever her original name may have been, had cultivated the acquaintance of Rose Craithness because her uncle was a member of Parliament whose household she managed for him. It seemed at the time rather small fry for one looking to bigger political game, but she felt intuitively that John Craithness was a coming man who some day might be useful. When she read in a New York paper that he was now prime minister, she left for Liverpool on the next boat and lost no time in calling upon Rose after reaching England. As far as she could remember, there was nobody in the United Kingdom who knew anything of her antecedents or was in position to expose her. Consequently she was entirely at her ease in Downing Street.

At two o'clock Monday morning she slipped over her pajamas a dark negligée of thin wool which would not rustle, as silk or linen occasionally does. From one of the pockets she took an automatic and left it on her table—because, if caught, her only possible excuse was somnambulism, and a pretty thin one at that. She didn't mean to be caught. The small electric torch was suspicious in itself, but necessary. Rose, of course, had shown her over the historic portions of the house that first afternoon, so that she could have found her way to any room in pitch darkness—and did so now. The stairs were her first risk, because she naturally assumed that such a house would have at least one night-guard who might be anywhere about it. But by stepping on the ends of the treads next the wall she got down to the main floor without making a sound—and along to the Premier's study, where she softly closed and locked the door behind her.

The big safe was beyond her abilities—the combination undoubtedly had been changed by Craithness when he took over the building. His desk, however—the books and magazines scattered about on it and on a couple of tables—the books and half-dozen japanned boxes on the wall-shelves—might easily contain something of value to her. With a couple of skeleton keys which she took from her thick braid of hair she had the desk and its drawers open in two minutes, and went rapidly over

the letters and memoranda she found in it. The letters had no apparent value—but the somewhat crumpled memorandum-sheet she examined closely under the glow of her torch. (Trevor had taken the precaution of heating the ink in order to make it appear considerably older than it was.) In a moment or two, she had grasped enough of the code to understand what the vitally important sheet in her hands really was,

—expressing her pleasure at having spent a week-end in a house of such unusual interest, with what she called "great people", as her hosts. One of the Government cars took her away with her hand-luggage at ten —but an ordinary city taxi, with two of the more experienced King's Messengers in it, followed that car to the old Royal Hotel



That night two famous peers of the realm slunk around behind the house. Placing the rims of two audiphone-transmitters against the window, they followed the conversation inside.

and slipped it down her neck against the skin where she would instantly miss it if the paper fell out.

She was about to make a systematic search about the rest of the room when it occurred to her that she had better make sure of getting safely out of it with what she had, rather than run the risk of losing it and being exposed for what she was. On her way through the halls and up the stairs she stopped half a dozen times—certain that she heard a stealthy footstep upon some creaking board behind her. As a matter of fact she really did hear it—but probably wouldn't have appreciated the joke had she known that the last thing in the man's mind was interfering with her.

IN the morning, she told her hosts at the breakfast-table that she must leave them before ten in order to do some necessary shopping before running down to one of the country houses by motor that afternoon at Blackfriars and remained in the vicinity long enough to spot the woman when she came out again with her luggage—taking a taxi up west to a small house of quite respectable appearance, with a small garden around it, in Belgravia.

Evidently, the place was occupied by friends or relatives, for a very decent, gray-haired butler opened the door and took her luggage with a welcoming smile. He looked so entirely what he should be that the King's Messengers looked at each other in momentary doubt—then grinned sarcastically. The stage-setting and props naturally would have to be convincing! From that moment the house was under surveillance—front, sides and back.

That night, as soon as it was dark and foggy, two famous peers of the realm slunk around behind the house, concealing themselves among tall hydrangea bushes which reached just above the sills of a bay-window opening from a small study or library.

Placing the soft rubber rims of two audiphone-transmitters against the glass of the window, they easily followed every word of the conversation inside. After two hours of meaningless chat between the Vanderpoel woman and the occupants of the house, another man came in—and the talk became much more interesting.

"Have you really got anything this time, Elsa? How the devil you managed to spend two nights in Downing Street is too much for me—I certainly present my compliments. But I don't see how it could have been possible for you to get anything of value!"

"Suppose you glance over this memo-sheet—carefully. The code is so simple that a child could guess it—evidently intended merely to prevent the average person from grasping it at a glance. Well—I took that from the Prime Minister's desk in his own study at two o'clock this morning—and got back to my own room without being seen. Is it worth anything?"

"You—lucky—plucky—little—devil! I'm taking this back to Moscow at once, myself!"

"For ten thousand pounds in cash—you are. And the further understanding that you get two hundred thousand marks in Berlin for a Wilhelmstrasse copy of it—of which I get half. Otherwise—I take it myself by the first plane in the morning!"

"Hmph! Don't be dictatorial or grasping, Elsa! I've got the thing, you know—right here in my hand. Possession is—"

He took a step backward at sight of the ugly automatic covering him—then reluctantly handed the sheet back to her.

"Fetch me the ten thousand pounds, and four thousand more for what you'll get in Berlin at present exchange, before noon tomorrow, Ivan, and I'll hand you this paper. You know without argument that it's worth a hundred times that to the Commissars and Wilhelmstrasse—and even you will admit that I've earned the money! We understand each other, I think. I shall remain in England for a month or so longer to be sure that the disappearance of this paper from John Craithness's desk hasn't been connected with me in any way. If it has, I'm no longer of use in this country—if not, I may be again invited to Downing Street some day."

THE two peers, aching in every limb from their long wait and cramped positions, slipped out through the garden into the street, like wraiths in the fog. When they were comfortably settled in Lammerford's car, bowling along toward Park Lane, Trevor said:

"Nice sort of position for two Cabinet ministers—I don't think. Hiding under a window in the rear of a respectable householder's premises like a couple of bally cracksmen—listening to strictly private affairs! Wonder how that would sound if somebody got up on the floor of the House an' described it—in case we'd been caught? My word! I doubt if Parliam'nt has any sense of humor!"

"Being in the Cabinet does alter the appearances somewhat—doesn't it? It was quite right enough for us to do the same thing as private individuals, when we were getting no more valuable information or scoring no more far-reaching *coup* for the Government than you've just done. But I fear we'll have to reform a bit, George. Sort of thing wont do, y'know—really wont. . . . . Hmph! Ella didn't do so badly for herself, if she but knew it—fourteen thousand, sterling, for a fake memo! By the way—have you come to any decision yet regarding that purchase down at the Cape? I'll want some of those shares, you know—if you're really takin' the comp'ny over. In the hands of the present managem'nt, it's not payin' regular dividends—but if you find the plant an' land-holdings as represented, I see no reason why we shouldn't make a pot of money out of it."

"Neither do I. I'm leavin' on the *Balmoral Castle* day after tomorrow—running down to have a personal look-see before I take over that big block of shares, giving me control. I'm not payin' out a cool million for a cat-in-the-bag, you know!"

"H-m-m—best wait until after that money-bill has come up in Parliam'nt, hadn't you?"

"Can't! I've only a month's option on those shares—an' there are at least three other groups who know the value of that property as well as I do. It's either grab it now, after satisfying myself as to the property, or not getting it at all. Why can't you argue against that bill in the House? You're a Peer as well as I!"

"I'm not the leader of the Lords—their official spokesman in the House—an' you are. Neither the speaker nor the members would recognize me in this connection—they'll ask you to present the Lords' views on the bill. It's supposed to be merely a gesture, d'ye see. Money bills originating

in the House cannot be amended by the Lords, an' if not approved by them, can be passed over their heads with His Majesty's consent. We all know, in the cabinet, that it's a bad bill—almost certain to increase burdensome taxation. If you could get His Majesty's consent to refuse approval, your gesture would have teeth in it—sharp enough to have the pernicious features shown up in the house as they never will be unless you gain time for full discussion."

"Well, I'll run down to Windsor tomorrow morning—see His Majesty—get the promise of his refusal—an' then go to South Africa next day. If it's necess'ry for me to appear in the House, we'll have to arrange it in some way—that's not worrying me to any extent."

IT was a week before John Craithness realized that his Lord Privy Seal was somewhere abroad and couldn't be gotten at in a hurry. Without any immediate reason, he began to get apprehensive—called in Lammerford for a confidential chat over the matter.

"Of course, you know, we can manage to delay having that money bill come up for another week or ten days, old chap—but we're all counting on Trevor's managing to get the necessary time for discussion. Isn't there any way of getting in touch with him?"

"Confidentially—he should be in Capetown on Saturday."

"Capetown! Oh, my word! Then we're done for as far as that bill is concerned! Too bad! It really shouldn't pass!"

"Don't worry until you have to, Craithness. George may still get back in time—he has a way of doin' things like that."

"But—how under heaven can he?"

"Wait an' see. Don't worry until I admit it's hopeless."

Ten days later the speaker announced that the money bill would come up for discussion on the night of the fifteenth, when opportunity would be given for the Lords to present any arguments against it. That was on the evening of the eleventh. And that morning's *Times* had published half a column with this heading:

EARL OF DYVNAINT TAKES OVER SATTERTHWAITE PRODUCTIONS, LTD.

Although the Speaker had not mentioned Trevor by name, it was understood by everyone that his absence at the Cape settled any possible opposition to the bill.

The evening of the fifteenth, Lord Privy Seal was not upon the Government Bench when the bill came up, and the reading was gone through with in a perfunctory manner. When it came to the point of discussion, however, Earl Trevor came in from the cloak-room, took his seat, was recognized by the speaker—and spoke for half an hour in a masterly way, ending with the statement that the bill could not look for Crown approval until after it had been thoroughly discussed. In spite of the fact that the bill was a house measure, there was round after round of applause, partly aroused by the Earl's dramatic appearance in the very nick of time. The newspapermen in the gallery were skeptical, but the *Times* next morning had another half-column with a double-header:

FAMOUS PEER AND AVIATOR MAKES RECORD FLIGHT FROM CAPE IN NEW TYPE OF PLANE. TIME—UNDER THREE DAYS.

SOME ten days later His Lordship actually *was* back on his deep-sea yacht *Ranee Sylvia,* which had been cruising in the Indian Ocean with Countess Nan and a party of friends—but he landed in Salcombe Harbor so that the news-sheets got no hint of his presence on board. Next day he, Nan and Lammerford were down at Windsor again for the week-end. Craithness had told His Majesty of the sell which Trevor had thought up to plant with the Vanderpoel woman, which both amused and impressed the King. When he got Trevor into a corner for a confidential chat after dinner, he said that he was beginning to appreciate what remarkable men he had in his Government—reminding Trevor that when he had come down the second time to confer with him on the Money Bill, it had been the night of the eleventh—when Trevor was reported to be closing his deal in South Africa. Said that neither incongruities nor impossibilities disturbed him overmuch, but that he certainly considered it a most remarkable performance—since everyone present in the House on the fifteenth swore positively to the Earl's appearance there in person, and His Majesty himself would have sworn to his being at Windsor on the eleventh. Yet a million pounds had been paid by him in Capetown, personally, on that same date. Satterthwaite Productions were equally positive as to that. His Majesty was inclined to marvel at the wonders of modern progress.

Trevor, listening, merely smiled astutely.

Swamp Sanctuary

By FREDERICK GRIFFIN

Just the story of an old couple and two dogs—but you will find it deeply interesting.

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

"DID they kill many more today?" The old woman looked worriedly across the table.

"Found more 'n a dozen dead ones in the south creek since noon." Old Elie—Elie Fawcett—roused himself out of his moody silence for the first time since he'd sat down to eat.

"Were you shootin' at them at all?"

"Got a chance half an hour ago—and missed." And his thin lips set in a grim line. "It was gittin' dark and I was just about turnin' home, when all of a sudden I heared 'em barkin' and yelpin'. They were killin' a muskrat right under my nose. I thought I saw something movin' in the swamp—and I fired—"

He rose and, with a an air of morose detachment, took down his gun which he began to oil.

"—But I'll git them! I'll git them yet!"

The strain on the old people was beginning to show. No longer could they feel their former confidence in what this year's "farm" was going to mean to them. For their "farm" was a muskrat farm in Northern Ontario, and up to the present it had promised much. But four days ago there had descended upon it two enemies of a new sort that were threatening to wipe out all profits whatsoever. These enemies were a pair of dogs, and only that day the old people had heard most of their story from Joe Lachance, a passing timber cruiser.

They were runaways, Joe had said—a pair of vagrants that nominally belonged to Doc Fuller of Wakagami, ten miles down Indian River. The old doctor was the kind of owner who didn't feed his dogs—who didn't, in fact, give himself any concern about them at all. His last, a good water spaniel, had virtually frozen to death, trying to pick up a living in the woods, in his first winter. Anyone in Wakagami could have told you about that. And you would also have been told that it was quite likely to be the same with the present pair.

One of them, the leader, was a thoroughbred Irish terrier. The other was an undeniable mongrel. Yet between them existed the strangest and the strongest of alliances. It went back two years, to the time when the terrier had pulled the mutt, a half-drowned pup, from the river, and carried him home.

The pair—old Elie had been close enough to see that himself—made a queer combination. The mutt was a sorry mixture. Basically he seemed a dachshund. But his head was broad, his face wrinkled, and his tail had a tendency to curl. Fore and aft, he gave more than a suggestion of pug. On the other hand, the terrier was clearly blue-blooded; breeding showed in every line of his aggressive car-

riage. The gay tilt of his tail declared the daredevil. The glints of flame in his small hazel eyes proclaimed the fighter and hunter. But from the first he had made himself the smaller dog's guardian.

He had fed him, fought his battles, and in general protected him with a love which at times had shown itself in savagery. The scamps of the village had been inclined to terrorize the quiet, amiable pup —who had been nicknamed Dip from his origin—but again and again the terrier—or to call him by his name, Terry—had come to his rescue, as he had also saved him from bullying dogs. Dip, for his part, had returned such favors with a devotion that was measureless. And they had become inseparable.

They had fought together, foraged together, and now they were hunting together. The mutt could only imitate and follow after. But that was all he asked to do. He was a hero-worshiper and he had his hero. And—neglected as they were by old Doc Fuller—however it might be with them when the cold weather came, in the summer and fall they had been doing well enough in the woods. Some of the leaves were already tinted with the reds that were winter's first faint warning. And, with hunting difficult and no food at home, in the end this might mean starvation for them as it had for the spaniel. But in the meantime, they were having a good time. Gradually their excursions had extended further and further up the river from Wakagami. They had been drawn ever deeper by the fun the bush provided: scurrying after rabbits for a juicy meal, treeing chipmunks, stirring up a slow-witted partridge, and at times—best perhaps of all even if the kills were few—sending a red fox sneaking quickly to his earth.

So it had been perfectly natural that they should have come in time to the Fawcett muskrat farm. For it was a "farm" that was really part of the wilderness itself. And, ever since, they had been finding such hunting as they had never had before.

THE Fawcett cabin was a mere dot in the solitary bush. The old people hadn't a neighbor within five miles. They were so isolated indeed that in the summer a forest ranger or in the winter a trapper or a passing Indian were their only visitors. One son had been killed at Vimy, their other children had married and gone, and they had been left alone.

The old woman—her worn face still showed traces of a comely youth—lived that life of almost complete loneliness which is the lot of so many aging women of the wilderness. Sometimes, especially at night, the gloomy swamp, the silent river widening into a slow lagoon and the encircling woods, seemed to close in upon her almost unbearably. It was especially lonely for her. For old Elie had his 'rat farm. It virtually filled his life. Two years before he had leased nearly two hundred acres of Cassidy's swamp and had since been busy trying to make several hundred pairs of muskrats breed him an income.

"Two thousand 'rats at a dollar apiece would—" he would figure in his slow way as he went his round of the creeks.

Muskrats are not easily frightened and these had become accustomed to the figure in the faded jeans who came so regularly and passed without molesting them. Some of them would sit motionless on the shores or shoals, and only slip into the water when he was almost up. The older 'rats were more than a foot long, with fur that was a dark brown merging to a whitish fawn on their underbodies and long hairless tails, flattened towards the tip. And recently the old man's eyes of bleached blue, peering shrewdly from his weather-dried face, had been noting with satisfaction the growing number of fall litters.

"—Two thousand dollars. They ought to fetch that much anyway this winter. By all 'counts women are still crazy for fur. Mebbe I c'd kill twenty-two hundred —all depends how this last breedin' shapes up. And there'd be near on a thousand left, 's far 's I kin reckin, to breed from next year."

The winter before he had merely thinned out some of the older animals, and the total number had grown to a point where he felt he might make a sizable slaughter. Of late he had, in fact, been dreaming dreams. He had been a trapper; but trapping of recent years, in a country just about cleaned of fur, had brought slim money. But this way he was practically growing his own. By rights, of course, his place should have been surrounded by a high fence of wire mesh. Since he could not afford that, he had, so far as he could, simply kept mink, weasel and the like out of his mind, though enough of these ma-

rauders came stealing in from the near-by woods to cause occasional heavy losses.

BUT now there had appeared enemies of a kind he had never bargained for. Only a pair of danged dogs, of course, but in the last few days they had shown they could do as much damage as a dozen mink or weasel. Old Elie was by nature a lover of dogs himself. So was his wife, for that matter. And, indeed, at the back of the old woman's mind there was always the thought that if there was a dog around it might help to make the place a trifle less lonesome. For they had always had one until the 'rat farm had seemed to put it out of the question. But much as he liked dogs, the old man had quickly had to make up his mind that he must get rid of the present pair.

He had been trying his best to do so. Each night since they had come he would say to himself, "T'morrow—I'll git them t'morrow for sure." But so far he had not succeeded. Luck, and the nature of the swamp, with its winding creeks, its clumps of cedar and tamarack, its patches of alders and willows, its bullrushes and tall grasses, had given the dogs an undeniable advantage. They had been able to range almost at will.

They could do little against muskrats in the water. They might pursue them, and did, as they slipped sinuously downstream, but they were no match for these animal torpedoes that left long, angular ripples in their wake as they dived into sub-water holes. But the terrier had quickly learned the knack of smashing through grass, catching a feeding 'rat ashore and cutting it off from the water. With low growls of sheer delight he would hurtle forward upon his quarry. Now it would be a young one which could make no resistance. Then it would be a fully grown fellow that would show fight. And, after a kill, he and the mutt would sweep forward exultantly. For even Dip felt that he was playing a part in this wholesale chasing. Very soon, too, they had learned that the old man was after them. In fact, the very first day he had unexpectedly come on them when they were making one of their first kills and had scared them back into the bush. But, in spite of that, they had returned. And for four days they had led him a fruitless hunt in the marshy labyrinth.

On more than one occasion they had had narrow escapes and old Elie had fired at them twice. The second time—it was on the evening of the fourth day—they had rounded a bend and cornered a big dark veteran of the marsh. It had fought madly. Its wild screeching, the terrier's battle-growls and the yelping of the mutt had come to the old man in his punt some distance down the creek. He had shot along towards them. But he had only arrived in time for the end. He had dropped his pole for his gun. His eyes had strained in the murk. But he could see nothing. The swamp had been dark as a black bear's hide. And though he had fired and jumped ashore, all he had found was another dead 'rat. Again the dogs had escaped. Their splashing had gradually died away—while he had stood there flatfooted.

"Dangnation!"

And he had gone home wearily, beaten once more.

HE spent a restless night; and a raw dawn found him finishing a gloomy breakfast.

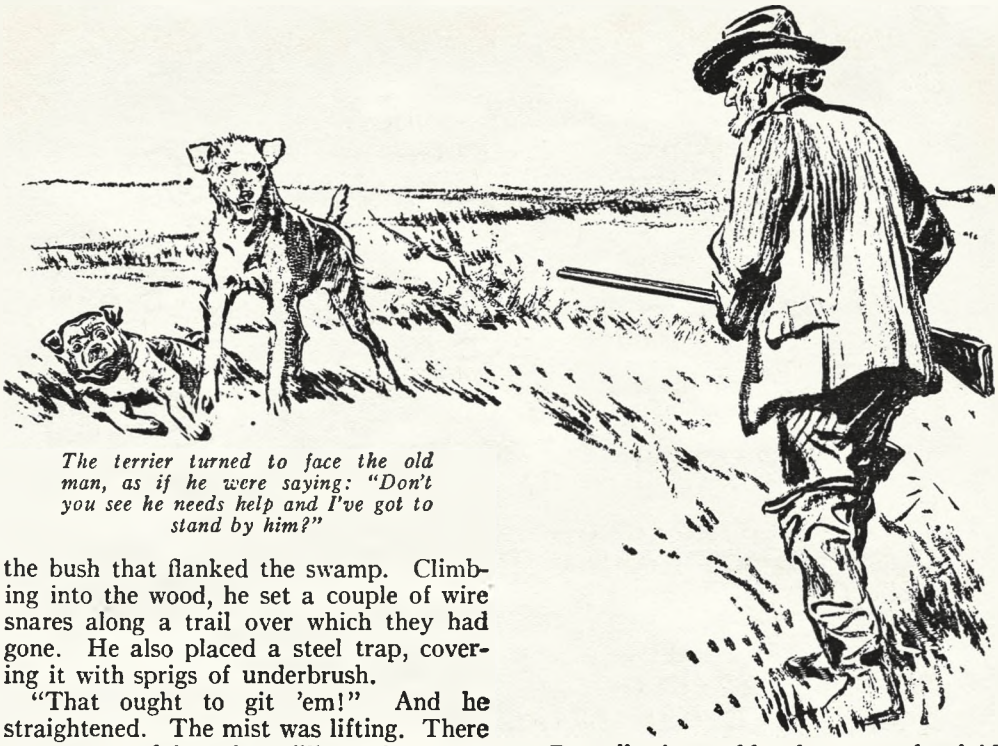
"Oh, Elie"—the old woman had slept little either—"I—I'd hate if you have to shoot 'em. It—it seems terrible mean—"

"Don't I hate it too—killin' a dog! But what in flames else kin I do!"

And he walked angrily from the house, crossed the river and within five minutes was again on the south creek. Yet, so far as he could see, there was not a sign of the dogs. The swamp lay morose and quiet. A gray mist blanketed the mist ahead. And the punt seemed to glide through a void in which the happenings of the last few days were as distant and unreal as a dream.

And then, suddenly, his mind was jerked once more to a realization that the dogs were indeed no dream. Another dead 'rat! He stiffened into quick action—his long spare body still limber with vitality —and sent the punt across. His face grim as an ax edge, he leaped ashore and picked it up. Tensely he passed a hand over the fur. There was a trace of blood on the long teeth, and a telltale gash behind one of the ears.

"Jumpin' wil'cats!" And where were those flaming dogs now? Killing more 'rats? He'd get them—by gorry, he'd get them before many hours had passed! He searched swiftly along the creek and soon found tracks where they had returned to



The terrier turned to face the old man, as if he were saying: "Don't you see he needs help and I've got to stand by him?"

the bush that flanked the swamp. Climbing into the wood, he set a couple of wire snares along a trail over which they had gone. He also placed a steel trap, covering it with sprigs of underbrush.

"That ought to git 'em!" And he straightened. The mist was lifting. There was no sound but the million minute, ordinary noises of the bush. He decided to take no chances on the traps but to hide there and watch for a shot when the dogs came back, as he knew they would, being wise in the ways of dogs. Opposite on the swamp side was a small thicket of tamarack. So he crossed the creek, climbed a sloping tree and perched among the branches. From this point of vantage he peered relentlessly, gun forward, at the green curtain on the other bank.

Meantime, the pair he sought so stubbornly were enjoying a well-earned snooze in a soft moss nook not a quarter of a mile away. They had returned to the wood after a spell of adventuring in the swamp the night before, as had become their custom; and the terrier had pounced on a wandering rabbit which he had shared with the mutt. After that they had slept. Morning was well advanced when they had wakened, stretched and, for a while, rolled playfully about.

Then they had started back for the "farm." As usual, the terrier was trit-trotting in the van. He was rakish and lean, with muscles that moved easily as he ran; a trim, game figure of a dog. Occasionally he would glance back to see if the mutt was following. And the latter would waggle with pleasure. Then—so close was the bond between them—the terrier would jog on, satisfied.

But all of a sudden he stopped—rigid. His nose went to the ground, then rose. The man—he smelled the man! On the wind came strong warning.

The dog could not see old Elie. But at that moment, eagerly, the latter sighted him. His eyes ripped along the gun. He steadied the barrel—and his finger was tightening on the trigger when, without warning, the terrier whipped round and fled, missing the trap by inches. This the old man did not know at the moment. But he caught a glimpse of the second dog before he, too, was gone.

The pair swung in a circle east through the trees and five minutes later were back in the swamp chasing 'rats.

"Holy flames!" He stood listening. "An' now they're at it again already! Git them? I might as well s'arch for gold in the clay belt as look for 'em in this dangnation maze."

But again he was after them, poling warily along the edge of the wood. The brief outbreak in the swamp had ceased. Not a sound or a swaying bullrush! The dogs had probably—

Just then he saw them, coming toward him. They were still too far to chance a shot, so he slewed the punt across and sprang to the shore. But, as he jumped, they saw him. The terrier wheeled. The mutt followed suit. And they scooted back up the creek.

HE started after them along the strip of marsh. Here the footing would have been impossible for anyone but the old trapper. But he ran with surprising speed in his high rubber boots along the boggy surface. Only twice did his foot slip with a sucking squelch. He picked up the trail and kept on, to find at last that they had crossed the stream and shot up the shelving bank into the wood. Useless to go any further!

"Ye murderin' curs!" He jerked off his hat in a spasm of rage that creased his face as he stood there shaking. "Come back and face me. Come back, I tell you. You kill and run, kill and run. . . . . Dangnation! I—I'll—"

Speech died in his throat. But his thoughts raced on. He'd kill those dogs—he'd kill every dog he came across. Time was when he might have loved dogs, but that time was past. They were a curse. Ruining him—that's what they were doing—ruining him. He'd riddle them!

And before the day was over he was to have his chance.

THAT chance came late that evening when he sighted them across a strip of treeless muskeg. He ran towards them. And there, not fifty feet downstream, they were slipping out of sight along the north creek, with the terrier, farthest away of the pair, already almost gone.

The old man did not waste a second—he slung his gun forward and fired. The smaller dog pitched and lay yelping; then tried to drag himself along. Exulting, the marshman ran on to give the terrier the second barrel. But he was not to be seen—his trail showed where he had swerved into a clump of cedar. Hotfoot through the tangle the old man chased; then worked back to the creek. And there, what he saw brought him up short.

The mutt was lying on his side, and the terrier stood over him. If for a moment he had seemed to run, it had only been for a moment. He had merely doubled back. And, besides, it was quite clear that he was giving no thought to himself at all. For he had bent down and, with hot, soft sympathy, was licking the little fellow's side.

In spite of himself, at the mere sight of it, the old man's gun came down an inch or two.

"Well—I hadn't reckoned on a trick like this!"

Naturally he hadn't. Who could have? But so far he was taking it for granted that the terrier hadn't seen him. He slipped out from the shadowy edge of the trees, telling himself that this time he'd get as close as he could and make sure.

And now the terrier did see him. But he showed not a trace more fear than when the old man was hidden. He knew what the gun was and the danger was—there was no question about that. But far from running, he had whirled round to defend the mutt.

"By dang! An' what next!" And again old Elie's gun came down.

BY then the terrier was standing in four-square challenge. His game eyes were blazing fire. From his throat broke a series of low, raw growls. Again, above all, he showed clearly no fear for himself. He was evidently not even thinking of himself.

As we've said, old Elie had been all his life a dog man and a dog lover. But he had never seen anything like this before.

"He's sure a game 'un!"

He took a step nearer.

"But s' far 's I kin see, there's nothin' else for it." And he forced himself to raise the gun again.

For answer, the terrier came straight at him. He jumped hard and low, hurtling upwards in a tawny flash.

Old Elie hadn't time to fire, even if he'd wanted to. He met the dog with his foot and spun him to one side. The terrier scrambled up, shaken. As he crouched there the mutt began to drag himself slowly up to him. There was a hurt look in his large, soft, globular eyes as he licked Terry's feet with his tongue. And at the touch of it, the terrier lowered his head, nuzzled him reassuringly and then turned back to face the old man. It was as if he were saying: "Why, don't you see he needs help and I've got to stand by him? Can't you help him, too?"

For with that the old man's gun dropped once and for all.

"No use—this is too much for me! It'd be like murder, now—there's got to be some other way. Come on—the pair o' you! We'll leave this for the old woman."

A minute later he was on his way back to the punt, the mutt in his arms and the terrier walking trustingly at his heels. He had been given a perfectly good chance at them, but he was instead taking them

"They're wonderful dogs—aint you, Terr y—aint you, Dip? And now I'm going to get the pair of you a rare good meal!"

both home alive. And his slow mind was fumbling for a solution to the new problem.

"I GUESS we can call that part fixed up." And the old woman, having bathed and bandaged the sufferer, began to rock softly in the chair while he lay in her lap. "But what are you going to do with them now, Elie?"

"We c'd keep 'em tied up." The old man bent to pull off his boots.

"Not dogs like them—you wouldn't want to."

"Then there's nothin' for it but to send 'em back to Doc Fuller an' threaten him if he don't look after 'em better we'll have the law on him."

But the old woman had made up her mind that they were not going back. She had been thinking. And, suddenly, she stopped rocking.

"Elie,"—and she leaned forward,—"do you mind that deer dog—the one as was always running rabbits?"

"Yeh—sure." He looked up puzzled. "But—

"You mind how you broke him off? And you mind how worried you was—for he was a good one? But you worked with him, and cured him. They said you couldn't do it—but you did, in little more than a week. Why couldn't you work it the same with these ones?"

"Yeh—sure I mind all that." He chuckled. "But 'rats an' rabbits's different. An' these fellows've got a purty good taste o' killin'. It might work an' it mightn't. I'm mighty doubtful—"

"Sure it would work. Sure you c'd do it, Elie."

"Well, there'll be no harm in givin' it a go, anyway."

The very next morning found him beginning the experiment, with a live 'rat which he had trapped. Tying the terrier up outside the door, he placed it in a pen just beyond his reach.

And the dog went wild. He jumped and tugged in a rush of mad desire. But the old couple soothed him. And, finally, he tired and lay down.

"That'll do fine for a start." Old Elie threw him a piece of boiled meat and walked away. But he left the 'rat where it was. And every time it stirred the dog broke into a fury to reach it. Gradually, though, he quieted—and in two days gave it no attention.

AFTER that the treatment was changed. While the old woman held him on a leash, Elie sent a 'rat running across in front of him. He leaped at once—only to be jerked back to the tune of: " 'Ware 'rat, Terry, 'ware 'rat! Steady, boy, steady now!"

This went on at intervals for a week. "He's l'arnin'!" the old man would repeat with satisfaction as the outbursts

lost force. And one morning he lowered a live muskrat close up to Terry's nose. He stiffened. His nostrils quivered. But he did not stir.

The old woman let the leash fall as she bent and petted him.

"Sure looks 's if he'd l'arnt now!" And the old man pushed the 'rat back into the pen. "Guess we got him cured, maw. Tonight I'll try him out on the creek and make certain."

BUT that night the swamp was to have an unlooked-for visitor, one, indeed, that was to give things an entirely new turn. Old Elie knew nothing of this as he floated lazily along. The mutt was lying in the bow, loose. He showed no sign of the recent peppering with the birdshot. Behind him sat the terrier, still tied, for he had not yet been given the freedom that would be the final test of all. But along the creek scores of 'rats at their approach plunged into the water. And neither dog showed a sign of more than passing interest.

"By dang!"—and old Elie eyed them happily as he poled—"sure enough looks like—"

He did not finish. For the pair had started a racket that all at once shattered the night. The mutt had flung to his feet with high-pitched barking. The terrier was tearing furiously at his rope.

"What in—!" He leaned out, and, in the dark water, made out a low dark head.

"A mink!" And he yelled it; for he had abundantly learnt that the mink was the worst enemy the muskrats had. "Go git him, boys! After him, after him, Terry! Good dog, fetch him!"

But that was to be the mutt's moment. For one thing, in the excitement, Elie had forgotten that Terry was tied. At his shout, it was Dip, and not he, who shot into the creek and was at the mink's heels when, with arched back, it went bounding up the bank and into the bush.

TERRY was still plunging at the rope with the old man vainly fumbling at the taut knot. But, at that moment, Dip's voice in the bush took on a new note. Elie caught the terrier to him and listened. From the mink came a series of squalling shrieks, and then, sharply, silence—and, finally, three or four falsetto barks from Dip. And they were barks of canine triumph.

"Holy jumpin', but he's got 'im!" He had worked the terrier loose at last. "Yes sir, he's got 'im!" He was still holding the rope. "Steady now, Terry, hold on now, till I git this lantern lit."

As he clambered up the bank, the mutt came running out of the dark. He certainly had got him. And with all the pride in the world, he was gripping his prize in his mouth. It was perhaps the first hunting the little fellow had ever done on his own and he had made the most glorious of kills. No wonder the terrier swung round him with yelps of praise!

And surely it was not to be wondered at that into old Elie's mind, as he watched them, should have flashed the thought: If the runt could do that alone, what could not the two of them do together?

"I'll be danged!" He got the mink into his hands at last and examined it in the light of the lantern. It was a big one, too. "You're one fine dog all right, Dip. . . . . Yes sir, this sure gives me an idea."

HOME again, he showed the old woman the mink and told the story.

"An' more than that," he went on, "aint we mebbe got something in them two dogs that's a dang' sight better'n wire fence? They aint goin' to kill 'rats no more—but looks to me as if they could be easy l'arnt to kill any other kind of varmin' that comes along intrudin'. Sure looks like that to me."

"Oh, Elie—they will! They will!" She let herself down on a chair and picked the mutt up in her arms. Her eyes were glistening. But it was not of mink or weasel she was thinking. Rather was it that in that hour a solution had come for everything. There need be no more loneliness for her. The dogs need no longer range homelessly for food. And the old man need worry no more about his muskrats. Here were two protectors who would enjoy nothing better than chivvying their foes.

She reached out and pulled the terrier towards her, too. The longing was gone from her face. She was half smiling, half crying.

"Oh, Elie," she said, "aint it great you didn't shoot them! They're wonderful dogs—aint you, Terry—aint you, Dip? . . . . . And now I'm going to get the pair of you a rare good meal!"

The Riff Salient

By WARREN HASTINGS MILLER

"To you, Lady Luck!" the Anzac said briefly, and let them fall. The dice scattered, rolled, came down a five and a six.

A splendid story of the Foreign Legion by the man who gave us "A Soldier of the Legion" and many another fine story.

Illustrated by Paul Lehman

"THEY attack tonight, I think. My front of the salient, *mon Commandant.*"

"Let them. She is bait, that salient!" Commandant Knecht, of the Second Regiment, Foreign Légion, smoothed his beard with a large hand and leered engagingly upon the troubled Duveyrier commanding the Fourteenth Moroccans. Big, burly, bluff and genial, Knecht was a large and pachydermatous animal not easily disturbed. He always had some subtle reason behind that urbane ease of his, no matter how alarming the situation might seem.

None of his officers liked this salient. It simply was asking for attack! It ran up the hill from Fes-el-Bali in a long V of men to the ruined *poste* of Biban at its apex, the Second Regiment holding the east flank in a rude line of rifle-pits, the Fourteenth Moroccans facing west. The ravines below on both sides swarmed with Riff tribesmen. It was during the opening days of the Riff War, and everyone knew what a close call Abd-el-Krim's drive on Fez had been. There had been nothing between him and the capital but a few Moroccan regiments, some *goums* of irregular Arab levies, and the *poste* garrisons—seventy of them, scattered along a hundred mile frontier.

Those soldiers of civilization, the Foreign Legion, had been rushed by train and lorry from hundreds of miles down in the Desert, the First Regiment to Taza, the Second to Fes-el-Bali. Knecht's command had deployed out of their lorries just in time to save that key position from the charging hordes of Riffians—and even then had themselves only been saved by the timely charge of three squadrons of Spahis. As for the seventy *postes,* they were now all anywhere from three to ten miles within Abd-el-Krim's lines, and all of them being besieged. Poste Biban had been blown up by its defenders the night before, and its garrison of Senegalese rescued by Sergeant Ike and forty of the Légion. And then Knecht had established his salient, as an entering wedge, and no one else was pleased.

"IF he had the intelligence of the frog, that Abd-el-Krim, he would attack on both sides tonight and crush us in like the shell of the egg!" growled Duveyrier, twirling his long Norman mustache.

"Bah!" said Knecht, and applied himself to his beer. He waved a burly arm

out into the night, where, beyond the illumination of the military canteen, rose the tall and grim mountains of the Riff under the stars across the dark valley. "Regard you, Duveyrier," said Knecht with satisfaction as his red tongue licked bearded lips and his brown eyes gleamed facetious merriment. "Let me whisper something for your ear: The guns have come up! Not half an hour ago. Two batteries of seventy-five's. Me, I knew they were behind us, so I establish my salient. They are now posted where they sweep both of its flanks with artillery. I should adore an attack!"

He swung the beer mug in a you-be-damned circle to his lips and waved the free hand nonchalantly. Duveyrier looked relieved, but the third officer at their table spoke up in a sharp, incisive voice:

"Even then it will be of no avail, this time, my commandant." Knecht put down the mug, worried for a moment, and looked at him questioningly. To all the world that handsome young officer was some sheik of the friendly tribes, in conference with Commandant Knecht and Colonel Duveyrier. In reality he was Lieutenant Carreño, of the Intelligence, a dark, French-Spanish colonial of the type that is so significant of the future of colonial Africa.

"Of no avail, Carreño?" Knecht said sharply. "But they are the Twenty-fifth Colonial Artillery from Oran! And I am proud of them, proud of the whole Army of Africa! She saves herself, North Africa! Not a man from France can lift a hand in her defense because Abd-el-Krim has struck so suddenly. But—*bah!* We are of the old conquering régime, Duveyrier and I, but we look on, and we see this young giant, this North Africa, pouring her own troops through the Taza Corridor! It is a nation, here, that asserts her strength!" Knecht launched into the oration that his poetic soul delighted in. "I and my Soldiers of Civilization, the Légion, we help. But it is you, Carreño, who were born and raised here, you and that admirable Luini of the Artillery, who broke all records in getting his guns here—it is you colonials, I say, who are our hope and our strength! Is it that I cannot rely on the colonial artillery to make of my salient a trap for these Riffians?" he demanded with severity.

CARRENO listened respectfully to that digression on the nation of North Africa forming in the womb of time, but he was a colonial and therefore practical in sticking to the immediate facts before them. His incisive French, spoken with a Spanish patois full of grating consonants, replied: "It is not the artillery, *mon commandant*. They are good. But Sidi el Hadj, the German, commands the Riffians on Duveyrier's side. He was an officer in the old Imperial army, and he knows better than to attack in force when guns command a front. And he knows about your guns already, be sure! Fes-el-Bali swarms with Riff spies! *Bien?* My agents say that there will *be* an attack, just the same. But it will be in the nature of the English game of 'all the geese come over.'"

Duveyrier growled helplessly as he caught the significance of that. "He means a desertion, *en masse*, of my Moroccans, Commandant," he said. "You know that I have lost a third of my men already. My Maghzeni, he goes to the Arab café when off duty. He hears the whisper of temptation. Abd-el-Krim will soon be Sultan of all Morocco. . . . . Morocco will encourage Algiers to rise. . . . . Algiers will liberate Tunis. Then those who were with Abd-el-Krim from the first will receive high station, emirates, *aghas, rais*, all the paraphernalia of the old Barbary States. If he but brings his rifle under his cape and some cartridges to this café! His escape will be made easy. The Riff will welcome him as a brother. If not—woe to those who forgot they were Arabs and aided the hated Roumi! You see, Commandant. They are but children, my Maghzenis!"

Knecht looked thoughtful again, his brow furrowed. This desertion was the most serious weakness in the present situation. One could depend on the Algerian native troops, the Spahis, tirailleurs, battalions d' Afrique. But they were not here yet. And Morocco had been only eleven years under French guidance.

The old drama was afoot here, the vigorous colonial pushing on to the future and peaceful development; the native, narrow and reactionary in view, hating the Roumi in his heart, hoping for the old war, plunder and anarchy once more. Knecht sighed. No; the Légion, the Soldiers of Civilization, would be needed here for many a year yet! They represented the world's interest in backward countries, the world's police, those Légion foreigners who enlisted, some for a taste of fighting, some because of criminal records, many more because of an instinct in the white race that this world

was created for peace and prosperity, and that the native was hopeless, needed schooling and discipline before he could learn that fact.

"This is what I learn, Commandant," said Carreño, his voice harshly ironical. "An attempt will be made, tonight, to bag the entire Fourteenth Moroccans. They will be appealed to come over and join the Riff by the voices of their own deserters calling to them. Suppose it succeeds? Can Duveyrier and his officers hold them back from the stampede across to the Riff line? And then, Sidi el Hadj being in command, he is soldier enough to know that *then* is the time to strike! Your whole left flank will be without a soldier to defend it. The Légion will be attacked in the rear, and at that signal, Abd-el-Krim will attack simultaneously on their front. Result, disaster complete to our arms, the salient wiped out, the road to Fez open. Of what use will the guns be, then?"

"Git away, girls! Vamoose!" Ike ordered harshly. "Cut it out, Bill—we can't do nothin' with them around!"

Knecht gaped unhappily at this picture drawn by the Intelligence officer. For the moment he was at a loss how to manage such a diabolical attack as this. And a good general like Sidi el Hadj would undoubtedly make prompt use of its success.

"The guns could hold Abd-el-Krim back with shrapnel fire *bien nourri*," (well maintained) he mused. "But—my poor Légion! It is ghastly, Carreño! This prospect of their being attacked in the rear by native troops supposed to be friends!" He looked to Duveyrier for any ray of encouragement, but the Norman was doubtful and troubled. He knew well the situation among his Moroccans, that they were wavering, a third of them deserted already, the rest anxious to fight on the winning side, not to miss the loot if Abd-el-Krim should be successful. And already he had seventy French *postes* within his lines. He had plenty of guns, ammunition and supplies, captured wholesale by the surrender of an entire Spanish army. Already, within the first three days, he had advanced against the French twenty miles on a hundred mile front. How would that look to a Moroccan soldier, as yet unconvinced that French rule was a blessing, secretly proud of the success of these Riffians of his own race, knowing well what it would mean if Abd-el-Krim, that almost legendary chieftain, should once take Fez and proclaim himself sultan?

"Remember the English and their mutiny in India! It is the same situation, only I and mine are the sepoys' officers," Duveyrier offered without much hope in his tones.

KNECHT planted both elbows on the table and seized his ears in a spell of concentrated thought. In him the hope of the whole French genius, its traditions,

its love of gardens and chickens and peaceful countrysides, was concentrated at that moment. During his campaigning he had seen Algeria turn into just such a smiling countryside, a second France, beautiful, prosperous, great harbors built where had been dangerous reefs, rails laid everywhere, roads that were the wonder of the world spread in a network, towns sprung up like magic, even the Sahara being made productive.

Only America could match it, and all in about the same time, less than a hundred years for North Africa. Marvelous! A new nation was being born. Before that all was turmoil, plunder, fire and sword, rival sultans, civil war, intriguing emirs. In eleven years France had done the same thing for Morocco, abolished anarchy, set up a stable government, laid the rails, built at Casablanca a harbor second only to Algiers'. A countryside even more smiling and prosperous than Algeria. And Knecht himself represented it all, for who had made all this possible but the Army of Africa and the Foreign Légion? Force was the only way to obtain your smiling countryside—when you were dealing with the inrooted propensity of the Arab to plunder and raid! But this was not a question of force meeting force, and might civilization win. It was worse than that, treachery, that same Arab who had seen Morocco grow, eager to tear it all down again, to turn against the hand that had blessed him.

"Prosperity—yes, but all for the French!" That was the Riff catchword that was so hard to combat. A false catchword, Knecht felt passionately; for the prosperity was there, and millions of the Arabs were enjoying it, however ungratefully. It was only when some ambitious fanatic broke out among them that the catchword became dangerous. It was so now, with Duveyrier's Moroccan troops, who were listening to it unthinkingly. And Knecht could see no way out of this at all. Sidi el Hadj's subtle "attack" was coming. It all depended, now, on whether the Moroccans would stand fast and reply to it with the rifle volley it deserved. But would they? The chances were against it, for as Duveyrier had said, they were but children. They would desert *en masse!*

Knecht raised his head. *"Holá!* My *Légionnaires!* Three of them!" he exclaimed with relief, as if his men had sprung unbidden to his aid.

The three were moving along the outer fringe of tables, and all in search of a drink. Little Hortet, that zouzou who was still a hardened old reprobate when off duty in spite of his recent promotion to lieutenant, led them. Followed him Sergeant Ike Smith of Texas, long, lanky, hook-nosed, drooping mustache, that lock of black hair of his hanging down from under the rim of his kepi, as usual. Swank was Ike, for a sar-major in the French army dresses precisely as the commissioned officer, a single gold stripe on his red kepi. The third man was Anzac Bill, in sober Légion khaki, peaked hat over one eye, the swagger of the Australian in his gait and a to-hell-with-you look in his eyes.

"A moi, la Légion!" cried out Knecht, a humorous yelp accompanying his gesture. "Beer, *mes enfants!"*

IT needed no more than that to bring them flocking in. Duveyrier they already knew. He had been adjutant in the Légion once, and Sergeant Ike had rescued him when sleeping most unwillingly on the bones of a saint in an Arab tomb, during the taking of Khasbah er-R'Bia. Carreño sat back looking at them sleepily from the shadows of his turban drapery, eyes that appraised, a busy brain behind them thinking, scheming. It took the Légion, if you wanted to get things done!

"My old one," said Knecht, addressing the gray little old zouzou, whose judgment he trusted above all officers sent out from St. Cyr, "this gentleman of the Intelligence, he has scared yet one more gray hair upon my head! The Moroccans are about to desert, he says. Those who have already deserted will return, tonight, in the Riff line and attack us as do the cooing doves—with soft and persuasive words, *ma foi!* The devil of it is that Duveyrier's fools will listen—and what then, I demand of you? Is it that the Légion alone remains to defend Fez because a line of Riffs comes up to make pretty talk?"

"Morbleu!" growled Hortet over his beer, set down by a fezzed waiter. He could see all the rest of it as could Knecht, the Légion charged from the rear and massacred just as soon as the deserting Moroccans could be formed for an attack on their former comrades. But the wizened old soldier of Africa was famous for two things; you could not kill him by any known combination of mines, bullets or yataghans, nor was he afraid of any of them; also he was quick and keen with his military thinking.

A heavy blow from behind smote Ike's head with stunning force, and he felt the flash-lamp drop nervelessly from his hand.

If he had lived a hundred years ago, he might have left Napoleon tied somewhere to the artillery and himself risen to handle the armies of France, as an expert playing with amateurs!

"Morbleu, non vieux!" he told the Commandant. "It is to win with talk? *Bien!* We have the guns, and let them talk first! All it needs is that one man with a signal-flasher lies out there beyond our Moroccan's lines. When the enemy gets that far —*Diable!* he makes his little flashes! Before one of them can open his mouth, those dear *soixante-quinze,* they *craque*—how you say it, Sergeant Ike?"

"Slam hell out of 'em," supplied Ike with pleasure. "Only, this ol' cow-punch aint goin' to *be* out thar none, Hortet!" he warned off that military genius. "Gawd help the pore bozo what gives that signal!"

"It is nothing," said Hortet without emotion. "The shrapnel, she cannot hit everybody, *ma foi!*"

ANZAC BILL gave a gurgly guffaw over his rum. His bronzed and seamed iron face turned on Hortet sardonically, every tousled hair on his thick skull awry, for Bill took his kepi off when really sitting down to drink. "Not everybody, Frog," he retorted. "I've seen as many as two of my Anzacs get through, when the shrapnel was slapping 'em down as a man thrashes wheat! Still, sir, I'll volunteer to be that man, if you don't mind," he turned to say suavely to the Commandant.

"Me too, sir," put in Ike. "I was only foolin', Hortet. And Bill, here, he's thick-haided and mought aim that signal the wrong way. Nope—two of us ought to do that job, Commandant, an' git it done *right!*"

Ike sprawled luxuriantly in his chair and put down some more beer. As for Hortet, it went without saying that nothing lunatic was proposed without his being in the thick of it! And that made three of them, and Knecht could have as many more of the Légion as he wanted. For a moment the Commandant pursued that idea a distance. Why *not* move the whole Légion over? And when these birds came up for a desertion-talk, hoist them all on their bayonets? No; Abd-el-Krim was too watchful for that. He would walk right into the salient and make himself at home if there was no line holding its right flank.

But this scheme of Hortet's, of one daring man, or possibly two, out there beyond the left flank, was a sound bit of military planning. As Ike had said—to Knecht's delight in its picturesque Yankee phrase-

ology—the guns would "slam hell" out of them, once they got a range-signal, and Sidi el Hadj's persuasions for desertion *en masse* would be over before they began. Also it would be a good object-lesson for the waverers now in Duveyrier's ranks.

"Why not send up a star-shell when we begin to hear them talk?" that officer was objecting, for the sacrifice of a single human life—and particularly one of his old Légion boys—was distasteful to Duveyrier if it could be managed any other way.

"Bah!" exploded Knecht hilariously. "What would your star-shell show but empty space in front of your line, Duveyrier? The Riff will not be standing up in a line of battle. In the bushes, rather, flat on the ground, where they can call yet not be hit if your Moroccans should reply with bullets. No; what is needed is one idiot in their midst, an idiot who is thirsting to be killed, who will make his little flashes and let the shrapnel fall where it will. And here are three of them!"

HE waved a thick hand over his three Légionnaires, beaming upon them and secretly proud, for they had saved the day with this precious scheme, he could see in Carreño's eyes.

"No; one, sir! One! I insist!" protested Anzac Bill, laying a heavy and restraining forearm across Ike's eager gestures.

"Don't listen to him, Commandant—he needs a guarjeen!" drawled Ike, shaking the forearm off. "I goes, savvy!"

"Morbleu!" grunted Hortet. "Is it that I, who make this so-pious trap, be set aside for these cabbages? *Diable!"*

"Ouff!" chortled Commandant Knecht. "Three imbeciles! *Eh bien?* Let them dice for death, then!"

He looked around inquiringly for the bones, and Carreño grinned and produced them, for they were part of his business, Arabs being Arabs. Hortet grabbed for them and threw a miserable three; then went out and threw down his cap and danced on it in a French fury. Ike swept them next into his big paw, breathed on them, made a pass or two.

"Come awn, you babies!" muttered Ike fervently. "Best thing we do back in li'l ol' Texas, Commandant!"

A pair of fives. The Anzac picked them up and turned his left shoulder to the table. "To you, Lady Luck!" he said briefly, and let them fall. The dice scattered, rolled; one of them spun on a corner while the table watched. And they came down a five and a six.

"That flasher, sir, if you don't mind!" said Bill with his iron grin amid the shout that went up. "When is this party?"

They all looked at Carreño, who advised: "Just as soon as you can get there, my Légionnaire. It is now ten o'clock. Sidi el Hadj will move before twelve, I am warned. For the rest of us, I suggest that the Commandant take the battery, in person, and Duveyrier stay with his lines, surrounding himself with all his officers and backed by a picked squad of the Légion. The native sergeants and corporals—those that are loyal—will have to do the best they can with the ranks. The gunners will be guided by the tiny spark of light from the flasher, and will fire over it, so as to give our man all the chance possible. I suggest, sir, that he post himself somewhat above the brow of the ravine, and, as near as he can judge, on the right end of this attack. The rest is luck! But you, sir, seem to have your share of it," he concluded with a smile upon Anzac Bill.

"It's a habit, sir, rather!" agreed Bill, and downed his third glass of rum with gusto. "I'll be out there within the hour, Commandant!" he told their leader. "You send your man with the flasher here."

"Bien!" said Knecht, and they all arose to put Hortet's plan into execution. Just the same, Ike was convinced that Bill still needed a "guarjeen"; also they had come here, in a serious way, to drink. To Ike that meant beer, good French beer, that filled one's belly with happiness and one's soul with peace. To the Australian it meant whisky, or if he could not get it, "nigger-head" rum from Martinique. Bill could hold any amount of it, but Ike damned the dice fervently for picking *him,* for he knew Bill better than any of the officers did. There never *was* a thicker mug for carrying out any scheme, however simple! And Bill never had any idea of time. There was always time for one more drink, in his philosophy. When given the Victoria Cross in London, he had twice failed utterly to show up at the ceremony, and the third time had put in an appearance hours after the date, the King and his dignitaries having gone away in disgust, leaving an indignant secretary to confer the honor.

That was Bill; and Ike determined to stick around until he was safely on his

Ike grabbed the yataghan and swung savagely at the other guard.

way. And about then, Fate, or perhaps it was the wily Riff, who might have been listening in on all this—no one knows—sent a couple of Ouled Naïl girls strolling by. Their silver anklets and bracelets jingled. They wore voluminous panties of blue silk embroidered all over with figures of mauve, and above them jackets all lace and silk and finery. Their heads were adorned with extraordinary helmets of gold coins linked by gold chains, in broad bands across their foreheads and alluring festoons over their ears. They were beauties, if you weren't particular. Their oxlike brown eyes were fixed on Bill and Ike; hard, cruel, speaking but one thing—invitation.

Bill stared at them with interest, while Ike grabbed his arm and bade him lay off it, in a low growl. Beautiful faces, fair, long, alluring as only the Arab can be; both girls had paused, and seeing no officers of rank in the café, they came straight for the table. They were quite at home with soldiery. The tallest and handsomest glided up to Bill without hesitation, put her arm around his neck, found a seat on his brawny knee and pressed his tousled head to her bosom. The other made for Ike, who blushed red and fought her off.

"Cut it out, Bill!" he growled. "We can't do nothin' with them around! Git away, girls! Vamoose!" he ordered harshly.

"Nice sergeant! Pretty sergeant! You come wis me," cooed the littler one, clinging to him.

Ike got rough and attempted to bundle her away; whereat she took refuge on Bill's other knee and made faces at him. Imps they were, brimming with enchantments, and they were fast setting muddle-headed old Bill afire. The fezzed waiter came flapping up with another tray of rum, grinning cynically at the girls.

Ike was becoming rapidly alarmed. Who knew how many of these waiters were Riff spies? One of them might have been idling behind the table, unnoticed, while Hortet's plan was being discussed. Or it might have been the bootblack, that small Arab imp who had been assiduously polishing Duveyrier's boots. Anyway, chance or design, these girls were here, and they were a real menace. Bill was fondling them both, and the last glimmerings that a messenger with a flasher was due here presently seemed to have left his mind. The satyr look leered in his eyes; the girls were holding to his lips, one after another, all three glasses of rum.

Bill looked idiotically pleased with himself and his girls, and was completely a fool, Ike thought, as he wrestled helplessly with the situation, getting more and more worried. And then the messenger with the flasher arrived, and things began to happen.

All the electrics of the café went out suddenly. There was an uproar of astonished and angry soldiery, tables overturned, men ramming each other in the dark, cursing and striking. Ike jumped for where he had last seen that messenger, found him, and snatched the nickel cylinder from his hand. A flash of its rays lit up the café. Bill and the girls had vanished; at least he could see nothing of them in the mass of uniforms, spahi capes, burnouses of *goum* irregulars, that milled in there like a forest in a gale.

"*Holá*—light! *C'est ça!*" called a voice.

"The hell I will!" muttered Ike, and put it out. He knew he would have to act quickly now. Their plan was known—no doubt of that!—and Sidi el Hadj's spies had kidnaped the man who was to give the signal. Those girls, the lights put out, Bill gone—Ike turned and raced down an alley for the open country on the salient side of Fes-el-Bali. He tried to think further into this as he ran, but Ike was just a plain ex-cowman who loved the adventure to be found in the Légion, and his brains always went back on him when he got into anything so subtle and complicated as trying to match wits with a man like Sidi el Hadj. What would that commander of the Riff be doing about his attack now? Would he change the whole plan, or would he carry it out on the lines Intelligence had warned them? So far as Ike could see, his spies in Fes-el-Bali had immediately set about abolishing that signalman. Then the attack could come ahead without the guns saying a word.

"Pore ol' Bill! They got *him*, all right!" said Ike. "He warn't no good anyway, soused to the gills that-away; but I hate to leave him to them gals. Howsomever, looks like the signal's the impo'tant thing."

He reflected that the Ouled Naïl girls would not do much more to Bill than strip him and rob him blind. They, and one of the waiters, had hustled him away the moment the lights went out. He had heard a groan and a cry beside him right after snatching that flasher. That was evidently the messenger, struck down under the illusion that he was the one holding the light. He owed his own life to the fact that he had promptly put it out, Ike realized with a shiver. Well, he had got away with it!

HE worked down cautiously into the ravine. It was lined with bushes and had a dry brook in its bottom, and it meandered down from the hills in an irregular course that separated Sidi el Hadj's lines from the No Man's Land in front of Duveyrier's Moroccans. Ike crept up it warily. There were Riff snipers posted above him on his left hand, but all was profound silence under the stars. Ike used every bit of Texas woodcraft that was in him, stepping cautiously in stockinged feet, dislodging no pebble, lifting bushes carefully aside. His automatic was ready in his right hand, the flash-lamp stowed in a tunic pocket. Listening intently, he worked his way slowly up until he judged himself about opposite the companies on Duveyrier's extreme left. Then he crawled up into No Man's Land.

A bare stony hillside, cleared of brush, tufted here and there with green camelweed. Back to Ike's right gleamed the lights of the town. Somewhere below it were posted Knecht's guns, commanding this slope. Up beyond him several hundred yards was the long line of the salient flank, running uphill to where the smoke from Biban still hovered over the mountain peaks. Ike lay still, wondering if he had got here ahead of Sidi el Hadj's attack, after all. Or had they abandoned it? Everything was still as death. But there seemed to be an unaccountable undertone of movement all about. Ike listened for some time, trying to locate it. Nothing. And yet the very stones seemed creeping. Ike lay still and tense, his mind all a-tingle again. Something *was* up! The durned hosstyles were at some deviltry, but it was too many for Ike!

Then he thought he heard a stone clink on steel over to the right and raised up for a look. And that one look was enough to electrify him with horror! Rocks—*nothing!* The whole hillside was covered with creeping Riff, camouflaged with white and gray earth on their black nakedness! That glimpse had defined them, after one intent glance at the nearest. Long human forms, but broken and crisscrossed and splotched with limestone mud of the prevailing countryside gray, so that, if they did not move, they melted into this stony hillside.

Ike lowered and reached carefully for his flash-lamp. He knew now that Sidi el Hadj had changed his plan indeed! They weren't going to appeal to the Moroccans to desert and come over, but were raiding them for their rifles instead! This was an attack in force—with the silent and deadly knife—and depending subtly for its success

on the fact that nothing of the kind was expected, only a parley, at voice-distance! And that signal could not be made too soon, now, for the guns would be useless, once the lines came together in a hand-to-hand assault. Sidi el Hadj would have all the advantage of surprise in that.

Ike got out the flasher and raised it. And then a heavy blow from behind smote his head with stunning force, filled all the universe with blinding stars, and he felt the flash-lamp drop nervelessly from his grasp.

He was out possibly five minutes. When consciousness came again, he was being gripped firmly by two stout tribesmen on either hand. Ike groaned, and his mouth was promptly stopped by a hard hand. His feet were tied already, he realized when he tried to kick. They were holding his arms immovable. The attack was still moving forward, foot by foot. He saw weird shapes pass him, with slow and almost imperceptible movement, on either hand. It might take an hour, yet, before the yelp to rise and charge was given.

Ike watched it develop in impotent agony of soul. He heard the mutter: *"Légion Etrangère,"* pass between his guards—more Arabic that he could not understand. *"Red jal et-teneen!"* muttered one of them. Ike figured out that they were explaining him as the second man at the café, but it was not much comfort. Disaster to the salient was all he could see ahead, and himself helpless to prevent it! The Moroccans were a weak reed at best; either they would be overwhelmed by this sudden attack, or would be converted, with swiftness, to join the winning side and pitch into the Légion guarding the other flank. Gloom! Ike hardly gave a thought to his own fate—which was to be buried alive according to the Riff custom with captured officers, leaving their heads out for vultures to peck at—in his worry over what was about to happen to the long-suffering Légion boys.

And then a song rang out in the night, a drunken and ribald song, and it was coming up the hill on Ike's right. Bill! He had got here, under some muddle-headed recollection that there was a party on over at the salient, and he was due for it.

IKE choked as he recognized the voice. Bill was coming a-singing:

Madamashelle from Armeteers
She hadn't been kisshed in—(hic) forty years.

"Ike!" he stopped to yell.

The attack stopped too. They couldn't do a thing to halt him! There was not a rifle in all this raiding party of hundreds of tribesmen armed with knives. Feminine squeals were adding themselves to Bill's blatant din. He still had those two girls with him, somehow, Ike opined with convulsions of suppressed laughter, while the guards over him cursed.

The parade came nearer, and on the skyline appeared a tall and ungainly apparition. Bill had got hold of a camel somehow, and he and both girls were up on its palanquin! The camel let out a *"Groo-aw-aw-ow-ahhh!"* of protest as it ambled straight for them, and once more Bill stopped singing to sound the Australian: *"Coo-ee!* Oh, Ike!"

"The pore souse!" groaned Ike, as he heard the girls tittering and laughing at that funny noise. " 'Twont be ten seconds more till one of these snakes jumps up an' gits you, Bill!" he thought with exasperation, for a hand was smothering his mouth after that one groan aloud.

And then—Bill lighted a cigar.

Ike could see the profile of it under his straight nose and tousled forehead, a tiny yellow illumination, the flame rising and disappearing in winking flashes as he sucked at it. And taking those sparks of light for the signal, the gunners back at Fes-el-Bali tore loose, and all the hillside was illuminated with the blinding orange explosions of shrapnel. The air overhead thundered and detonated with its terrific crashes; the ground was being thrashed with a hail of iron that combed it like a rake. Ike heard a groan beside him and felt the weight of a guard tumbling across his back. Grabbing the fallen man's yataghan, Ike cut at the bonds on his ankles and swung savagely at the other guard and was free in the pandemonium of yells and curses and running figures all about.

Shrapnel hail slatted down, with stone-breaking force, on every hand, and a whine of bullets hummed overhead from the Moroccan lines where Duveyrier was answering Sidi el Hadj with death. And out of it all towered Bill, on that camel, in the center of the glare of illumination. His girls had jumped down at the first crash, but Bill didn't seem to be minding the *whizz! whizz! whizz!* of horizontal hell around him in the least. He was looking for Ike, who swore fervently and began crawling toward him at top speed.

"Git down, Bill! Off him, you damn'

fool! Git down, for Gawd's sake!" Ike kept yelling as he crept through bewildered and dead Riffs recklessly. Knives struck at him as he passed, but he himself was an added mystery in his Légion uniform, and most of them wormed out of his way.

Still the storm of shrapnel kept up. Those who attempted to rise and run were shot down from the trenches, the rest were being punished where they lay, hell being slammed out of them, as Ike had predicted.

He saw Bill's camel bumped off and come down like a nest of tent poles. Out of the wreck rose Bill, weaving inebriatedly, but still persistently obsessed with the necessity of finding his buddy.

"Prone, you damn' fool!" screeched Ike in a last desperate yelp, made for him on all fours, grappled him, and down they went in a heap.

And then Duveyrier stopped the guns with a star-shell and went over the top by its light with his Moroccans, in a bayonet-charge that turned what was left of Sidi el Hadj's desertion scheme into a massacre.

The aftermath of it was characteristic of Commandant Knecht. Before him presented himself next morning the precise and red-tapish Légion *adjutant,* who had a document setting forth that Private William Blake had been found derelict of his duty and was drunk and disorderly on a camel, instead of being at his post to give a certain important signal.

"Prut!" said Knecht, crushing the paper. "He gave the signal, didn't he? *Le Bon Dieu* knows what would have happened if he hadn't! And my cowboy Sergeant Ike swears he did it on purpose, with that match. He is a liar, that one; but it is a so-delightful lie!"

The Commandant licked his lips with gusto and gave the officious *adjutant* a prodigious wink. *"Eh bien?* I decorate him, that Anzac!" he declared, poking the *adjutant* in the ribs. "For he proves, does he not, that the Légion is never so filled with rum as to forget the field of glory!"

As for Bill, he was the most astonished man in the regiment when led out and medaled, on parade, a day or so later. For the life of him he could not remember a thing that happened after the lights went out in that café! He told Ike so—who told him to shut up and bear it like a man, or he would break Knecht's heart.

"The Hell's Angels Squad," another Foreign Legion story by Warren H. Miller, will appear in an early issue.

The Madness of William Bull

By BERTRAM ATKEY

A blithe adventure of the moon-mad young gilded youth, Merlin O'Moore, his best girl, Blackberry Brown, his valet and his demon dog.

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

MR. MERLIN O'MOORE was in high spirits. He had been in such a really charming mood all day that even his glum, big-headed valet Fin MacBatt had no serious complaints to make about him at the moment, and indeed had gone so far as to say so to his especial crony Henri, the head-waiter at the Astoritz Hotel—when Henri had chanced to look in upon Mr. MacBatt for a chat, a cigarette and a little stimulant prior to girding himself up for his evening rush of business.

"He's been as sweet as a nut all day, Honroy," said the gloomy MacBatt. "And it's full-moon time, too, when he goes completely off his burner, as a rule. I suppose it's because him and little Blackberry Brown are off on a moonlight motor mouch tonight. Going down to our hat factory I think. We own a big hat factory down Reading way. And there's some sort of trouble going on there—strike or something."

"It is extremely oll-right to hear you expressing your satisfaction with him," said Henri pleasantly.

"Oh, don't you get any idea that I'm satisfied with him," the dour MacBatt hastened to say. "I'll own he's been as good as a doll today—but it's only a flash in the pan—if that. Let any little thing sting him, and he'll be on me like a leopard on a lamb. Still—it makes a nice change to

Molossus chanced to get in the way, and MacBatt hoofed the awe-inspiring dogue de Bordeaux halfway across the room.

get a civil word now and then," concluded the blue-jawed valet, holding a glass of his master's remarkable Burgundy to the light.

Henri nodded.

"That is a pretty one—the little Blackberry. H'm?" he said, referring to Merlin's delightful friend Miss Blackberry Brown, the famous white-black comédienne, whose coon flapper representatives at the Paliseum and the Colladium theaters of variety were said by critics to be the talk of the town that year.

"Yes—pretty enough. Not bad," said MacBatt. "But streaky-tempered—very streaky. Give you a quid at two o'clock and give you the bird at two-twenty. . . . . Still, she aint bad, in some respects. Have you seen her turn?"

"Oh, but yes," said Henri enthusiastically. "It is very *chic*—very ravishing. She is like drinking champagne, is she not?"

"Not bad," agreed MacBatt. "I've known worse."

"Yes indeed," said Henri, emptying his glass in that deft French way of his, and rising. "I go now to execute my duties."

THE door-bell of the suite of rooms which Mr. O'Moore tenanted whirred as Henri rose, and MacBatt accompanied him. One of the hotel servants was occupying the mat, with a telegram in his hand, trying to look as though he deserved a tip.

"For Mr. O'Moore," he said.

"All right," replied MacBatt, and conveyed the telegram to his master.

Merlin, who was enjoying a half-hour with Swinburne and tobacco, prior to dinner, looked up at the blood-curdling growl with which it was the custom of his fearsome *dogue de Bordeaux,* Molossus, to greet every entry of MacBatt.

"Well, Fin, what's this?" inquired the millionaire affably.

"Wire, sir." MacBatt passed it on a salver, waiting while Merlin opened and read it. It was very short, but decidedly to the point:

"MEN VERY MUCH OUT OF HAND. GLAD HEAR YOU COMING. DELAY IN SETTLEMENT MAY BE SERIOUS."

It was signed by Forsythe, the general manager of the hat factory. Merlin put down Swinburne with a jolt, and rose. His affability went suddenly. "Now, MacBatt, my man, get interested. Don't dawdle! Do something besides smoking my cigars and drinking my drinks. Send a telegram to Forsythe saying 'Coming at once;' see Henri and countermand dinner, and tell him to conspire swiftly with the *chef* to put up a traveling dinner-basket fit to invite a lady to share; ring up the garage and tell them to have the car—the fast two-seater—ready in twenty minutes; ring up Miss Brown—and let me know when you are through; give Molossus something to eat; fill my cigar-case; lay out a tweed suit, soft shirt and collar for me! Hurry up, my dear good man! Don't stand staring there! Don't you realize that a strike is a serious matter?"

With a muffled snarl the valet plunged heavily to the door, while Merlin, slipping off his dinner-jacket as he went, turned into his dressing-room.

FOR the ensuing twenty minutes the activities of Mr. MacBatt, boiling with badly suppressed fury, were reminiscent of an extremely spirited encounter between a youngish Irish terrier and an old, tough and worldly-wise London tomcat. He whirled; he dashed; he swore. Once Molossus chanced to get in his way, and he did what not one man in a thousand would have dared to do—that is, he hoofed the awe-inspiring *dogue de Bordeaux* halfway across the room before Molo quite realized what was what. It was like kicking a surly tiger; and if the flustered and fuming MacBatt had not instantly and bravely defended himself with a piano stool, until Merlin came out in his underclothing to quell the *dogue,* there would assuredly have been serious bloodshed.

"He deliberately got in my way, sir—did it a-purpose, sir, as I was hurrying across to tell you Miss Brown was at the phone waiting, sir!" lied the perspiring MacBatt, indicating the hanging telephone receiver, and hastening out to get the hamper from Henri, and put it in the already waiting car.

But all good things come to an end, and within five minutes of the specified time Merlin, duly arrayed for motoring, was leaving the suite, with Molossus slouching at his heels.

Merlin was pleased hastily to express his satisfaction with the valet's energetic handling of the mobilization; and MacBatt, shedding for a moment his sullenness, mentioned that he had a small favor to ask.

"Quickly, then—what is it?" said Merlin.

"Beg pardon, sir—I should like to ask you to let off one of the forewomen fairly light if she's mixed up in this—young woman named Wimple, sir. She's a well-meaning young woman, sir."

Merlin smiled.

"Ah, another of your numerous and everlasting *amours,* I suppose, Fin? Is she engaged to you? Man, you ought to be called Don Juan MacBatt! How do you do it? You wouldn't appeal to me if I were a lady!"

MacBatt blushed bluely.

"Oh, not engaged, sir. But we happened to go for a stroll when you were staying a few days near the works last month. She's a very nice girl—in some respects—and I thought I'd put in a word for her. She's engaged to one of the engine men there."

Merlin nodded.

"All right—I will deal with her as she deserves."

Henri appeared at the head of the stairs, a bottle of wine in each hand.

"Pardon, sir—I overlooked the Moselle for Miss Brown."

"All right, Henri. Take it down, MacBatt."

"The dinner for tonight is countermanded, sir?" inquired Henri. "The *chef* wishes me to express his regret. He had excelled himself—even has he created for this evening two magnificent inspirations, the *caneton à la Merlin O'Moore,* and yet again, sir, the superb *Pêches à la Coon*—in honor of the charming Mademoiselle Blackberry!"

"I am very sorry, Henri, very. Please convey my compliments and thanks—and regrets—to Monsieur Casserole—" began Merlin hurriedly.

"Not at all, my dear boy, not at all!" broke in a refined voice close by.

THEY looked round to behold, advancing down the corridor, an old gentleman with a fine head of silvery hair, wearing an extremely racy silk hat with a broad well-curled brim, and a black, deep-caped Inverness overcoat—none other, indeed, than Merlin's good friend and financial protégé, Mr. Fitz-Percy, that evergreen and totally indestructible *doyen* of all the deadheads in London. He had evidently overheard Henri's plaint, and he advanced with outstretched hand.

"You issue forth once again to your moonlight revels, I perceive, Merlin mine—and doubtless you are impatient to be gone. Go then, with the blessing of one to whom your happiness and welfare is as important as his own. Leave the creations of the highly gifted Monsieur Casserole to one who will appreciate them not less than yourself and your little friend, my ward, Miss Blackberry Brown—I refer, needless to say, to myself, dear laddie. With your generous approval, *I* will attend to the dinner. Come then, dear boy, I will speed you with good wishes." Gracefully he linked his arm in that of Mr. O'Moore and descended the wide stairs with him, merely pausing to remark over his shoulder to Henri that he would return to the dining-hall shortly.

A few moments later Merlin had gone—planning to pick up Miss Brown *en route*

—and the Deadhead and MacBatt turned into the hotel again, the one to enjoy the dinner he had so fortunately inherited, the other to return to Merlin's suite and rest for a while from his labors.

It was perhaps an hour and a half later when the Deadhead, having steered himself with great skill through the dinner which Merlin, Henri and M. Casserole had so scientifically thought out in honor of Miss Brown, and now waiting for Henri to make his Turkish coffee and pour out his liqueur, perceived, making his way across the crowded dining-room, Mr. Fin MacBatt, bearing a telegram in his hand and quite obviously looking for him—Mr. Fitz-Percy.

The man surveyed him a moment in silence; then with unexpected quickness, he slung an upper-cut to the valet's jaw.

Gracefully removing one of the best cigars that the Astoritz could provide him with, the ancient Deadhead smiled.

"Ah, MacBatt, my good fellow, what have we here?" he asked.

"A telegram for Mr. O'Moore, sir," replied the valet with a bleak grin. "He said nothing about opening any wires; and I don't know that I care for the responsibility of opening it. He's in a funny mood—streaky-tempered — full-moon time, Mr. Fitz-Percy."

The Deadhead nodded.

"Very right, Fin, my man—very proper," he said, reaching up for the telegram. "*I* will accept the responsibility of opening the wire on behalf of my young friend Mr. O'Moore. In these matters of delicacy one must always trust to one's instincts—and the experience gained during an extremely checkered career has taught me that my instincts are rarely, if ever, at fault in these matters."

He slipped a silver dessert knife under the flap, opened the envelope and withdrew the telegram. His refined, handsome old face grew grave as he read it. Then he looked up at MacBatt.

"I am very glad indeed that my instincts led me to open this wire," he said. "For it is a warning. Listen!" And he proceeded quietly to read aloud:

"'One of strikers named Big Bill Bull left here by six-thirty train for London stating his intention of assaulting you. Stupid man but tool of dangerous characters. Urge you take precautions. Forsythe.'

"When—and what—is Forsythe, MacBatt?" inquired the Fitz-Percy.

"Manager at our hat factory," said the valet.

"Ah, yes." Fitz-Percy nodded thoughtfully. "Well, I think that we must arrange without delay to receive Mr. Bull. Do you, therefore, my good MacBatt, return to the citadel and await my coming. Do not worry, and do not be nervous—for I shall be with you almost immediately."

The dour MacBatt moved off.

"Worry?" he snarled under his breath. "Me worry about a half-witted ham from the hat factory that thinks he's only got to threaten with his mouth to frighten us!"

The old Deadhead, meantime, with that complete *savoir-faire* which invariably characterized his every action, whether it was "raising" a half-crown from a reluctant "parter" or eating a multi-millionaire's dinner, sent for M. Casserole, and in felicitous terms, complimented him upon the duckling *à la Merlin O'Moore*, expressed his admiration of the peaches *à la Coon*, insisted upon the gratified *chef* having a liqueur with him ("on" Merlin), and then, bestowing upon Henri a very worn shilling with the air of one who passes at least a sovereign, finished his coffee and accomplished a distinguished-looking exit, *en route* to Merlin's suite.

Handing his hat, stick and coat to MacBatt, he entered Merlin's den, inviting the valet to follow him in there to hold a council of war *re* the imminent advent of the ferocious Mr. Bull.

HARDLY had the Deadhead settled down in the most comfortable of the many comfortable chairs before a ring at the door invited MacBatt's attention.

He went out and opened the door rather skillfully with his left hand. In his right hand, which he kept a little behind him, he held ready for immediate use a lead-headed baffy—a "crank" invention long discarded by Merlin as being about twice as heavy as any golfer could ever need, but put aside by the far-sighted MacBatt in view of just such a contingency as this. A very large man, indeed, was standing at the door—a giant of a man, with a singularly small head, and a dull, heavy face, which was totally devoid of any signs of intelligence.

"Yes, what?" said MacBatt curtly.

"Does Mr. O'Moore live here?" asked the visitor heavily.

"Yes—why?" snapped the valet, his jaw protruding.

"And a man name of MacBatt?" continued the giant.

"That's me! What for?" answered MacBatt crisply and contemptuously. He saw that he had to do with a strong man, no doubt, but slow, he thought—painfully slow.

The man surveyed him a moment in silence; and then, without the least sign or warning, and with unexpected quickness, he slung an upper-cut to the valet's jaw. It was short but so remarkably stiff that it made MacBatt's teeth grate quite noisily, and lifted him clean off his feet to a sitting position upon the floor.

The giant stared down at him dully, without the slightest change of expression.

"Take that, MacBatt, see?" he said slowly. "And the next time you try to cut me out with Bessie Wimple, I'll knock your neck off. Where's your boss? I'm Big Bill Bull, I am, and I want a word or two with him. I'll learn him to cheat the engine-men that works for him. Go on—get up and fetch him."

The temporary dizziness had departed from the badly rattled MacBatt's brain now, and he got up, even as the engine-man requested him. But he did not go for Mr. O'Moore—instead he went for Mr. Bull, with the speed of an infuriated lynx and the howl of a semi-maniac in the rage of his life. The shaft of the baffy caught Mr. Bull on the iron-muscled arm which he had raised to protect his head, and snapped like a carrot, so that the lead head of the club flicked down fairly upon the beetling brow of the revengeful Bull. It did not fracture his skull, but it felled him like a buffalo struck by lightning.

The Fitz-Percy, roused by the sound of the combat, emerged just in time to prevent the maddened MacBatt from doing as the bull-moose is said to do, namely, jumping heavily upon the prostrate carcass of his fallen foe.

"Let us not totally obliterate the ruffian from off the face of the earth, MacBatt," said the Fitz-Percy. "Now that you have so deftly rendered him practically unconscious, it may be that, when he recovers, he will be in a milder mood, and more open to reason."

With a certain appearance of weariness, Mr. Bull rose to his feet, staggering slightly.

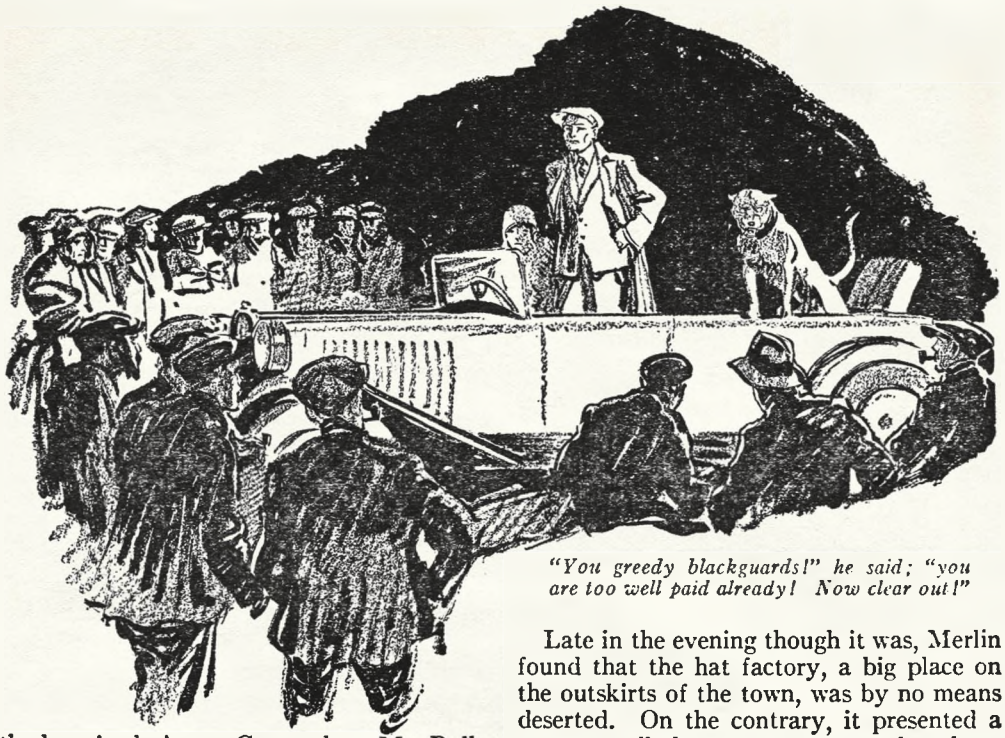
"Those who appeal to physical battle, my good man, must be prepared to abide by the result," said the Deadhead.

"Yes," said the giant dully, and suddenly swung a knotty fist to the near-by MacBatt's ear, refelling him.

The valet bounded to his feet again with a howl, but by this time many of the hotel servants had arrived, and they intervened.

The Fitz-Percy, thinking rapidly, decided that it would be well to lure Mr. Bull out of the hotel. He thought—rightly—that Merlin O'Moore would prefer that rather than the man's arrest, with subsequent police-court proceedings and the inevitable newspaper publicity.

"Come. Let us go forth and have some beer," he suggested cooingly, with his unerring instinct. "Beer—I know a grot where



"You greedy blackguards!" he said; "you are too well paid already! Now clear out!"

the beer is glorious. Come, then, Mr. Bull. Why fight—against heavy odds—when good British beer, nut-brown, comforting, zestful, served by deft-fingered houris in large cool cans or gleaming tankards, awaits us. Beer, Mr. Bull! Over it we can discuss matters, talk over your grievances against my young friend Mr. O'Moore, and await at our leisure his return. Forward to the beer!"

And thus crooning, the Deadhead skillfully led the bewildered Mr. Bull downstairs and beerward. He was a wonderful judge of men, the Deadhead.

The crowd dispersed, and save only for one stealthy figure which followed them—that of the vengeful MacBatt—the couple departed, alone, for a near-by hostelry.

LEAVING the diplomatic Fitz-Percy busily engaged in his noble endeavor to drown the ire of Mr. Bull in unlimited quantities of beer, and leaving the dour MacBatt watching for his chance to rebatter the engine-man, let us glance briefly at the activities of Merlin O'Moore and Miss Blackberry Brown.

Something like two hours after leaving London the couple reached their destination, after what, moon-slaves as they were, they decided was a very pleasant run, broken about midway by what they sincerely believed to be a delightful moonlight picnic, which clearly was entirely their own affair and need not be described in detail.

Late in the evening though it was, Merlin found that the hat factory, a big place on the outskirts of the town, was by no means deserted. On the contrary, it presented a pronouncedly busy aspect—some three hundred or so of the more dissatisfied workmen having decided, after grave and profound deliberation, that quite the simplest way to extract from their employer the increase of wages they desired would be to smash up about seventy-five per cent of the machinery in the place. Armed with the necessary tools for this operation, they advanced upon the factory in a body, reaching it a few moments before Merlin and Miss Brown drove up.

The manager, Forsythe, a shrewd, capable Scot, with an auger-shaped brain, a steel-lined will and rubber-reinforced soul, had collected many police beforehand and formed them as it were into a reception committee for the strikers.

He was haranguing them from a lofty place upon a pile of crates, as Merlin's car came into sight.

"Here," he said, "comes the boss. And if ye'll have the sense to be patient for ten minutes, ye'll discover that he'll settle it one way or the ither within ten minutes. If ye take my advice, ye'll wait. Ye have no fool to deal wi' now, d'ye ken! He'll treat ye fair, and if ye aren't all out of yer minds, ye'll abide by his decision."

The crowd stared with interest at the fair-haired, thin-featured young man, at his pretty lady friend, and especially at the glaring, furrow-faced, pale-eyed, growling beast that stood on the big dicky seat be-

hind—Molossus, who was surveying the multitude with every symptom of displeasure. His teeth gleamed in the gaslight like steel.

Merlin leaned out, talking to Forsythe. He already knew the main points of the strike—for instance, that this was not a unanimous strike, but was largely confined to a section of men comprising perhaps a third of the hands. All the women workers were well paid and satisfied, as well as many of the men—indeed it was well known that all O'Moore's workers, everywhere, were reasonably paid and well housed. But a section of them had lost their heads a little, thanks to the activities of certain discontented individuals, and these comprised the strikers. Mostly they were engine-men, stokers, and what were lucidly described as "craters, twisters, catchers and tankers."

Briefly, then, all that Merlin had to deal with were the engine-men, the stokers, and their quaintly named comrades.

"The bulk of the crowd, sir, are here for curiosity," said Forsythe. "I think ye should be firm. These men should be fired out—" He handed a list. "The rest of the strikers are too well paid as it is."

"I see. How much too much?" asked Merlin quietly. The Scot scribbled some figures upon a sheet from his notebook; and Merlin, who rightly had implicit faith in the judgment of his manager, stood up on the seat of the car and faced the crowd.

Doubtless, judging from the gentle appearance of Mr. O'Moore, they expected a soothing speech, in which he would yield to their demands.

They were disappointed—very.

"Men!" said Mr. O'Moore in a voice that, clear and distinct and with an odd ring if not of gayety, certainly of exhilaration in it, reached every person, striker and non-striker, there. "I understand that about a third of you are dissatisfied—mostly the engine-men, stokers, craters, twisters, catchers and tankers—I don't know what the last four are, but no doubt they are very interesting—and demand a raise."

"Yass! Yuss! Yes! That's it, boss—a good raise!" they bawled.

"And the remaining two-thirds are satisfied!"

"Yah! The dirty blacklegs!" howled the strikers.

"Very well," continued Merlin. "I have made inquiries of Mr. Forsythe—in whom I have perfect trust—and I am satisfied with the result of my inquiries. Now I want, my dear friends, to break an item of news to you. This—I am not interested in hat factories—I don't care for hat factories—I don't require any hat factories. I have so much money that I have never noticed whether this hat factory makes a profit or a loss. I don't know; and, my friends, I don't care. Personally I think this is an ugly hat factory—ugly and smelly—and I assure you that I would far rather see it leveled to the ground and turned into a really pretty golf-links. After all, what is the good of hats? Things that people put on heads which have already been provided by nature with a very reasonable thatch. Personally, I don't believe in hats or hat factories, and if there are a proportion of you who don't want to work in an ugly hat factory, I am sure I don't blame you. I wouldn't myself—should not think of it. Most uncomfortable notion. Still, we'll put that aside. . . . . About this money. Let me say at once that the wages of the non-strikers remain as they are—they are satisfied, and I am sure I am. The wages of the strikers will be reduced ten per cent all round. Do you *get* that, my friends? Ten per cent, all round—and you will still be the best paid hat-factory artists in the world! Those who don't care about staying on can leave. It makes no difference at all to me. If they want to wreck the factory, they can—some other evening. It will not agitate me. I shall never miss it—in fact, I shall be glad to be rid of it."

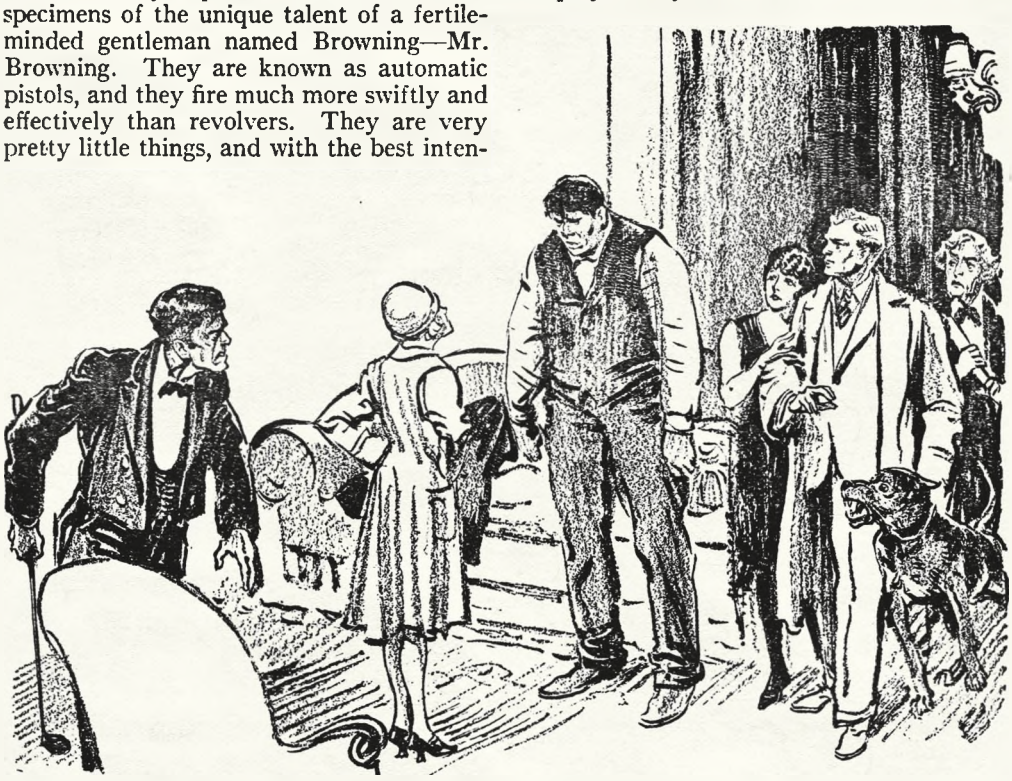
HE smiled benignly upon the rather puzzled crowd. The police, Forsythe, and a few of the sub-managers and so forth were looking uneasy, but Merlin did not appear to notice it.

"Ten per cent cut until you behave yourselves better," he said, rubbing it in. "And you have my sympathy; but you will never get more of my money than I want to give you, until you learn to ask for it a little more civilly than you have on this occasion. And now, what are you going to do about it? Wreck the factory, or accept what I have offered you—namely, ten per cent cut all round? Turn it over in your minds."

He lifted a small bag from the seat and opened it.

"I ought, perhaps, to say that it is not entirely convenient to have the factory wrecked this evening." He began passing things from the bag to Forsythe and his supporters. "And I am not prepared to allow my friends or myself to be attacked

to any extent. Consequently I have taken the precaution of arming us all for purposes of self-defense. These little instruments which you perceive in our hands are specimens of the unique talent of a fertile-minded gentleman named Browning—Mr. Browning. They are known as automatic pistols, and they fire much more swiftly and effectively than revolvers. They are very pretty little things, and with the best intentions in the world, I assure you, my good friends, that the first dozen or so of you who lead the assault will inevitably sample them."



"William Bull!" she said with a snap, "where's your manners? Glaring like a great ignorant ninny!"

He smiled again, as they muttered sourly among themselves, still a little puzzled.

Then with a sharpness that startled them, the millionaire's voice and whole manner changed extraordinarily.

"Why, you greedy blackguards," he said, with a cold and stabbing contempt. "Haven't you brains enough to understand that you are too well paid already, and that if I were a poor man, the factory would have been shut down years ago? If not, go to the women and learn from them how to be satisfied, and how to get out of the way of thinking that the law's right when it backs you up and wrong when it doesn't. And now, clear out, or I'll cut your wages ten per cent per minute from now onward!"

The police braced themselves for what they thought was coming. But nothing came.

The strikers knew, in their hearts, that they were in a big minority, and that their strike had been inspired not by honest need but by a desire to take advantage of an employer they fancied was "soft."

They had discovered now that he was unsoft. Oaths, yells and mutterings there were in plenty—but some one set the fashion of "clearing out," and it speedily became a craze. Everybody was doing it almost immediately. It was within a space of minutes, quite the thing to edge out of the range of vision of Mr. O'Moore and the needle-eyed Scot standing close by him.

The strike was settled, and within half an hour Merlin, Miss Brown and Molossus were speeding at a leisurely pace homeward, to where Messrs. MacBatt, Fitz-Percy and Bull were waiting to receive them.

MR. FITZ-PERCY, meantime, had made quite a number of mortifying discoveries, mostly relating to the quaint giant who called himself, with perfect truth, Big Bill Bull. And since it had been the Deadhead's praiseworthy plan to drug Mr. Bull into at least friendliness and forgetfulness of his mission with practically unlimited

quantities of beer, not the least mortifying of his discoveries was the knowledge that William could absorb all that was set before him, apparently without the least effect upon his physical or his mental—if any—equilibrium. Further, after tankards terribly innumerable, it was borne in upon the Fitz-Percy that the lapping of many waves of beer upon the shore of Mr. Bull's consciousness, so far from soothing his anger and weakening his intent well-nigh to slaughter Mr. O'Moore, merely intensified and steeled it.

Not that Mr. Bull became quarrelsome—not at all. He became merely anatomical. Between beers he favored the Deadhead, himself laboring gallantly with a terrifical cargo of inferior beer blended with the magnificent wines he had taken at dinner, with a detailed account of how he purposed practically to tear Mr. O'Moore limb from limb. It was all very grisly indeed, and was not rendered less so by the occasional descents upon the pair of Mr. Fin MacBatt, who came into the place at regular intervals, a little more "lit up" each time, presumably to see that his gigantic prey did not escape him. The valet carried a large brassy with a dreadnought head.

Not one of the Fitz-Percy's many attempts to soften the fell determination of Big Bill had the least effect, and at about ten o'clock the Deadhead rather dizzily realized that Mr. Bull had not sufficient brain-power to accommodate his suggestions. Ideas, tact, persuasion, veiled threats, all slid off Mr. Bull's brain-case like water off a slab-roof. It was impenetrable by any art of even such an artist as Mr. Fitz-Percy.

So, recognizing that he had done his best, and failed, the Deadhead, still dimly conscious that Merlin would regard the calling in of the police as a sign of weakness, presently fell in with the suggestion of the still quiet but now perfectly cannibalistic Bull that they should have one final tankard and return to the hotel in the hope of finding that Mr. O'Moore was now at home.

"You are doubtless aware, my good friend, apart from Mr. O'Moore himself, MacBatt, his completely iron-clad valet, and Molossus his man-eater, you will have to deal with large numbers of huge porters, commissionaires, — er — bouncers and so forth, if you start anything at a place like the Astoritz!" he said.

Big Bill Bull grinned a slow grin, which, oddly enough, had something remotely winning about it.

"The more the merrier, mate," said he cheerfully. "I'll half kill them *all!*"

"Very well," said the Deadhead, seeing that the man must be humored until he was rendered completely unconscious. "Let it be as you wish!"

They went up to Merlin's suite.

MacBATT met them at the door with the grin of an enraged death's-head.

"Come in," said the valet, keeping at comfortable brassy length. "Mr. O'Moore has returned and is expecting you."

Big Bill Bull took off his coat and waistcoat and put them on a hall chair near him. Also he spat upon his hands.

"This way," said MacBatt, and steered them toward Merlin's favorite room.

"Mr. William Bull," he announced, and entered behind them.

Merlin, who was alone, and still in his motoring things, turned to them.

"Well, Mr. Bull, what can I do for you?" he asked. Molossus, standing near and, to judge by his exhibition of teeth, giving an admirable representation of a *dogue* in an ivory mask, seemed to be asking the same question.

"Do, mate!" said Mr. Bull. "You got to raise all wages down at the hat-factory by half, being as how you're a blood-sucking capitalist an' human shark!" he added, with a parrotlike mechanical simplicity that made it abundantly evident that he was merely repeating a lesson. "Or else I shall smash you and your house and furniture and everything else," he concluded, knotting his fists.

Molossus gaped imploringly at Merlin for permission to devour the big dunderhead.

But Merlin looked curiously at the man.

"Do you honestly believe you can do anything my man?" he asked. "You are big, but that is all, and I have no doubt that by touching this bell I can have half a dozen men as big as—or bigger than—you, here, in a few seconds." (The Astoritz is noted for its huge retainers.) "You have come to the wrong place—and—"

"And your name is Daniel in the lion's den, see?" hissed MacBatt bloodthirstily, entirely incapable of restraining himself.

Big Bill Bull scratched his head, remoistened his palms, and knotted his fists again.

"If you was earthquakes and lightning, and your little dog was lions and tigers, it wouldn't matter to me. I should put you through it, just the same," he said simply, and quite obviously meaning it.

Mr. Bull was plainly one of those men who honestly does not know what fear is—one of those unimaginative gents that, staring into a loaded revolver, cannot for the life of them believe there are bullets inside.

"Well, mates, look out!" he grunted, on the verge of attack. Merlin, who did not desire a scene, reached to the bell; MacBatt got a comfortable grip on his brassy; the Deadhead picked a solid, clublike slab of heavy carved ivory from the wall; and Molossus, instinctively realizing danger, began to foam at the jaws.

But none of these symptoms seemed to affect Mr. Bull in the least. He glanced round, marking the lay of the land—looking like a grizzly. But on the very edge of his rush he suddenly stiffened as the door opened and Blackberry Brown, who had been to her flat to change prior to supper with Merlin, entered, followed by a pale, rather pretty, bright-eyed diminutive girl.

"I met this child inquiring for you, Merlin, on my way up!" said Miss Brown. "Her name is Miss Bessie Wimple, and I think she is hunting for a gentleman named William Bull!"

"This is Mr. Bull," said Merlin politely.

AND then an amazing—or, so it seemed—thing befell.

Miss Wimple's sharp, bright eyes flickered round the room, at the men, at Molossus, who was still dribbling and rumbling within himself, and finally at Big Bill Bull. A quick, angry flush spread over her pale cheeks; her lips seemed to go thinner, and her eyes sparkled. She was still pretty, but there was a faint, far-off hint of the nagger and the shrew about her.

She moved swiftly to the mountainous Mr. Bull and stared at him. She seemed about as high as his lowest rib.

"William Bull," she said, with a crisp snap, "you have been misbehaving yourself again! Look at you! In this hotel in a gentleman's room without your coat on! Where's your manners? Just look at you! Glaring and staring there like a great ignorant ninny! Look at your great red hands! Aint you heartily ashamed of yourself, William Bull? The ignorance! Why don't you bow to the lady? Haven't you got any manners? Look at your great, dirty lumpering boots—on the gentleman's carpet and all!" She sniffed at him keenly.

"And you've been drinking beer! After your promise! What do you think people will think of you! Why didn't you shave yourself before you came to London? Ugh! Look at you. In your working shirt, too!" She drew breath. Evidently this was merely the preface.

But it had worked a miracle in that room, preface or not. Five seconds before, Mr. Bull had closely resembled a *musth* elephant. Now he resembled a punctured push-ball. He stared open-mouthed, goggle-eyed, at the little hornet buzzing about him. He looked dazedly at his "great red hands," at his "great lumpering boots;" he bobbed awkwardly to Blackberry Brown all as ordered. He blushed to the roots of his hair; he was utterly crestfallen.

Miss Wimple was tugging at a ring on her finger. Horror and desperation were made plain upon his face as he realized what she was doing.

"I can't bear bad-mannered men," she said angrily, "and I'll never lower myself to marry one!"

Mr. Bull gazed imploringly at Merlin, at the Deadhead, at MacBatt, even at Molossus. Evidently he loved the girl, and was in agony lest she meant what she said. All the fight was gone out of him.

The unfortunate man opened his mouth to speak and failed. Either his beer or his emotion choked him. He only succeeded in hiccoughing most alarmingly—and that, as Mr. MacBatt afterward said to "Honroy," put the lid on it. Like a tiny cyclone the girl whirled upon her gigantical *fiancé* and bitterly and contemptuously hustled him out of the room—as a twittering tomtit might (if it could) hustle a barnyard rooster off his favorite rubbish heap.

And the giant went like a lamb. They heard her voice, shrill and penetrating and extraordinarily copious, hounding the man into his coat, across the hall, through the door, down the stairway, and finally die away.

THE men stared at each other, with an odd, comradely look in their eyes.

"And that is the man who five minutes ago would have fought the entire male population of this hotel—and reveled in it!" said Merlin in a quiet, almost awed voice.

The Fitz-Percy shook his head slowly and a little sadly.

"And that's the girl I took for a walk last month!" said MacBatt raptly.

Another of these lively stories by Mr. Atkey, entitled "The Pariah," will appear in the next—the August—issue.

The LONE HAND

By

E. S. PLADWELL

A stirring story of cowboy life by the man who wrote "The Shield of His People" and many other good ones.

Illustrated by William Molt

The ranchman's bull voice bellowed: "Ride 'im! Quit pullin' leather!"

EIGHT horsemen under a darkening February sky came across a flat sage-brush plain, riding up to the fine Whitehall ranch-house with its green roof and its great white porches. The riders went around the main building, dismounted, unsaddled, and turned their mounts into a well-built corral.

Steve Whipple, the extra hand, who usually camped at the far northern boundary of this vast New Mexican cattle-ranch, released his horse with the other seven. By luck he had met his fellow-workers on the road near Whitehall. Being far from his camp he decided to spend the night here. Weary after a hard day, chilled by frigid winds, he looked forward to a hot supper and a warm bunk. Gladly he followed his fellow-workers into the dining-room, where a cheery flame glowed in the stone fireplace at the end of the long hall.

Then he discovered himself in a den of thieves.

Realization came unexpectedly, like a lightning-flash. It came when the youngest rider at the table blurted out a fool remark, forgetting that Whipple was present:

"Looks like we've been feedin' that hidden herd long enough! When do we slip 'em out through Sangre Cañon?"

THE water-glasses on the table quivered as seven bodies came bolt upright, including Whipple's. He gazed at his knife and fork while his brain digested the telltale words, especially the "hidden herd" and "Sangre Cañon," preceded by the incriminating "we," which proved that all was not well within this great English-owned cattle-ranch. His gray eyes turned toward Jim Cassidy, the big foreman at the end of the table, whose beefy face was colored by little purple veins.

"You don't wanna take this kid too serious," growled Cassidy. "He—uh—got a little too much hootch in him last night."

Whipple nodded, waiting for the next play. A sharper voice rang out:

"Forget it! Shut up, everybody!"

The voice belonged to Paul Tarron, the top hand with the slanted eyes and curly black hair, who looked what he was—handsome, reckless, debonair and speedy. Tarron's face showed a wry smile. Alongside him the heavy visage of Felipe Gonzales, the Mexican, bore a fierce frown. The others were frowning likewise. But Tarron finished eating, then jumped up and led

them suddenly to the bunk-house, saying not a word to the lone guest from the northern range.

Whipple remained where he was, making no sign of special interest in the matter. The Chinaman cleared the table, lighting two lamps which gleamed on Whipple's sandy hair and high cheek-bones as he sat close to the red tablecloth, reading newspapers. A tenderfoot might have tried to run away. That would have been foolish. Over in the bunk-house, not fifty feet from the main building, Whipple knew that vigilant men were arguing his case. He was curious to learn the result.

SPURRED boots finally resounded outside. The ranch-house door came open. The lamplight gleamed on the robust forms and well-loaded cartridge-belts of Paul Tarron and Felipe Gonzales as they came inside and closed the door softly behind them. Gonzales waved his companion to a chair, taking one himself. Tarron crossed his booted legs while starting to make a cigarette.

"You've been with this outfit about six months, haven't you?" he began, as he licked the paper.

"About that," Whipple nodded.

"Uh-huh. Up north. Lookin' after strays, watchin' water-holes, repairin' fences, and so on. Sort of an all-round hired man, livin' far away from everybody. I guess we've got out of touch with each other. Too bad."

Tarron sat back and blew a smoke-ring toward the shadowy rafters of the ceiling.

"She's not a regular ranch. She's only a syndicate, owned by a lot of English dukes and lords"—this was an exaggeration—"who aint got much sense, anyhow. What do we care for dukes and lords?" Tarron snapped his fingers. "So we've had to take control, though of course we send 'em a letter every so often. Somebody's got to handle the job. Sure. Cassidy's the boss, all right, but Cassidy's too slow, so we've had to bring Cassidy along with us. What of it? The Englishmen don't know the difference!"

"What's your proposition?" interrupted Whipple.

"Proposition? Oh!" Tarron's oblique eyes appraised his face, including the high forehead, symmetrical nose, large mouth, and bony cheeks and chin. The sun-blistered visage was not quite handsome but it was strong with character for good or evil. Perhaps Tarron noticed that, or perhaps the steely-gray eyes made him cautious. "We-el," he explained, slowly, "some o' the boys didn't want to make any proposition at all, but me, I'm different. Of course we can never be caught—"

"Never be caught?"

"Just that!" snapped Tarron.

"But you were caught, tonight!"

"That was by accident. We knocked that fool kid's face in. But except for blabbin', we're safe as a church."

"Oh! How do you work it?"

Tarron frowned. "You'll get to knowin' too much pretty soon. You're mighty near there already. The question is, are you with us or against us?"

"In what?"

"You know what. Quit joshin'!"

Whipple sat back. "Suppose I called the sheriff?"

Tarron's oblique eyes became black pinpoints.

"I wouldn't do that, Mister. No. You bet not. But let's suppose you did. Huh! You'd make a fool of yourself. He'd say you was crazy. I tell you, we've got an air-tight proposition, and it's big!"

"Well, why do you want me in it if it's air-tight?" Whipple demanded.

"Smart, aint you? Well, we're takin' you in for fear you'd blab all over the range. Loose people have loose tongues. They start rumors. Well, we don't want rumors. On the other hand, we don't need you very bad, either. You needn't expect much!"

"Not very tempting," grunted Whipple.

"No? Well, think it over. You'll find it more temptin' than it looks. Are you goin' to stay in the bunk-house tonight?"

Whipple considered this, finally nodding an affirmative. He had come to the ranch-house for that purpose. He saw no safety in trying to change his program now. That would have aroused suspicion. Anyhow, no scent of great danger came to his nostrils. It is hard for a normal man to believe that his own associates will harm him, so Whipple calmly went to the bunk-house and slept there as if this ranch was peopled by seraphs.

A LAMP, barely glimmering, sent blue light and black shadows through the clean old room where beds were built in a double tier along the eastern wall. A few snores began to rumble through the hollow building. Whipple, in a lower berth at the far end, lay turned inward with his tousled head in the crook of his arm, breathing somewhat loudly.

A whitish sock with a foot inside it came into the lamplight from the black shadows of a bunk. Another sock followed, bringing forth a crouching body in underwear. It slipped along the carpeted floor.

A sudden hand leaped out from the blackness of another berth and grabbed its thigh. Underwear halted.

"Forget it!" came a whisper from the berth.

"Let's save trouble," argued Underwear.

"No. He may be useful."

Underwear was slow to reply. Finally: "The boys think the other way, Paul. He's playin' with us. Better to stop trouble before it starts. He don't look like a sucker to me. I don't like his eye. Better get him while he's still off his guard!"

"Aw, why don't you use your brains?" growled Tarron, wearily. Then he sighed. "All right. Let's have another pow-wow with Cassidy at dawn, then. We'll vote on it. I'm not goin' to argue any more."

Underwear hesitated.

"Shall I take the shells out of his gun?"

"Naw. That'd make him suspicious. We'll handle him, all right. Go to bed!"

Underwear slipped down the line and into the shadows again. Steve Whipple slept like a child, never knowing how close he had come to angels' wings.

NEXT morning, after sunup, the big red-faced foreman gave Steve Whipple some unexpected orders:

"I'd like you to ride over to Guadalupe wells and broaden 'er out with a shovel," said the foreman, awkwardly. "Boyd and Knudsen will go with you."

Whipple smiled. Guadalupe wells was eighteen miles straight east. His own camp was nearly thirty miles to the northward.

"Oh!" he observed. "So Boyd and Knudsen are goin' to work on me, are they?"

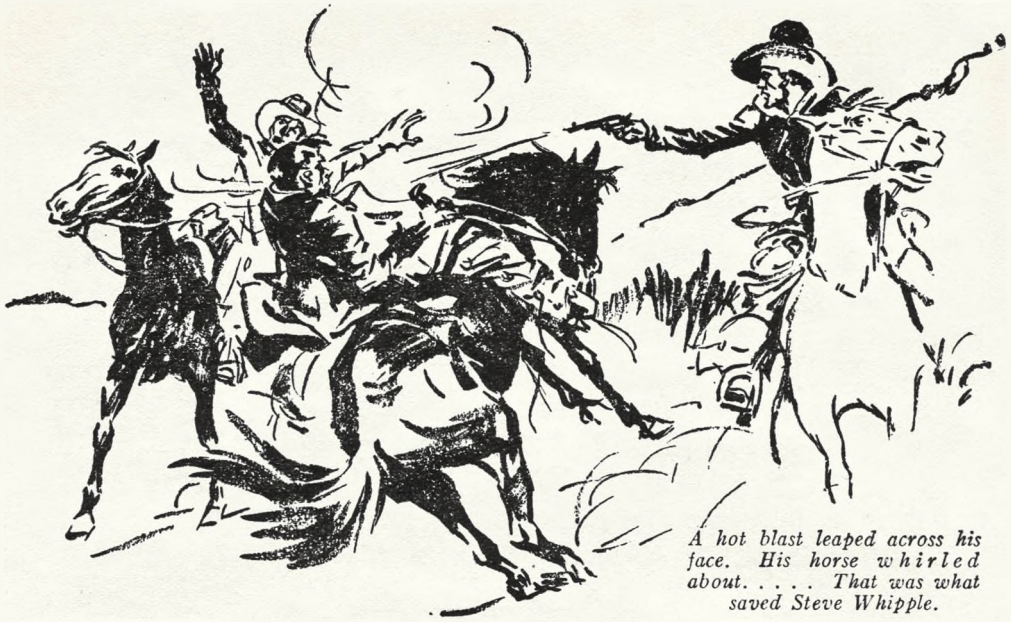
"They'll work with you," grunted the foreman, turning his back quickly.

Boyd was a young blond with a foxlike countenance. Knudsen was a dark fellow with a gnarled visage, a solemn manner, a slow brain, and a brutal mouth and chin. They rode with Whipple silently for more than ten miles under gray February skies until they came past a high knoll in rolling sagebrush country, looking down upon a broad green-gray valley where red cattle were grazing thickly among the clumps of sage or greasewood. Whipple had passed plenty of cattle already; they were scattered by ones and twos all over the land, for this New Mexican range was a sparse feeding-ground; but the animals now in sight constituted a big collection whose horns and red hides gleamed in the dull sunlight for several miles.

"The hidden herd?" asked Whipple.

"No," growled Knudsen, at his right. "Regular."

They went onward toward desert coun-



A hot blast leaped across his face. His horse whirled about. . . . . That was what saved Steve Whipple.

try. The sagebrush thinned. The land became more yellow. There were fewer cattle here. Shortly there were none at all. Some distance ahead, a thick clump of mesquite appeared at the base of desolate yellow-gray hills. Among those tough intertwined bushes was the pool of brackish water known as Guadalupe Wells.

Knudsen stopped his horse, easing the reins and resting his elbows on the horn of the saddle as he glanced ahead from under the brim of the broad-brimmed hat which was tied down by a strap under his chin.

BOYD halted likewise. So did Whipple, who was between them. He had let them get him there rather than start an argument, for while Steve Whipple was not entirely asleep, he was still amiable and somewhat curious to see what would happen next.

He learned swiftly.

"H'm!" Knudsen cleared his throat. "Have you made up your mind yet?"

Whipple sent him a quizzical glance; but Knudsen's face was somber.

"No," confessed Whipple. "I don't know enough about it."

Knudsen still looked ahead. His chin was down close to his neck, like a bulldog's. The collar of his heavy gray overcoat stood high around his ears. His words came very distinctly:

"You know enough, I guess!"

Whipple smelt danger now.

"Almost but not quite," he admitted. "For instance, if the boys have been doin' all this business all this time, why don't they scatter with their winnings before something happens?"

Knudsen studied this. He was very slow about it. His eyes kept looking at that clump of mesquite ahead. Boyd's gray pony pawed the ground on the other side of Whipple, but Knudsen ignored this. He said:

"It aint time yet. They'll wait till they do the big job before they skip."

"What big job?"

Knudsen turned his slow head. His eyes were bleak as blue marbles.

"You want to know too much. Yaas. Well, I ask you again. Are you in or not?"

Whipple frowned. The dull shadow of Boyd darkened his horse's neck but he was not disturbed about this rider at his left. It was the one at the right.

"I don't like this business," blurted Whipple. "It looks like plain steal—"

Knudsen moved. His right hand came up with something in it.

WHIPPLE, in the middle of a word, caught his breath and jerked straight backward in the saddle as he saw the flashing thing come down toward him.

A hot blast leaped across his face, stinging his cheeks. The thunderous explosion nearly burst his ear-drums. His quick gasp drew a devil's broth of flame and smoke into his mouth, causing him to choke; but before he could think to reach downward for his own weapon, his horse

came up on his hind legs and whirled about with such swiftness that Whipple's body was almost jerked horizontally out of the saddle before he could squeeze his legs upon it again.

That was what saved Steve Whipple.

Swinging around frantically while grabbing for his gun, he heard another terrific explosion just above him, where he had been a moment before; but even this registered less upon him than what he saw in a quick glance at Boyd while whirling around, almost upside-down.

A big red hole had been drilled by a forty-five bullet straight into the middle of Boyd's forehead. The shot intended for Whipple had struck the other man when Whipple dodged!

That leaking round hole opened Whipple's eyes at last. Quivering with resentment, he brought out his six-shooter, turned his dancing horse, and focused his eyes upon the sinister blurred figure in the overcoat, now just ahead of him.

The moving figure spewed forth another swift blast of flame and smoke. Then another. Then another. Whipple sent back shot for shot, firing desperately in red rage, hoping to knock that sneaking, stupid murderer out of his saddle and out of the white smoke which wreathed horse and rider in a ghostly haze.

The animals of both men were jumping around excitedly. Both men were firing for life. Both were reeling and rolling as they fired. Each had five shots in his six-shooter—keeping an empty cylinder for the firing-pin—and therefore they soon found themselves staring open-mouthed at each other over empty pistols, panting for breath, marveling that they were still alive, while thin smoke still hung around their nervous horses or oozed slowly from the barrels of warm revolvers.

At Knudsen's right ear was a trickle of blood. His eyes were popping. But this was the only net result of frantic firing with forty-fives at a distance of less than thirty feet!

STEVE WHIPPLE was first to recover. He leaped off his mount. Knudsen awoke to realize that Whipple was running toward the silent form of Boyd.

The howling Knudsen jabbed spurs into his animal. The outraged cow-pony rose high in a pitching jump which almost landed it on top of Whipple; but Whipple's gyrating pony got in the way. It gave him just an instant to reach Boyd's body. He yanked the six-shooter out of its holster before the two ponies could disentangle themselves.

With a yelp Knudsen pulled back, whirled around, and bent low in the saddle of his galloping mount as he raced for a dry-wash near by.

Whipple straightened up, thumbing back the hammer of the pistol. His own pony danced in front of him. He tried to go around it. It veered away, interposing a sleek neck between himself and the fleeing Knudsen. Whipple yelled in exasperation as he tried to grab the reins.

"Whoa! Whoa, now!" The reins came very near but were still out of reach. "Whoa, dammit, stop that! Here!" He grabbed again but the animal pulled sideways. "Oh, dammit, *get out of the way!*" But the pony stepped in the wrong direction every time. Whipple made a wide detour around it.

Knudsen was quite far away now. He was nearing the dry-wash which was broad and very deep. His hips disappeared beyond the edge; then his waist.

Whipple fired. Dust spurted at Knudsen's left flank.

Whipple fired again. The spurt was just at the right of the disappearing neck.

Whipple fired again.

A tiny black particle of Knudsen's hat leaped upward before it disappeared in the dry-wash.

Then Whipple eased down the gun, staring at the silent yellow desert. There was nothing in sight except two buzzards wheeling high in the wintry sky.

"Well," sighed Whipple. "I guess the answer is no, then!"

CHAPTER II

THERE are things which will make any man fight, and the worst of these is treachery. Self-preservation urged Steve Whipple to slink out of the country to avoid further trouble, but a stubborn streak in the brain under his sandy hair forbade this, even though the odds were terrific.

His own poor situation and the strength of his foes was as plain to his eyes as the pieces on a mammoth chessboard. He was alone and without much money or food, at the eastern end of the vast public range dominated by the Whitehall interests. All around him was desert. The nearest town

was far to the southwest, reached by a single trail which his enemies could watch at all points. He decided not to start for town yet anyhow. His information against the gang was only hearsay.

To the north, east and south of him were barren wastes. Westward was the ranch-house. Beyond this were hills which gradually rose to timbered mountains. Far to the north of these dwelt the Zunis; far to the west were Apaches and Navajo; but these were out of Whipple's calculations. His first task was to get food and ammunition so that he could look into this Whitehall business further. His camp, of course, would be watched.

There was only one place where he could possibly get supplies. The house was in the foothills to the northwest. Its owner, Caleb Brent, was an erratic old codger whose daughter was engaged to marry Paul Tarron. That looked bad for Whipple, but he went there anyhow.

He rode down through bare hills and into a cañon which gradually broadened toward a fine fertile valley which was really an arm of the great plain. By late afternoon he approached a corral, numerous outbuildings, and an adobe house built like an L; but though he kept watch for possible enemies, nobody was in sight until he rounded the front of the main structure, which faced an acre of bare red ground surrounded by wire fences.

A great bull voice came to his ears first:

"Ride 'im, cowboy! Give 'm hell!"

BRENT, the lanky old owner of the ranch, in a brown suit and cowhide boots, stood cracking a long whip toward a handsome black pony whose little heels literally spurned the ground whenever the lash snapped in the air alongside it. The pony's eyes were rolling. Its nostrils were quivering. Its ears were frightened semaphores which kept pointing in the direction of its tormentor.

On its back was a girl, clutching at the horn of the saddle as she wabbled up and down with teeth clenched and eyes shut, as if praying that this misery would cease. Her reddish face was contorted. Her gold-brown curls spread out in disarray under the broad-brimmed hat whenever the pony jumped. Her black boots, beneath a rough tan skirt, clung frantically to the animal's side; but aside from all this awkwardness she was not an unattractive young martyr.

The whip cracked again. The pony jumped and snorted. The girl gave a little cry. The ranchman's bull voice bellowed:

"Ride 'im! Dammit, quit pullin' leather! Leggo them hands! Leggo!"

The whip cracked again.

The amazed Whipple halted his own horse. He remained silently in front of the open doorway until the ranchman suspended the circus and turned toward him, nodding while lowering the whip. The ranchman's sun-slitted eyes were humorously disgusted.

"Howdy!" he greeted. "Rotten rider, aint she?"

"Why don't you kill her and have it over with?" drawled Whipple, throwing a leg over his saddle.

"Aw, shucks. She's got to learn to ride, that's all. She's the daughter of one rancher and she's goin' to be the wife of another, so it's about time she quit bein' a tenderfoot. Hell! She's been here two months now. Two months, mind you, and she aint comfortable in a saddle yet, though I've been givin' her these lessons twice a week, regular! Seems like she's just plain stubborn!"

"Stubborn!" The girl echoed the word piteously toward the gray sky. But the ranchman merely waved a gnarled hand in her direction.

"That's what them Eastern towns do to a gal. She's been livin' with her mother, my divorced wife, back in Illinoy; but now that Amy's dead, the gal's come to live with me. Of course I'd rather I'd had a boy, but I'm gittin' along in years and there's got to be some one to take charge of my ranch and my brand, so I'm breakin' this here gal to the job, though she looks like damn' poor material for a cow-ranch!"

WHIPPLE choked as he came off his horse, noticing that the shamefaced girl had also dismounted.

She stood swaying for a moment until she wiped her eyes in the crook of her arm and then collected herself and started slowly toward her father. Her manner was listless, almost sullen. Her eyes were big and brown; her face was symmetrical; her nose was saucy and her curls flashed like gold in the sunlight; yet the sum total looked wooden. Her little boots dragged reluctantly along the ground as she approached her sire, who waved toward his guest:

"My daughter, Dorothy, Mister—uh—"

"Whipple."

Her weary eyes hardly noticed him though her voice was polite enough:

"Aren't you one of the Whitehall men?"

"I was; yes ma'am."

"Oh! Did Paul Tarron send you?"

Before Whipple could reply, her father interrupted:

"Tarron! Huh! He's too slick. One o' them curly-haired smart-alecks. If my daughter had a lick o' sense she'd wait for a while before she got married; but no; she goes and gits herself engaged to him, and she spreads the news all over New Mexico, and I can't do nothin' about it now, no matter how I carry on. Sometimes I think I'll have to git harsh with her!"

The girl's fists clenched themselves.

"Do I have to ask Paul to marry me right now?" she challenged, in a despairing voice which was near to breaking.

"Aw, quit that! Dammit, what's got into gals nowadays? She hangs that over my head all the time!"

"I have to," she confessed.

The ranchman dismissed the subject.

"Well, Mister, is there anything I can do for you?"

"Yes," admitted Whipple. "I'd like to borrow some grub. Enough for a week or two. Coffee, beans and flour. I'm travelin'."

"Eh? A week, eh? And there's plenty o' grub at the Whitehall ranch. That's funny. Still, I aint inquisitive. But you're quittin' the range sort o' sudden, aint you?"

Whipple nodded, but he had learned not to trust anyone too quickly nowadays!

"All right." The ranchman threw his whip through the open doorway. It landed accurately on a red-covered table. "Dorothy, give him what he wants. I've got to go to the barn, yonder, to teach that fool hired-man how to milk that fool cow you had to have. Make yourself to home, Mister—anything you want's yours."

THE father rambled around the corner. The daughter silently led the way into a clean home where all the rooms were built in a row except the kitchen at the end and rear. She took him to the kitchen, pointing to a gunny-sack and then to boxes and sacks on various shelves. He helped himself. She leaned against the doorway stiffly, staring past him with eyes which glistened. Her dejection made him feel like a trespasser.

"It must be lonesome out here," he ventured, as he took a small sack of flour.

She nodded. "Oh, yes. But I'll probably get used to it."

He filled a small sack of coffee. Then:

"You'll be marrying Paul Tarron soon, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes. I suppose so."

He looked up. She was plainly a well-bred Eastern girl, strange to the range-country; hardly Paul Tarron's type. Still, she had chosen him, even against the jibes of her father!

"Tarron's a mighty good-looking fellow," persisted Whipple.

"Oh, yes."

He glanced up again. If this was a Juliet pining for her lover, she disguised it beautifully. Then she asked a sudden question:

"What do you know about him?"

Whipple straightened up. He did it deliberately, like a puzzled man starting to solve a problem.

"What am I supposed to say?" he asked. "Do you want praise or scandal?"

SHE smiled. Like a flash of sunshine it seemed to vanquish her dullness, as if a somber mask had fallen away. Whipple became aware that she was now really alive to his presence. Until now he had been merely another strange two-legged creature who had wandered into her landscape from nowhere in particular.

"Tell me what you really think," she demanded.

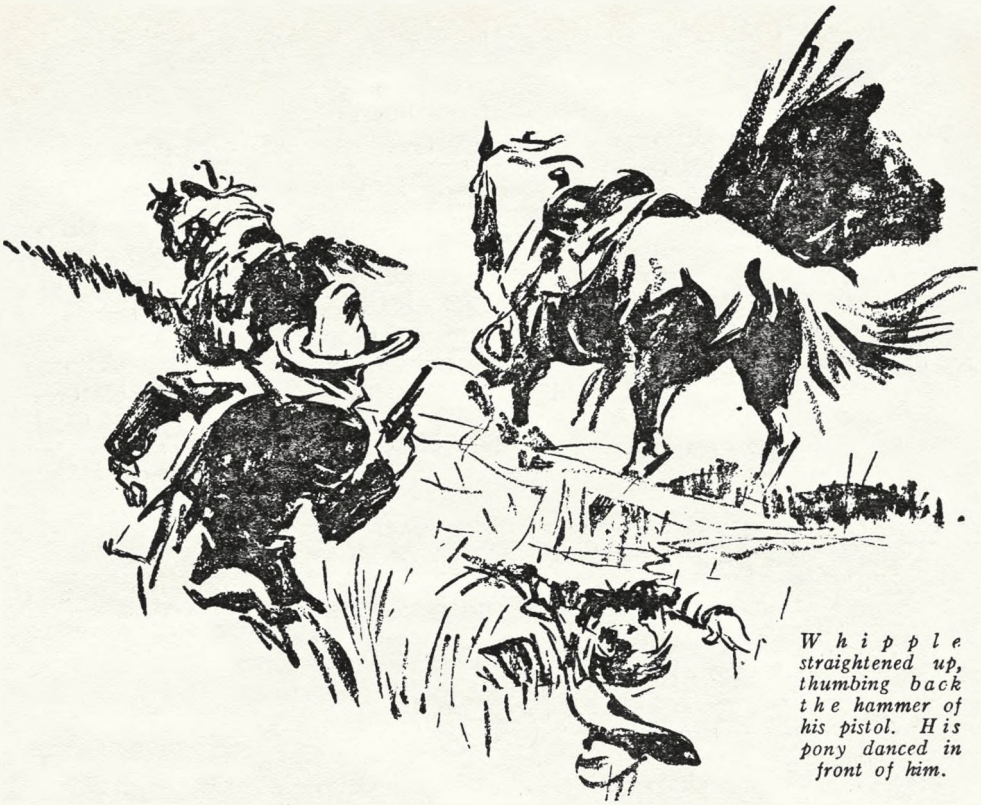
"I'd hate to!"

"Oh!" She drew back in surprise. "That's not very nice!" Her brown eyes were puzzled as she regarded him. "Still, you don't look like a man who would say such things spitefully. You have a kind face. Much kinder than the ordinary man around here. That's why I'm sorry to hear you speak that way."

"Oh," translated Whipple. "You think I ought to stand up for Tarron?"

"Yes. There are so many dumb-looking people out here that I think you—you other people—ought to get together."

Whipple balanced his loaded grain-sack in his left hand while he considered this proposition; but his ears were listening to something else. It was the faint *thump-thump-thump* of a horse moving outside, and this sound was accompanied by a soft rhythmic *jingle-jingle-jingle* of spurs and martingale. The tempo of the sound was that of a well-broken animal ambling along in a Spanish trot.



Whipple straightened up, thumbing back the hammer of his pistol. His pony danced in front of him.

"Tarron and I are likely to get together right soon!" he prophesied.

"I'm glad of that," she said. "You two men ought to."

"We probably will! Excuse me, lady, while I take this grub outside. Thanks."

In four bounds he was out of the kitchen and near the front door, where he stopped suddenly. So did the approaching rider, who was now in front of the building, where he could recognize Whipple's bay pony. The sight made the rider pull his reins taut. His eyes, from under the shadowed brim of his big hat, narrowed in speculation as if wondering how this animal could have come here. Then his eyes, still wondering, went toward the doorway.

Steve Whipple stood there, holding the big muzzle of a forty-five straight toward his head.

IF Paul Tarron was amazed at seeing his healthy victim standing belligerently in a doorway far from where he was expected to be, Tarron's quick impudence asserted itself by the time his gloved hands had risen to the level of his hat.

"Hello! What are you doin' here?"

Whipple took five steps to Tarron's horse, yanking a pistol from the man's holster before running a hand over his blue coat and cowhide vest in search of other weapons. There were none. Tarron grinned.

"Suspicious, aint you?" he jeered, as he swung off the horse.

Whipple's gray eyes never ceased watching him.

"Yes. I'm suspicious. I'll be suspicious about you till the day you're hung!"

"Oh, aint you righteous! Plumb pure now. Sudden, too. High and noble, stickin' to the straight and narrow path!"

"Well, if I am, you've made me that way," retorted Whipple, as he compared the two weapons. "It was real nice of you. I was pretty slack but you've cured me—you and Knudsen!"

"Oh!" Tarron's dark face showed a curious expression. "What about Knudsen?"

Whipple knew Knudsen couldn't have returned to the Whitehall ranch-house before Tarron started on his journey here, so Tarron was without any report of the shooting episode.

"Knudsen sent me here," said Whipple, quite truthfully.

"Sent you here? He did not!"

Whipple twirled the loaded cylinders of the six-shooters, then looked up steadily into Tarron's eyes.

"Let's quit fooling. The plain fact is, you're not only a thief, but almost a murderer. You know why Knudsen took me eastward. You know all about everything. I ought to kill you right here, if it's only for the sake of that little tenderfoot girl in the house, but I haven't got the nerve to kill an unarmed man. You should have resisted me. I'd have enjoyed it!"

"Yeh?" Tarron's slanted eyes were maliciously humorous now. "All right; give me my gun; let's shoot it out."

Whipple stared at him, but Tarron was not bluffing. Whipple's left hand moved unconsciously as if to offer the man his pistol with the butt reversed, and then he pulled back, giving a dry chuckle of vexation at himself. He had nearly performed another idiotic stunt. His optimism and his sense of fair play were almost incurable, but he was learning quickly.

"Oh, no!" he demurred. "If you downed me, there'd be nobody to keep you from stealin' the whole Territory. I guess I'd rather give you a little run for your money."

Tarron's arrogance mounted.

"Careful, aint you? Well, we can't afford to have *you* runnin' around loose very long. You know that."

"No," retorted Whipple, coolly. "If you're as safe as you say you are—if you've got a system where you can't get checked up—it looks like you're a lot more afraid of me than you ought to be!"

Tarron rolled a cigarette before replying:

"You came in just at the wrong time. You're dangerous. You've stumbled into a position where you might *by accident* throw everything into a jam. See?"

"Thanks," promised Whipple. "I will."

THE girl, long delayed, came up behind him. She was carrying a big slicker. She saw him holding the six-shooters, but he seemed to be talking with Tarron quite amicably.

"Oh!" she cried. "Put down those pistols, please! They make me nervous. Here, Mr. Wanderer—I found this old slicker in a trunk. You may need it."

"Thanks," acknowledged Whipple, over his shoulder. "That's real thoughtful of you."

"But why the pistols—oh!"

Tarron had deliberately raised his hands in the air.

"I'm bein' held up," he explained, with a sardonic little bow. "Do you know who this man is? He's Steve Whipple, the bandit!"

"No!" Her eyes grew wide.

"All decent people are supposed to run him out of the country," added Tarron.

"My gosh!" gasped Whipple.

"Bandit?" she exclaimed. "Why—why, that doesn't seem possible!"

"It's not!" exploded Whipple, trying to get his mental balance again. "*He's* the bandit! And he expects to marry you shortly. Think that over!"

Tarron's face contorted with the rage of a man endangered in front of his girl.

"You lie!" he snarled.

Whipple's face began to show white under the tan, but he controlled himself, speaking slowly:

"Do I? What's the idea of that? To make me fight you? Well, I wont. Not now. I'll keep my advantage. As for this girl, you'll never marry her."

"No?"

"No. That would be a crime. She's too decent."

"Oh!" Tarron retorted. "I suppose you want her yourself!"

AT this, Whipple sent a swift glance toward the astounded young woman. Her face was flushing. There was a bit of indignation in it.

"I hadn't thought of that, ma'am," he apologized. "I'm only hopin' to prevent such a weddin', that's all."

"Huh!" challenged Tarron.

Deliberately he walked to the doorway and put his arm around her. She looked reluctant but she was docile enough.

"Never mind what these bandits say, honey," he soothed her. "I'll take you away from this father of yours pretty soon, in spite of all the bandits in creation! We'll fix this fellow, all right. Never fear about *him*. He's a gone goose already!"

Whipple stared open-mouthed at this masterpiece of impudence. Then he looked at Dorothy. Her eyes were startled, but there was pity in them as they gazed at him. His mouth tightened bitterly.

"I'm sorry," he said, scooping up his provisions from the doorway.

"So am I," she replied, gently, still looking at him. "You seemed a better man than that!"

He nodded. He couldn't find anything to say, so he tucked both pistols in his hip, turned away, mounted his horse, and silently rode northward.

From afar he looked back upon the ranch-house. Tarron was trying to pot at him with a rifle borrowed from the father, but the girl was distracting his aim so that the lone rider never saw where the bullets went.

With a wry grin, Whipple rode steadily onward into the hills.

CHAPTER III

STEVE WHIPPLE'S tour of investigation embraced a territory about as large as Massachusetts. Unable to stay in a country dominated by his enemies, he went completely out of it, starting far northward into unknown lands so that he could gradually circle westward to have a look at the cattle-trails leading from Whitehall into Arizona. Those trails, he knew, brought the stolen herds to some far-away unknown market. There was no other place they could go.

He went as fast as possible lest he be tracked too quickly. In two days he approached the painted country of the Zunis, where he began to swing westward with the general slope of the land, knowing that somewhere in the bottoms he would reach water. At last he began to descend into a great bare yellow valley.

His eyes suddenly sighted the unmistakable prints of civilized shoes.

He halted, staring downward. The tracks were quite fresh. They crossed his path, led up a yellow slope, and disappeared around a white shaft. Filled with curiosity, he followed them as they continued past the nose of a red promontory.

It was the most chuckle-headed trail he ever followed. The footprints meandered into a cañon, came back, struck northward toward a great brushy mountain, swerved downhill to the left, made a few detours in every direction, and finally started again through whitish sand toward the great gray-green hill.

The marveling Whipple followed the tracks for five miles. Finally they passed into a gray cañon, wandered up a broad aisle of whitish sand, and eventually turned in under a great arch in the flank of the mountain. Some distance within this arch, where the late afternoon sunlight never reached, was a gloomy wall of decomposed rubble pierced with dark holes.

Whipple halted his horse, gazing at the tiers of silent doors and the crumbling stairways of what was the home of a tribe living before the days of Julius Caesar. The weight of all the ages seemed to hold the place under a solemn hush which no human creature should disturb; yet a clear voice called to him, echoing from wall to wall:

"I say! I say! Are you there?"

Goose-flesh started to rise on Whipple's body. The voice persisted:

"I say! Are you there?"

"Is who where?" cried Whipple.

There was silence. Then:

"By Jove! Glad you've come! I thought it might be a silly ghost!"

The rocks sent out echoes which collided with each other: "Silly ghost! Silly ghost!"

Whipple tried to gauge the direction of the sound. It seemed to arise at his left, in a corner beyond the northern edge of the cliff-dwellings. Reluctantly he guided his horse over there.

"Rescued, by Jove!" greeted the voice, almost in front of him. "I'll be right out. I'm takin' a bawth."

"Bath!" gasped Whipple.

He went to the corner and peered inward. Around this edge of the last cliff-apartment was a grotto or alleyway with rubbish blocking the entrance, and somewhere within this dark cavern was a creature splashing in water. It could be seen as it moved within the shadows. Then the daylight gleamed wanly upon the pink body as the creature came to the entrance, blinking upward with solemn blue eyes.

He was in his birthday suit. He held a shirt in his right hand. His face was long and bony, with very little hair except for a blond mustache. His nose was a beak. His eyes protruded as if threatening to pop. His shoulders were immense and so was his torso, yet these were borne upon a pair of bony legs, so long and thin that they made the man appear like an enormous crane.

"What the devil are *you* doing here?" blurted Whipple.

"I'm really a bit hazy about it myself, old chap," apologized the other, commencing to draw his shirt on. "I'm lost, you know. Oh, quite!"

WHIPPLE, whistling softly, dismounted and threw the reins over his pony's head. His puzzled eyes stared at this unique thin-legged specimen until the man vanished for a moment to emerge again

with the rest of his outfit, including riding-trousers, expensive boots badly worn at the soles, a six-shooter, a good tweed coat, two canteens, and a knapsack with a few provisions in it.

"How'd you get here?" demanded Whipple.

"Why, really, I find it hard to tell you," confessed the other, as he sat on a dusty rock to draw on his woolen stockings. "It's really a misunderstandin'."

"Yes. It must be."

"Oh, quite. Some of these rawnchmen mistook me for a bandit. They formed a committee—very violent persons, really—who rode me into this frightful place and warned me not to annoy the rawnchers again under any circumstances. Fawncy!"

"Bandit!" yelled Whipple. "You?"

"Of course not. Very stupid of them. Most deplorable mistake. Very. Quite dangerous to be mistaken in this sort of country for a bandit, I assure you. Thorns on the bushes and loneliness no end!"

Whipple was beginning to see a great light. Suspicion became a certainty.

"You were sent here from England? Into this country?" he demanded, almost in awe.

"Quite so. I was ordered to look into the Whitehall rawnch. Matter of duty. Checkin' up, you know. I am Cecil Worthington Carewe of London, Secretary of the International Cattle Syndicate, which owns the Whitehall property."

ALTHOUGH the presence of this ungainly Englishman in this lonely land was so amazing that it seemed incredible, it did not take Whipple long to realize that his story was not only quite logical but proved that Mr. Carewe had embarrassed the Whitehall gang frightfully by his sudden and unexpected appearance from England. Whipple had never heard of Carewe; nobody had informed him that a representative of the Company had visited the ranch-house, nor had anyone told how they got rid of this Englishman without leaving a trace; yet Whipple was forced to chuckle as he saw the hand of Paul Tarron behind the grotesque plot which got Carewe out of the way.

Mr. Cecil Worthington Carewe, it seems, arrived with his credentials and his trunks and hand-luggage at the Whitehall ranch, where he introduced himself and took possession of the best room in the house. But next morning—doubtless after a conference of the gang in the bunk-house—he was confronted by the entire outfit, who complained that they had been imposed upon. They charged indignantly that Mr. Cecil Worthington Carewe was none other than Wild Jake, an alleged murderous two-gun bandit who had come among them to hatch out some deviltry.

Ridiculous though the thing seemed to Whipple at first, he was forced to admit that the scheme—probably conceived in haste during a panicky night in the bunk-house—was carried out so well that the Englishman was thoroughly twisted.

THE men, at the top of their voices, resented the presence of Wild Jake among them. Mr. Carewe protested that they were in error. He tried to produce his credentials. The mob informed him that he had probably stolen these credentials. They identified him absolutely as Wild Jake, even to the mole on the right side of the jaw. Some talked of lynching but gentler counsel prevailed and they voted to run him out of the country. They took him into the desert, gave him water, provisions, and a gun, and turned him loose. That was a week ago. Possibly they planned to rescue him later.

"Of course I cawn't blame the stupid creatures not wantin' a bandit among them," conceded Carewe. "They would be subject to a reprimand if they *did* allow this frightful two-firearm person to remain there, but it's beastly embarrassin' that I should look so exactly like this robber creature, what?"

Whipple rolled a cigarette slowly.

"You don't look like Wild Jake," he retorted.

"No?" The Englishman's popping eyes blinked at him.

"No. Neither does anybody else. There's no such animal."

"What? Oh, I say!" Carewe was utterly stupefied. "But—really, y'know—they said the resemblance was perfect. Now, how could I resemble Wild Jake unless there *was* a Wild Jake?" The Englishman frowned at the problem. "Besides," he added, slowly, "would they go to all this trouble to play a joke?"

"It's no joke. They want you out of the way."

"Really? Why?"

"I don't know. There's somethin' about to happen. Somethin' where they don't want any witnesses around. I figure

His eyes went to the doorway. Steve Whipple stood there holding the muzzle of a forty-five toward him.

they're aimin' to steal everything out of Whitehall except the trees."

"My word!"

"Yep. And they're goin' to do it slick. There'll be no posses chasin' *them* around. Not them. When they've milked the ranch dry, they'll drift along whenever they like, just as innocent as you please." Whipple's voice became slightly bitter. "Why, one of 'em even intends to take his blushin' bride along with him!"

"This is monstrous!" exclaimed the Englishman.

"Yep; but it's successful."

CAREWE was stunned but he was far from a fool. His somber round eyes gazed steadily at Whipple.

"How do *you* know all this?" demanded Carewe.

"I learned by accident. Then they tried to get rid of me with a gun. So now I'm pesterin' around, just out of pure human cussedness, tryin' to see what's at the bottom of it all."

"Astoundin'!" said Carewe. "I find it hard to believe it! Really!"

"Don't, then."

"Oh, no. No offense I'm sure, old chap. Your loyalty to your employers is most commendable!"

Whipple had never thought of that angle.

"Oh!" he said. "Yes. Still, I hate to be shot at!"

Carewe, disregarding side-issues, looked up at the darkening gray sky. He began to speculate:

"They cawn't be shippin' cattle boldly by railroad to the east, can they? Embezzlement, I mean."

"No. They'd be checked up too easy. I've only got one real idea. Listen. Somewhere westward in Arizona there's a ranch where the Whitehall cattle are driven to. Then they're shipped out to the markets from there. Well, the road to that ranch lies far to the southwest of here, and I'm goin' to find that trail!"

The Englishman seemed gamer than Whipple had expected. In reality he was becoming convinced.

"Quite so," he agreed, at last. "Take the lead, then. We'll look into this."

They circled westward next morning, taking turns at riding through weird country whose painted rocks were subdued by gray skies which were colder during the next two days. Then the coldness subsided. The skies grew darker and the air became heavy and damp.

The two wanderers, turning southward from the land of silent cañons at last, headed for the summit of a great brush-covered peak which stood out from the lesser hills like a giant among pygmies. The travelers looked like scarecrows now; their faces were hairy and their clothes were tattered, and Whipple had torn off the high heels of his boots in order to walk better; but their provisions and water still held out, though Whipple knew he must soon replenish them.

Whitehall lay far to the eastward. He could see its flat valley glinting afar under

the clouds, beyond the tops of several ridges of smaller hills. Nearer, northward and westward of the Whitehall range, was a cloud black as ink, resting upon high mountains.

"There's the ranch-house," pointed Whipple. "That little dark spot 'way over in the plain. You can hardly see it."

Carewe, whose boots were opening at the toes, folded his weary body upon a rock, drawing his thin tweed coat closer about him as he stared at the distant scene.

"Peculiar, that rawnch," he mused. "Really a splendid property. It's too bad those cow-persons are not honest, for our Board of Directors fawncy that they have had quite enough bad luck already. Oh, quite. Accident after accident. Really discouragin'. Floods, fires, stawmpedes—"

"Never heard of them," said Whipple, absently. "Nothin' big, anyhow."

"Oh, yes. Lawst autumn there was quite a stawmpede reported. Three hundred animals lost."

Whipple gazed at the black storm-cloud to the northeast, where brushy hills were beginning to disappear in a blur of rain. The tips of nearby bushes waved slightly with the suction of a wind passing the hill.

"I never heard of that," he said, slowly. "Of course I'm a new man, but there would have been gossip."

FROM the northeast came a deep soughing of winds as the storm-cloud grew blacker; but the noise was interrupted by the fluttering leaves of a little notebook in Carewe's hands.

"Here it is. Lawst March a barn burned. Forty head perished. Lawst April, a creek rose. Seventy animals drowned—"

"No!" contradicted Whipple. "There's a mistake somewhere—"

"Lawst July some of the range burned by accident—"

"Yep, about three acres."

"Oh, no. There was quite a lengthy report. Eighty animals dead."

Whipple jumped to his feet, staring at the man.

"Wait! Eighty animals? I saw the burned spot! It's a lie! It's a fake! A fake!"

They gaped at each other, though the air seemed to tremble with a distant roaring sound. A fork of lightning leaped across the inky northeastern sky, illuminating the sides of the distant hills. Whipple began talking swiftly, excitedly, as if that lightning-flash had given him a sudden clear insight into the whole dark plot:

"They fake their reports! They wait for accidents, or make 'em! And then they deduct their cattle from the Whitehall lists, and slip 'em through the back cañons to be sold! See? Accidents? Why, every accident's a gold mine! Burn barns, forty head; creek rises, seventy head; stampede, three hundred head! Hell! I'll bet Whitehall never lost ten cows altogether. But you can't prove it. The accidents really happened! Súre they did! Gosh! *No wonder they couldn't be caught!*"

The Englishman's bony cheeks glowed with a redness which even the winds had not aroused.

"Beautiful!" he exclaimed. " 'Pon my word, clever! But what's the rest of it? What is to come?"

Whipple gazed toward the storm, where the hills seemed to melt away as the heavens poured Niagaras of water upon them. The roaring sound came louder to his ears. The ground under his feet seemed to tremble.

"Look in your book again," he advised.

Carewe's face was puzzled as he fluttered the pages.

"It's all there," insisted Whipple. "Study it between the lines. Watch a bunch of ordinary ranch-hands grow into bandits, little by little. First a few head. Then forty head stolen. Not much nerve yet. Then seventy. Then three hundred. And nobody caught, see? Safe as a church. Gettin' trained now for a real blowout. That's what success does. They want raw meat. They've come to a place now where they're willin' to shoot me and drag you into the Zuni country. What for?"

"What?" demanded Carewe.

"A first-class catastrophe!"

Whipple pointed a tattered arm to where the distant hills were pouring down tons of water which tore cañons apart below the great mountain.

"She's a big cloudburst. A whopper. We get 'em every year, but I'll bet it's what the gang was waitin' for. Mister, there's your accident! Over yonder you can see the finish of the Whitehall ranch!"

CHAPTER IV

IT was a worried pair of travelers who reached an abandoned mining-shanty near the Arizona line that night. They

had no way to head off the developments they expected. They couldn't even summon the sheriff in less than a week. To make things worse, the food supply was running low, and there was nothing in this cabin except a dusty floor, a table smeared with candle-grease, a bunk with a mouldy quilt on it, and various cobwebby tin cans, bottles, and stained newspapers.

Whipple lighted two candles on the table, warmed up some supper, and then went out into the drizzle to make sure his hobbled horse was able to find feed.

The rain gleamed in the wan candlelight which came through a paneless window, throwing its faint illumination upon a spring of water and a litter of old boards in front of a hillside where the horse was munching on sparse grass. Whipple, satisfied, continued to amble around the shack.

His right foot went unexpectedly downward. He pitched forward. His foot came to rest at the bottom of the hole, hardly eighteen inches below the surface. Grunting, he lighted a sulphur-match to get his bearings. The faint light glowed on the doorway of what looked like a chicken-coop sunk into the hillside. A quick blow with a board knocked the door away. Whipple lit another match and thrust it ahead of him while he peered in, seeking provisions.

He yanked back the match swiftly.

Three round black corrugated cans, somewhat rusted, stood on a wooden shelf. For a moment he was disappointed. Then he changed his mind, lifted the heavy cans off the shelf, punched holes in the tops, sifted a few thimblefuls of black stuff out of each can, and brought them separately on little pieces of paper on the table of the shanty where Carewe sprawled on the bunk, face upward, emitting soft snores.

WHIPPLE lighted a match. He touched it to the first heap of powder.

Nothing happened.

He touched the second heap.

Whoosh! A blinding flame leaped from the table. Heavy smoke soared to the roof, spreading downward.

He lighted the third sample. Another flare and more smoke.

Carewe sat bolt upright, coughing.

"I say! What is it?"

"Luck!" exulted Whipple. "First we've had! I can block Sangre Cañon now!"

Carewe blinked at this. Whipple shouted:

"They're ready to slip that hidden herd into Arizona! Well, they *wont!* I'll give 'em a real stampede! I'll blow those cattle thirty miles back into Whitehall!"

"But—but you cawn't stampede Whitehall cattle, y'know!" protested Carewe.

"I can't, eh? Well, if they get past us now, it might take weeks to find 'em in Arizona. We're not equipped for that, are we?"

Carewe still gaped at him. Whipple didn't argue. He issued instructions.

"Listen! We'll let our horse carry our powder into Sangre Cañon tomorrow. I'll bet it's less than thirty miles. We'll get there by evening. Then you take the horse and start for the sheriff. Go south till you strike the railroad. Take most of the grub. You'll need it. But for God's sake, don't get lost! Within a week I'll expect you back with the sheriff and a posse. By that time I intend to have everything in a mess. There'll be plenty of evidence. You bet!"

Carewe made noises in his throat. This business was too swift for him.

"But—but how can you hold out for a week?" he wondered.

"I don't know. I'll strike first and worry later."

"These other men may get you."

"That depends on you. You've got to make time. I'll hold 'em back. You've got to do the rest!"

The Englishman was finally convinced. He had to be.

NEXT day they took their powder thirty miles south, where they crossed a well-used trail. Whipple sent Carewe on his journey and then started eastward afoot, carrying his first can of powder into the long corridor between hills leading toward the Whitehall range. By dusk he had almost traversed the cañon when he to his surprise heard a horseman approach. He slipped into the brush to let the rider go by.

The man was armed. His face was harsh and somber. Whipple laid his hand on the butt of his six-shooter as he recognized Knudsen, but the man went past.

The cañon was being patrolled! The Whitehall gang was taking no chances!

Whipple worked cautiously after that, traveling over back hills and gullies. By next noon he had carried his two kegs of powder to a brushy headland, one of two knolls which rose abruptly from the plains to stand as sentinel gateways at the eastern entrance of Sangre Cañon.

Whipple laid his kegs of powder in a slight depression on the nose of the southernmost of the two hills, about thirty feet above the floor of the cañon. He packed dirt and rocks on top of the powder. Then he manufactured a thoroughly dangerous fuse made of sacking and paper sprinkled with powder. It was all he could do.

Suddenly he remembered to look up from his engrossing task.

Knudsen was riding up to the top of the opposite hill. His figure loomed up like a black statue against the gray sky where three vultures wheeled above him.

Whipple froze to the ground. Only a clump of sage shielded him.

FOR a time he thought he was observed, but as the minutes passed, the watchman on the hill began to look deliberately in every direction and even into the air. Then he turned toward the eastward. He drew out a blue bandanna. He brought it over his head, waving it for a long time; then he pocketed the thing, swung his mount around, and ambled toward the back cañon again.

Whipple waited until he was out of sight before arising and looking westward.

Far away were two lonely riders, coming toward the yellow-brown hillocks below him. Far beyond those horsemen was a broad mass of moving objects, almost indistinct in the hazy February sunlight. Whipple, with a jumping heart, realized that he had only just arrived in time. The hidden herd was moving at last.

"Swift!" he exclaimed. "Only two days since the cloudburst and they've come across the whole Whitehall range!"

He crouched behind the bush again. His nerves were taut with suppressed excitement, for he was forced to endure a maddening wait. Minutes seemed eternities. The oncoming horde traveled so slowly that it seemed hardly to be moving at all; yet in an hour he could see the sun gleam dully on hundreds of horns as the mass came out of the distant haze and took the shape of a big herd of cattle.

The two riders in the lead came up through the foothills. One of them went back to join some comrades riding along the flanks of the herd. The other horseman approached nearer until Whipple recognized him as Felipe Gonzales, the Mexican ranch-hand. Behind Gonzales, the great red herd toiled up the sandy slope leading toward the gateway of the cañon.

The kneeling Whipple drew a bunch of sulphur-matches from his pocket. He looked all around. Lastly he gazed upward toward the top of his hill.

Knudsen, sitting silently on his horse, loomed against the skyline, with the collar of his overcoat high above his ears. He had crossed over to this other hill!

Whipple remained absolutely motionless.

Knudsen was gazing over and beyond him. The man's horse was standing hardly sixty feet above the gunpowder. The horrified Whipple was tempted to warn the man, but he knew the somber ruthlessness of Knudsen, who would doubtless advance even closer with a pistol in his hand.

Behind him came the thumping and lowing of the herd. He looked that way. Gonzales, very near, was riding up to the pebbles of the dry-wash where the actual cañon began. Whipple could see the man's white teeth as he went past and smiled and waved at Knudsen. Then Whipple looked upward again. Knudsen acknowledged the salute and turned his horse away. It took a few steps rearward, where it halted. Only Knudsen's head was in sight now.

The kneeling Whipple lighted a match.

Just below him, about four hundred yards away, was a vast array of bovine faces and horns, the vanguard of a big herd of perhaps three thousand animals whose red bodies extended far down past the lower hills. At the flanks of this bawling, bellowing, stamping aggregation were four riders, two on each side. Probably there were one or two more in the rear. Whipple could hear the voices of the nearer riders through the thumping of hoofs as the horsemen weaved in and out of the herd, shunting stragglers back.

His match flared up. He arose.

A harsh, excited voice roared at him from the top of the hill:

"Hey! What the hell are you doin'?"

Whipple touched the match to a wad of newspaper at the end of his fuse. The paper burst into flame, curling as it burned.

"Back!" warned Whipple, looking up and whirling around as he started to race at top speed around the contour of the hills.

KNUDSEN started his horse forward. His right hand went to his hip, but the desperate Whipple did not see that. Running, hopping, jumping, trying to keep his footing on the shale-rock, he struggled frantically to get around the side of the hill before its front blew off. He raced

"What the devil are you doing here?" blurted Whipple. "I am a bit hazy about it myself, old chap," apologized the other.

fifty feet, reached a pile of rocks, wriggled over the top, and pitched head-foremost into a clump of brush.

Bang!

With a concussion which shocked every bone in his body, the brush and the rocks and the ground shook beneath him.

It seemed to the half-stunned Whipple that several dozen incidents happened at once, so swiftly that his dazed eyes hardly caught the various items.

Objects flew through the air around him. A big rock, turning over and over, aimed itself at his head. He dodged on his knees, just in time. Another rock soared into the herd of cattle, braining a steer. With one snort, the rest of them wheeled the other way. The hindmost animals struggled madly to get over and through the others. Bodies rose over bodies. They smashed each other apart. The whole nose of the hill slid down to encourage them. On top of the slide came the screeching Knudsen. He turned somersaults and brought down more rubble. Alongside him tumbled his horse, rolling over and over until they both disappeared in the blur of dust and smoke which ballooned upward from the nose of the hill and then closed down upon Whipple in a blinding pall, causing him to cover his head with his arms.

He struggled through it, trying to wave it away with his hands. He came to his feet, coughing. He felt his way through the haze until a little gust of purer air allowed him to uncover his grime-streaked face. Then he halted and looked around.

A CURTAIN of white smoke and dark-brown dust still lingered over the nose of the hill, which was peeled away as if with a giant plane. He marveled that the blast had bitten so deeply, not realizing that the ground was mostly shale-rock anyhow. Below this peeled surface and its thick smoke, he began to see the tattered form of Knudsen swaying to his feet. Beyond Knudsen, the pounding of thousands of hoofs advertised that the herd was leaving Sangre Cañon in so great a hurry that they were still trampling each other to death by the dozens; but the details of it were hidden by that smoke-curtain.

He did not see a shrieking horseman rolled underground. He could not see two others in the distant vanguard, fleeing madly for their lives, nor could he visualize the frantic outriders trying to escape from the edges of the mass, struggling out past the charging horns of fear-maddened animals until, free at last, they halted their winded ponies a mile away, blankly wondering what had happened.

Whipple did not tarry. He knew he was in for it.

With another glance through the thinning smoke to where the trodden red hides of fourscore animals littered the yellow

sands, he drew out his six-shooter and trotted farther around the hillside while wondering what his next move would be. He had not planned anything, principally because he couldn't see any possible course after the explosion except to depend on luck and eventually Carewe, trusting that he wouldn't be cornered.

Felipe Gonzales came galloping over the top of the hill while his dark eyes peered suspiciously in every direction; yet he went southward down the hill past Whipple before sighting him. Then he whirled his horse around. His eyes glared with sudden recognition. Without asking for any explanations, he yanked out his pistol.

Quick as he was, the desperate Whipple was quicker. His thumb fanned the hammer of his gun. It blew out three explosions before Gonzales fired once, and then the latter's aim was erratic, for his weapon was slipping out of his fingers.

Whipple's last shot pitched him off his horse, as abruptly as if the bullet were a sledge-hammer.

The man's bay pony, released of its burden, jumped forward as Gonzales tumbled backward into the brush. The animal stumbled on the loose rock, went to its knees, kicked down some rubble, floundered around for a half-minute, and at last recovered its footing.

WHIPPLE seized the opportunity. Before the wild-eyed pony could get away, he threw himself into the saddle, grabbed reins, pulled up the animal's head, and caused it to turn again toward Gonzales for a moment.

Gonzales had rolled some distance downhill. He was on hands and knees, slowly rising to his feet. His forehead ran red, yet the bullet which knocked him down had only plowed a slight furrow above his eyes. Now he was returning to full consciousness. His crimson face contorted as he shook a fist at Whipple, who saw that the man's revolver had also slipped downhill and was only ten feet away from him.

"Ya-a-a-a-a-a!" raged Gonzales. "Damn you, damn you, I keel you!"

He saw his gun. He lurched toward it but stumbled on some brush. Whipple could have shot him but turned away swiftly. Gonzales was exactly south of him and below him; Knudsen was east of him, probably coming around the brow of the ruined hill. Westward was nothing but mountains and brush. Whipple knew it He had just come from there. His best chance, then, was to go northward over this hill, and down into the cañon, and boldly across the northern end of the Whitehall range, where he could lurk at a water-hole until Carewe and the sheriff arrived.

HE touched his horse with the spurs. It went uphill like a bucking comet. Range ponies resent spurs. Before Gonzales could reach his pistol, Whipple had sailed over the hill. Pulling down the animal's pace, he guided it cautiously down the other slope. Beyond the cañon, a long line of silent red carcasses lay at intervals in the wake of a horde of terrified animals still racing away toward the hazy skyline. Approaching over the more distant carcasses was a rider. Still nearer was another horseman, galloping up into the low foothills to learn what had happened. It was Paul Tarron.

Whipple slipped northward into a gully leading into little hills. If he was observed, these men did not identify him, so he got away this time. By nightfall he was traveling northeast along the edges of the foothills. At midnight he searched for a certain water-hole, missed it, and went onward. Dawn found him just north of Whitehall.

For an instant he was tempted to swoop down on Whitehall, using a six-shooter to supply himself with food, blankets and a fresh horse; but he knew they could track him and corner him. He was haggard from lack of sleep, chilled from exposure, weakened by scanty food. He decided to beg provisions from Brent. . . . .

Suddenly, at mid-morning, his eyes came wide open. He yanked back the reins and then grasped the butt of his six-shooter. His pony, cleverly edging toward the road, had brought him into it, where it arose steeply to the top of a low pass between green-gray hills. The top of a sombrero could be seen approaching beyond that pass. It came higher.

Then Miss Dorothy Brent loomed up on her black pony, less than two hundred yards away.

MISS BRENT'S pony looked like a packhorse. Valises and hat-boxes dangled along its sides while many bundles reposed across the saddle. As Whipple's eyes took in the astonishing list of belongings, he failed to see the expressions change on her

face; first alarm, then resentment, then hauteur.

"Howdy!" he greeted, doffing his hat as their ponies faced each other. "Is it movin' day?"

Her voice had a throaty tremble:

"Let me pass, please. I've nothing except women's clothes. You'll have no use for those."

"That's unfair," he protested. "Do I look like a road-agent?"

"Yes," she retorted, staring at him.

She told the exact truth. His face was grimy, his cheeks were fringed with a misshapen beard, his hair was touseled, his nose was scratched, and his eyes were bleary from lack of sleep. But, without realizing this, he pulled his horse aside and waved his hat with a resentful gesture.

"Pass, then; only, do it decently."

She touched her reins, going by with chin up. Then, having had her way, she halted within twenty feet.

"What do you mean by that?" she demanded, turning.

"Well, people don't call other people road-agents in this country unless they're mighty sure of it, ma'am. Suppose I wasn't a road-agent. Then you'd feel you had done me a wrong, wouldn't you?"

SHE looked at him again in perplexity though she had lost her distrust of him. Tarron had described Whipple darkly when he had the chance, but now these stories didn't quite seem to fit this man with the soothing voice and the friendly eyes. Even his ragged condition ceased to be alarming and became almost pathetic, yet he didn't seem to need help. He appeared more like a person who might be relied upon.

"I'm on my way to Whitehall now," she informed him.

"Yes. I suspected that. But why did you start from home?"

She stiffened slightly.

"Isn't that a personal question?"

"Yes, ma'am, but it's *the* question, isn't it?"

His keenness disarmed her. Her reply came blurted out with amazing candor, as if she hoped that this man with the gentle voice might furnish some new ideas on a baffling situation:

"My father threw my mirror out of the window this morning. He threw out my manicure-set, tea-caddy, pictures, everything. He said he hated female fripperies. So he tore my room apart."

"My gosh!" gasped Whipple.

Her tongue became unleashed. Reticence was swept away after a silence of months:

"I don't satisfy him. He wants a boy. He's tried to make me a boy but I hate it. Yesterday he made me shoot a shotgun. My shoulder's one big bruise. The day before, he made me rope a steer. It took all afternoon. My fingers were torn to shreds. Oh, he's not mean; he's never lifted a finger to me; but he just can't stand having a lily-white female milksop around—that's me—so he says he's going to teach me to be a real ranch-owner if he has to drill me all year. I can't! I can't! It's too rough; too sudden! So I came away, after he went to the range today. I can't stand it any more!"

The poor girl was on the verge of tears of exasperation. Whipple got off his horse and gently took her arm, inviting her to descend; to his surprise she did so.

"Sit on this rock and rest a while," he suggested. "That's it. So now you're on your way to Paul Tarron, eh?"

She nodded slowly, with a little sigh.

"Yes. Father's too much for me."

"Holy smoke!" cried Whipple, watching a red flush spread over her cheeks as she tightened her lips. "So Tarron's only a means of escape!"

"No!" she pleaded, quickly. "Don't misunderstand me, please! I'm going to Whitehall because I want to!"

He sat alongside her, rolling a cigarette.

"Yes, ma'am. Still, it's easy enough to fall out of a fryin' pan into a fire, but it sure is tough when you wish you could get back into a nice cool fryin' pan again!"

"Meaning what?" she demanded, somewhat stiffly.

"Meanin' you're likely to land where no nice young woman would care to go."

She studied a white pebble under the tips of her riding-boots, frowning at it.

"That's a mean insinuation," she said, at last. "Very mean!"

"That's no insinuation. I'm *tellin'* you."

"Yes? And is your advice better than that of—of people who are closer to me?"

LIGHTING his cigarette, he jammed his hands into his ragged pockets; but he was irritated at her situation and its perplexities; not at her.

"All right," he granted. "Have it your way, then. Call the Whitehall outfit a bunch of angels. If it works out that way you're safe. You can live among saints

who'll never try to make a buckaroo out of you. But if I happen to be tellin' the truth, and Whitehall's a roost of rogues, then where'll you be?"

She recoiled. "No! That can't be!"

"Can't it? Well, wait a few days and you'll find out. That's all I ask."

HER eyes began to be searching. She was more of a mature woman than she had seemed at first.

"Why should *you* ask this?" she demanded.

"Call it fair play," he argued. "Give yourself a chance. Of course if you want to destroy yourself, go ahead. I can't stop you. But if you're wise, you'll slip back to the Brent ranch and lay low till you find what's goin' on. Let your dad throw things around if he wants. He'll never harm *you*."

She rested her face in her hands. She was not sobbing; merely bewildered beyond words. At last he touched her shoulder. She did not flinch away.

"But I can't go back!" came her weary protest. "Not now. How can I?"

He thought it over.

"Shucks!" he decided. "Chances are, your dad doesn't even know you've left!"

She looked up swiftly. She realized that Whipple had probably stumbled on the ludicrous truth. For the first time she smiled, and it made his task of persuasion much easier.

Within two hours they were in sight of the big Brent ranch-house. They approached cautiously but there was no need for it. Old Brent did not return until dark. Then Whipple, refreshed by a nap and a good meal, frankly told him the entire story of Whitehall, without mentioning Carewe.

"I'm laying down my cards," concluded Whipple. "If you'll help me with grub, I'll thank you. If not, I'll collect things with a gun. I intend to survive!"

The humorous, sun-slitted eyes of the lean old ranchman peered past the table-lamp toward his daughter in the kitchen behind the living-room.

"I thought there was somethin' the matter with Tarron!" he chuckled.

But the girl held her ground.

"I'm not so quick to give final judgment," she rebuked him, slowly.

"Yeh; I know," he jeered. "Tarron's good-lookin'. Got curly hair and all that. He's all right, no matter what he does. Huh! I always said wimmen was crazy. Now I know it!"

"She's trying to be just," placated Whipple, hating to see the girl goaded.

Old Brent suddenly grunted, arose, and peered through the side-window.

"Hello! Some one's lightin' a cigarette out on the road. That's not one of my men. We're goin' to have a visitor."

Whipple jumped up and edged toward the kitchen.

"That may be Tarron," he conjectured.

The girl confronted him in the kitchen doorway.

"Is it fair to run, after all you've said?" she reproached him, holding up her hands.

He looked down into her honest eyes. For a moment he was stumped, but he recovered.

"This is a different sort of country from what you've known," he replied, courteously. "Tarron and I are enemies. We might start shootin' each other. Would you want that?"

She stepped aside, silently. He edged out past the back door and into the darkness of the vast rear yard.

Up in front, Paul Tarron rode into the light thrown out by the windows of the ranch-house.

CHAPTER V

IT was a travel-worn Tarron who entered the living-room while Whipple delayed to escape and watched him from outside the window. The man's clothes were dirty, his spurred boots were muddy, and his slanted eyes peered out of a face which was almost as soiled as Whipple's had been; yet he whirled his broad-brimmed hat boyishly to the top of a chair and then rushed forward and grabbed Dorothy in his arms, though she tried to draw away.

He saw it and stepped back, smiling down at her while holding her shoulders.

"What's the matter, honey? Somethin' gone wrong? Tell me about it."

"Honey, hell!" exploded her father, behind him. "Let her alone!"

Tarron whirled upon him.

"What's the idea?"

"Because you aint the sort o' person I want around here, see?"

Tarron's body straightened and his eyes narrowed at the old rancher, who surprised Whipple by his quick belligerency.

"Aint I? Well, we'll let Dorothy be

the judge of that!" retorted Tarron. "I'll take her say-so; not yours. Fact is, I came here to ask her to marry me, right away."

"Eh?"

"Yes. I'm in a hurry. I'm goin' to take a new job over near El Paso. I can't leave this country without her, but I've got to grab the job while it's open, so I want to make quick time."

"You'd start tonight?" asked Brent, with a peculiar smile.

everything? What was you doin' with Whitehall cattle in Sangre Cañon?"

Tarron swayed for an instant.

"Drivin' 'em through," he replied, quickly. "The Company ordered it. Why? What's it to you?"

Old Brent's mouth sagged. "The Company ordered it? What for?"

"Ask 'em," replied Tarron. Then he frowned. "Somebody's been lyin' around here. I can smell it. Somebody's been

Whipple lighted a match, touched it to the first heap of powder. Nothing happened.

"Tonight? What of it? Yes, if she'll go. We'll be that much ahead." He turned to Dorothy. "Well? How about it? I know it's sudden but it means a lot to me. How about it?"

SHE leaned against the inner wall, shaking her head negatively. Whipple, standing beyond the light of the window, marveled that she did not denounce him; but Tarron had a very plausible way about him. He proved it instantly when the old man sneered:

"My God, is the sheriff right behind you?"

Tarron turned toward him again.

"What do you mean by that?"

"You're in too much of a hurry. Mebbe you've been doin' somethin' you shouldn't."

"Meanin' what?" Tarron brought his right hand close to the butt of his six-shooter.

"Aw, let that gun alone!" snorted Brent. "Do you think I don't know all about

carryin' tales. What's his game? Who is he?"

The puzzled Brent remained silent. So did Dorothy. Tarron looked down upon her but she did not meet his gaze. Then his passionate voice arose:

"Do I have to wait around here, hung up by a lot of cock-and-bull stories, when I want Dorothy to go with me to El Paso so I can take my new job—the chance of a lifetime? Is that it? Is some one tryin' to play a joke on me? Who's been here? What's the trick? What's his object? Who's been spreadin' all these tales?"

"That sandy-haired feller, Whipple," blurted the dazed ranchman.

"Whipple!" Tarron's body jerked and his right hand grasped the butt of his six-shooter again. "Whipple, eh? I might have guessed it! Where is he?"

"He's gone."

"Where?"

The girl held out her arms, blocking him from the kitchen doorway.

"Why should I help you to trap him?" she demanded. "I'm trying to be fair, Paul. You've got me puzzled, both of you. Your story sounds well, but he—he doesn't seem to be the sort of man you say he is. Far from it. And how can I judge between you until I know everything?"

"How can you judge between us?" yelled Tarron. "So *that's* it!"

"I didn't mean it that way, quite!" she amended, swiftly.

"No. Oh, no!" He started pacing up and down, smacking his clasped hands behind his back. "Along comes this maverick —this road-agent—this liar—and she swallows his bait and don't know how to judge between me and this yawpin' four-flusher! My God! I'm in a hurry; I'm tryin' to make time; but if I could lay hands on that tinhorn, I'd ram his lies so far down his damned throat that he'd never bother you or anyone else again!"

THE astounded Whipple, standing alongside a sawbuck while the passionate voice rang all over the yard, yanked out his six-shooter and started forward to oblige the man, though Tarron's impudence was so magnificent that Whipple was almost dazed by it. Tarron was worried; things had gone wrong with him; he was working on a narrow margin of time for some reason; and yet he had the nerve to come to this ranch-house, deny every accusation, work himself into a frenzy of righteousness, and try to induce Dorothy to go away with him, at night, under her father's nose!

"He's a wonder," conceded Whipple, making for the closed door at the rear of the house, "but he's said a little too much!"

Then Whipple halted, listening.

From afar came the pattering of horses' hoofs, traveling in a hurry. There seemed to be two animals whose feet often struck the road in unison as they galloped, yet they were not heard at the ranch-house because old Brent had regained his vocal powers and was laying down the law in lusty tones:

"Well, however that may be, you aint goin' to take Dorothy out o' this house, tonight or any other night. If your head wasn't so full o' nonsense you'd have more sense than to ask such a fool thing!"

"But I've got the right!" insisted the desperate Tarron. "She's my girl!"

"Heh!" Old Brent cackled. "I aint so sure about that."

Tarron shouted:

"There you go again! There's been some dirty work here! I can see it! You people are all turned around. He's even turned my girl against me. Dorothy! Is that true? Speak up! Is it true?"

BUT Whipple, hesitating in the darkness behind the rear doorway, never knew whether she nodded or not.

The hurrying horsemen came up to the front yard with a great clattering of hoofs. Their boots thudded to the ground as they dismounted. They banged upon the door. There was sudden silence inside. The knocking echoed through the house like a cannonade. Whipple, returning toward the side of the building, saw old Brent amble toward the doorway, turning the knob. The door was flung open in his face.

The surly Knudsen with the chill blue eyes, still in his overcoat with the collar turned up, bent forward as he stepped over the threshold with a six-shooter in his hand. Alongside him came the burly dark figure of the roughest and most unkempt-looking brigand in the Whitehall outfit, one Delaroux, in a dirty checked shirt and a filthy brown overcoat, also holding a revolver. Both pistol-muzzles pointed at Paul Tarron. Tarron had backed to the open doorway between the living-room and the kitchen. Instinctively he had started to retreat when he heard these men coming, but that would have meant the abandonment of all his plans, so he preferred to stand uncertainly with his hands above his chest, probably hoping to vanquish these men also by the use of his wits.

It was like a rabbit trying to argue with a blunt meat-ax.

"Howdy!" grunted Knudsen, with a grim nod, ignoring Brent and his daughter. "Skippin' away, eh? You got us into it. Now you're stampedin' with the gal, leavin' us to hold the sack! So this is how you made us rich, eh?"

"No!" pleaded Tarron.

"Don't lie to me!"

There was silence in the room. Even Tarron's plausibility oozed away in front of that iron-faced creature with the one-track brain and the blue eyes which looked like marbles.

"What does this mean?" demanded the girl.

There was silence again. Knudsen made a little jerk of his pistol-muzzle toward Tarron.

"Ask him."

Whipple, standing in the yard beyond the window-light, gave a little sigh of relief, as if he sighted the end of a long and weary task; not because Tarron was standing at bay, but because Steve Whipple, his six-shooter in his hand, now intended to bag the whole outfit!

STEVE WHIPPLE'S idea was postponed as suddenly as it was planned. The front room of Brent's ranch-house began to emit information of such startling nature that he was forced to wait and wonder.

It began with another long silence. As in a pantomime, he saw the golden-haired girl look with saddened eyes toward Tarron, who stood with head up, staring at Knudsen, keeping his lips tight.

"Yeh," said Knudsen, at last, glancing sardonically at the girl and then at Tarron. "That explosion was too much for you, eh? You didn't have the guts to stay after that. None of you. Cassidy skipped; Barlow skipped; Peters was killed by the herd; Gonzales is hittin' for Tucson—"

"Keep still!" yelled Tarron.

"Keep still, eh? Why should I protect *you?*"

"Why give yourself away in front of these other people?" snapped Tarron.

"To hell with 'em! What do I care? I'm talkin' to *you*. You're the brains of the thing; yeh; you're the fella who showed us how to do it; you're the manager and the treasurer; yeh. But when things go wrong, and the rest of 'em lose their nerve, you come up here and try to skip with the money from them other little stolen herds—"

"Stolen herds!" gasped Dorothy.

"Wait!" implored Tarron, whose face was twitching.

She turned away, shaking her head.

"No! I've heard enough! You lied to me! You lied all along! You called Mr. Whipple a bandit; you fooled my father; you almost fooled me!" Her voice broke. "I might have forgiven the truth, but lies!"

She made a little gesture of repugnance, stepping back into the comparative darkness of the kitchen, where she sank into a chair.

Whipple went swiftly around to the kitchen door, which was not quite in line with the other doors. Hoping to be unobserved, he opened it slightly, peeping through.

Tarron, with his back turned, was the only person he could see standing in the light from the front room. Nearer was Dorothy. She was crying softly yet she saw the door open—or felt the slight draft—for she looked up. Whipple beckoned, closing the door again. He heard her arise just as Tarron's voice called: "Dorothy!"

"No!" she cried. "I don't want to see you again! Let me alone, please!"

He must have taken a step toward her, for Knudsen snarled.

"Whoa! Stay where you are!"

The girl hesitated. Then swiftly she came out past the rear door, closing it again. Whipple's left hand grasped her arm. It quivered but did not pull away.

"Listen!" he whispered. "Go to the barn. Stay there till I call you."

"Why?"

"You might not like what you'd see here."

She hesitated.

"Very well," she yielded with a sigh, clutching his hand in trembling fingers. "But—please don't get into any trouble. Please!"

"I don't intend to," he reassured her. "The trouble's goin' to be the other way. Don't worry about me. Go. Hurry. I'll whistle when it's time to come back."

She pressed his hand. Her dark form faded into the blackness of the yard.

WHIPPLE turned to the rear door again, opening it softly and slipping inside; not that he intended to walk straight upon the gun-muzzles of Knudsen and Delaroux in the living-room, but that he planned to get into the dark kitchen to await developments. There was no other logical entrance. The front door was closed. The side-windows were high, and no one window could give him a full view of everybody.

On tiptoe he glided into the kitchen, turning to the right, alongside the wall and away from the edge of the square shaft of light thrown upon the floor from the front room. Tarron's long shadow darkened a portion of the open doorway between the two rooms. Apparently he had started arguing with Knudsen and Delaroux. The tempers of all three were sullen. Old Brent had probably backed away from this business and was leaving the others to snarl at each other. They were doing it. Whipple noticed the electrical tension in the air.

Tarron's voice arose like a clarion, quivering with reproach and sarcasm:

"Well, you've done your damage. What more do you want? Are you blamin' me because you fools wrecked everything? Hell! You short-sports, was it me that got you into trouble? Was it me that wanted to kill Whipple? Oh, no. *You* voted it. You wanted to treat him rough. Yeh. You wasn't goin' to take any half-way measures. No. So instead of lettin' him alone, where he was likely to mind his own business, you waked him up and nearly got your fool head shot off in the bargain. And now you're actin' like cry-babies, tryin' to blame me—"

"Shut up!" roared Knudsen. "That's enough!"

"Is it?" jeered Tarron. "Well, I guess you've got it comin'!"

Tarron was regaining his nerve but was forgetting the morose disposition of Knudsen.

"The money!" growled Knudsen.

"Do you think I keep it in my pocket? With you people around? Oh, no. It's safe till the time comes to split it."

There was silence. Whipple, in the darkness, could hear Knudsen breathing heavily. Then the voice of Delaroux cried out:

"He lies! He comes for his girl. He comes to skip away. For good. Yah! He's got the money with him! He's a liar!"

Tarron's right arm began a swift downward movement.

THE astonished Whipple, almost behind him, saw the action in silhouette against the lamplight but never knew whether the man made the gesture unconsciously, in answer to the epithet, or whether he calculated that the others had held their weapons for so long that their hands were tiring. Tarron's hand almost reached the butt of his six-shooter, then hesitated.

"Look out!" yelled Whipple.

It was too late.

A thunderous blast of flame leaped toward Tarron from the front of the room. Another exploded alongside it. Smoke spread around his chest. A third yellow flash darted into the smoke. Its concussion made the floor-boards jump.

Tarron stepped backward. He leaned against the door-jamb for support. His head rolled against it as his knees wabbled under him.

Knudsen, crouching forward with pistol in hand, peered beyond the falling Tarron to see where the warning voice had come from. His cold blue eyes saw the dark outline of Whipple. His mouth came open as he aligned the gun-muzzle.

Whipple fired swiftly, sending a streak of flame past the sagging curly head of Tarron.

Knudsen staggered. His mouth was still open but his six-shooter sent a roaring bullet through the doorway.

Whipple fired again.

Knudsen's fumbling left hand groped for the front wall as he tried to lean against it, though his right hand wabbled forward stubbornly with the pistol. But Whipple had jumped aside. He had to.

A line of flame from Delaroux's six-shooter stabbed frantically through the doorway. Then another, and another, and another, while the lamplight became dim and both rooms seemed to be reeling in the thundering concussions and the haze of acrid blue smoke.

Then Delaroux crouched toward the front door, preparing for his exit but coming into a stronger light. He held up the muzzle of his revolver while his peering eyes searched anxiously for their target beyond the kitchen doorway. He sighted Whipple, who began to come forward. The pistol-muzzle of Delaroux came down, but Whipple's shot, desperately swift, went past it. Delaroux fired as the bullet slammed him backward, spoiling his aim.

Whipple shot again.

The hand of Delaroux still tried to press the trigger but came open. His head rolled back against the front door. His body bounced away from it as the butt of his six-shooter fell upon the floor. Then Delaroux crashed down on it.

Knudsen, with face contorted, trying to straighten his folding legs, still held out his pistol in a trembling hand while he reeled around. Stubbornly he pressed the trigger, though his eyes could not sight the gun. The explosion blew a hole in the ceiling as his boots slid out from under him and he fell backward upon the floor.

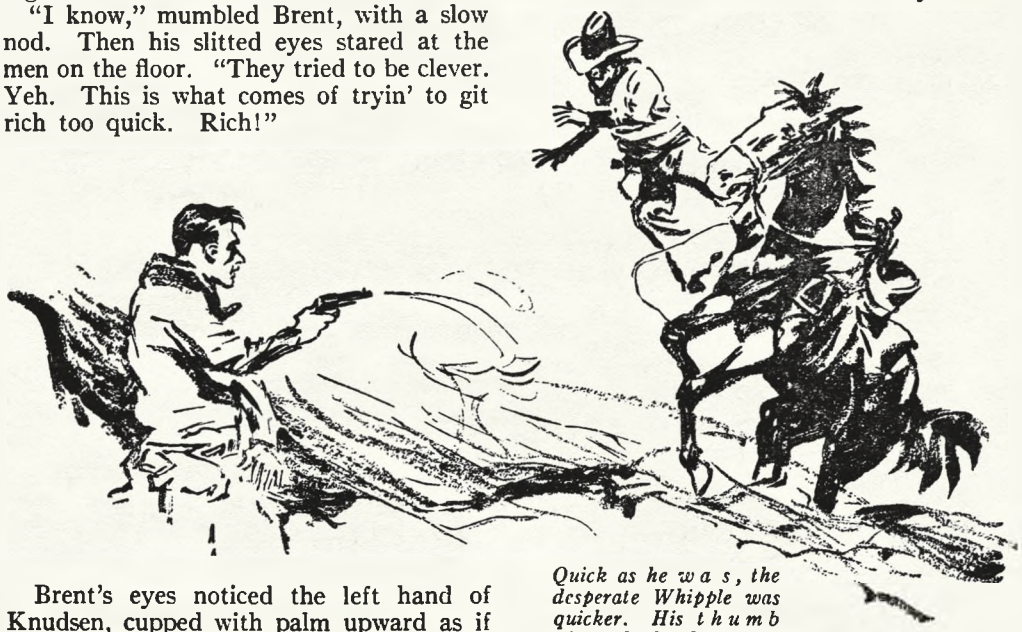
WHIPPLE stood in the doorway, relaxing his arm slowly while the blue haze faded away and the smoke-blurred figures, lying sprawled on the floor, began to appear with ghastly distinctness against the yellowish boards. Then Whipple stepped past Tarron, halting again as old Brent, white-faced and with a shotgun in his hand, emerged from a side-door leading from a dark bedroom. He, too, halted.

His trembling hands released the shotgun to the floor as he sank nervelessly into a chair. His cowhide boots seemed to collapse under him.

"My God!" he gulped. "My God!"

Whipple's eyes were despondent. His lips were dry. He sheathed his gun, making a little motion which said "finish."

"I know," mumbled Brent, with a slow nod. Then his slitted eyes stared at the men on the floor. "They tried to be clever. Yeh. This is what comes of tryin' to git rich too quick. Rich!"



Quick as he was, the desperate Whipple was quicker. His thumb fanned the hammer.

Brent's eyes noticed the left hand of Knudsen, cupped with palm upward as if it still coveted its golden reward. The old man couldn't stand it. He looked away, blinking.

Whipple stared at him, looked at the hand, turned away, hesitated, and finally went past Brent into Dorothy's sleeping-room, where he took all the blankets and furnishings off the bed. The old man looked up inquiringly as the burdened Whipple went past him again.

"She couldn't sleep here," explained Whipple. "Let her stay in the barn tonight."

"Yeh." Brent nodded. "Yeh. You're right. She couldn't stand it in the house. Not now!"

Whipple could not smile. Wordlessly he started for the barn.

IT was exactly five evenings later when Carewe and the sheriff and ten armed riders arrived cautiously at Whitehall, where only the lights of the dining-room gleamed in a great establishment which was otherwise dark and deserted. The hoofs of the posse's animals echoed against the tenantless walls of the bunk-house, and then, with weapons ready, the posse rode around to the front of the main building.

The door opened, throwing out a shaft of illumination. In the doorway were Whipple, Brent and Dorothy.

Carewe yelped, jumped off his horse, and led the others toward the light.

"You here!" he exclaimed. "My word! Why, we expected a frightful struggle! Where are the others?"

"Gone."

"No! Really? And who are these persons?"

"Friends."

"And where are the Whitehall cattle?"

"Scattered all over the country. We've tried to collect 'em but it's too much for two men."

The white-mustached sheriff shouldered past Carewe. His crowd clattered into the great dining-room, though the sheriff halted in front of Whipple.

"Are you Whipple? Yes? Well, I've been figurin' on comin' to get you for the killin' of a rider named Boyd. Some o' the Whitehall men said you done it. Know anything about it?"

"I know all about it," said Whipple, seeing the hand of Paul Tarron again behind this futile trick. "It was done by a man named Knudsen."

"Where is he?"

"Dead."

"And the rest of 'em's all gone?"

"Every one."

"H'm." The sheriff frowned. "Set down, all of you. We'll look into this."

He did. At the end of it, he leaned back in his chair.

"There's nothin' for us to do," he decided. "It's all done. Seems like you've played a lone hand, Mister, and that was plenty!"

"Astoundin', what?" burst out Carewe. "Marvelous! He jolly well cleaned up the whole beastly business! But how about those Whitehall cattle wanderin' around?"

"You'll have to get a new crew," advised Whipple.

Carewe nodded.

"Do so, then. You are runnin' the rawnch, of course."

"Me?"

"Oh, quite. You must take hold. Very necessary. Our Directors will approve my action, I'm sure. Nothin' else possible!"

THE delighted Whipple mentioned that to Dorothy several hours later on the broad stairway which led upward from the fine ranch-house "parlor." She still wore her riding-outfit, for she had accompanied Whipple around the range today, and riding was apparently becoming less distasteful to her.

"You were willin' once to come to Whitehall permanently," he reminded her. "Do you think you might ever have the same opinion again?"

The tenderfoot-girl took a step upward but it was a hesitant step. She examined the banister at her right. Her curls glistened like gold in the dim light.

"I might."

"To escape the other place?" he bantered.

She shook her head sideways. Then swiftly she turned away and went upstairs. He stood watching her. She halted and waved at him from the top of the landing before she disappeared around the corner.

He felt a mighty slap on his shoulder. Carewe's crowing voice arose behind him:

"The lone hand! Remarkable, really! Finished 'em all, by Jove! But you must have had a jolly time strugglin' with those desperado-persons all by yourself, what?"

"It wasn't very jolly," murmured Whipple.

"But it ended well. Oh, quite!"

Whipple still looked up the stairway.

"Yes; I think it's goin' to end fine!"

THE END.

REAL

The Forty-first Rescue

"CONTACT," yelled Al French, as he snapped on the switch. I pulled the prop down and made a wild dive for the lower wing and grabbed for the edge of the forward cockpit. The plane was already moving, and I just made it. Where to?

I'd better start at the beginning and tell you what it was all about.

I was the head life-guard on the beach at Seaside, Oregon, last summer; and believe me, boys, it wasn't any snap, either. A lot of people think that all a life-guard has to do is to walk up and down the beach and display his manly form for the ladies to gaze at and admire. However, I'm not bothered that way, as I would stand to win a prize in a homely man's contest, any place.

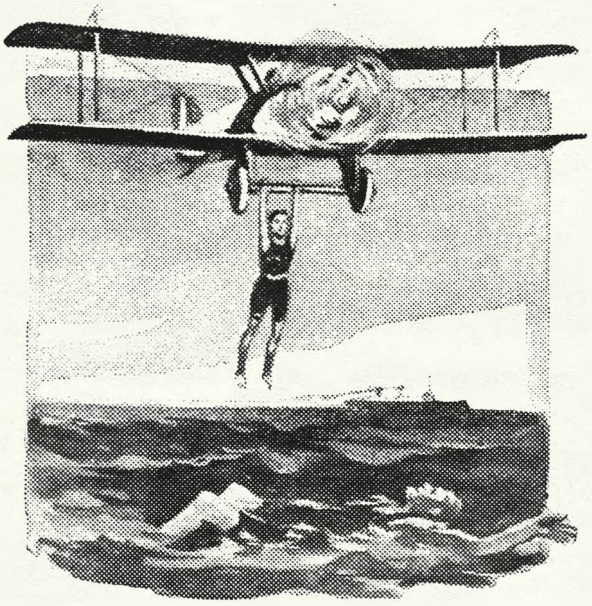
At Seaside we have three miles of beach to guard, and there are only two of us to the whole beach. There are no boats within ten miles, as there is no place for them to land.

We have a life-guard tower placed about in the center of the beach, and an airplane a mile north of this tower.

In case of trouble we take out through the surf a line, on one end of which is fastened a metal life-buoy; the other end is attached to a reel, which is hung on a post. These posts are set up at intervals along the beach. After getting out to the victim, we signal to the people on shore, and they pull us back in.

If the person in trouble is too far out for the lines to reach him, we signal the plane by raising a yellow flag over the life-guard tower, and the plane circles over the

EXPERIENCES



By

Emil J. Vodjansky

The life-guard's lot is not always so rosy as it looks. Here we have the story of an unusual rescue—including a dive into the sea from an airplane.

swimmer and drops two round cork life-buoys within a few feet of the person, and these keep him afloat until the guards reach him and tow him in to shore.

IT was Labor Day, and our season was almost over, and we were mighty thankful that no one had been drowned so far. We had had a strenuous summer and had rescued forty people from drowning from the surf, which had been very rough all during the season. Labor Day was cold and windy, and the sea was very rough and choppy, with a heavy undertow running.

There had not been much of a crowd on the beach that day because of the adverse conditions.

It was almost dark, and I had gone up to the other end of the beach for a last tour of inspection and to warn the few remaining bathers about the bad undertow and tell them that the tide had started to ebb.

I'd just reached the plane and had started to kid Al French, the pilot of the ship, about the snap he had been having all summer taking up passengers and only having to help in a few rescues, when we both heard the alarm gong ring, and right afterward the yellow flag was run up over the tower calling for the plane.

Al yelled: "Grab a couple of life-buoys and let's go." I threw the buoys into the front seat, whirled the prop for him and jumped in.

He didn't waste any time but revved up the motor and jumped the blocks, then headed straight for the surf. A cross-wind was blowing, and he pulled the crate up into the air just in time.

It was a risky take-off without warming up the motor or taking off into the wind, but we made it. We circled the tower and saw that the direction-arrow was pointing straight out.

ABOUT a half-mile out, we saw a dark speck against the foam. We soon made it out to be a large man barely afloat on his back, and hardly moving. One look back toward the beach, and we saw it was hopeless trying to reach him with a line from shore, as they were all too short to reach, and the surf was so rough that even if he could have been reached from shore he and his rescuer could never fight their way back through the great breakers that were rolling toward land.

Al dived the ship down within thirty feet of the man, and I heaved over both buoys about twenty feet from the victim, but he was either so weak he couldn't reach them, or he didn't see them. I felt terrible to think that the whole summer had passed without us losing anyone, and then the last minute some one should drown without us being able to save him.

AL flew up to about seven hundred feet and cut the motor so that I could hear what he said, then yelled: "Say, have you ever dived from a plane?"

"Gosh, no!" I said.

"Well, there is only one chance left for us to save him, and that is for you to crawl down on the spreader bar of the landing gear, then either drop or dive off and keep him afloat until I notify the Coast Guard station. That's about ten miles away, and it will be almost an hour or more before they can get here, though."

"All right, Al. All we can do is to try it, and if I am lucky in dropping, we may make it."

"Don't jump," he told me, "until I come down the third time; then wait until I gun the motor before you drop."

I started over the side of the fuselage onto the lower wing, then down around one of the wheels onto the spreader-bar. This wasn't as easy as it looked, because the slip-stream from the propeller was hitting me, and the rods were all covered with grease, making it very difficult to hold on securely.

The third time down Al cut the motor and we started down in a long glide. I lowered myself until I was hanging suspended by my arms from the under-carriage. It seemed like an eternity before I heard the motor roar, and then I dropped. It was only about thirty feet, but I thought I was crippled from the terrible sting and jar I got from hitting the water. My bathing suit was ripped off, and the breath was almost knocked out of me. I first located the two buoys, then headed for the man, who was still afloat, only about two hundred feet away.

WITH my help, he finally managed to put the buoys around him, and when this was done, he looked a whole lot more cheerful.

But our troubles weren't over yet, because we had to float around until we would be picked up, and the water felt like ice.

Al made a circle over us, then seeing we were all right, headed up the coast toward the Coast Guard station.

THE man felt a little better now and he said he was a banker from Portland down at the beach for the week-end. He had not noticed the ebbing tide, and had ventured too far out into the surf. When he started to return, the offshore current was so strong that he made no headway, so he turned over on his back and floated around expecting some one would notice him and come out after him. He was rather stout, and this made floating easy for him although the choppy waves washed over him and he had swallowed considerable water when I reached him.

We didn't have to wait for the Coast Guard as it turned out, for Al had sighted a large fishing-boat making for Astoria through the mouth of the Columbia River, and after a lot of waving had got them to follow him. He started back toward us with the boat after him.

We were picked up rather wet and cold, but otherwise all right. We went down in the engine-room of the boat and stayed there until the boat reached Astoria, where we borrowed some dry clothes and had a friend drive us back to Seaside.

SINCE the banker was very well known in Portland, he didn't want any publicity about his impromptu cold bath in the ocean, and as the beach was practically deserted when the affair happened, we didn't want to be considered charter members of the "Order of Ananias" for telling about such an impossible rescue, so we all consented to keep quiet about it. Therefore we didn't get official credit for our forty-first rescue, but as Al and I are satisfied, we aren't worrying about anyone else. We didn't lose anything by our work because the banker remembered us for Christmas and also has generously supplied us with cigars and other little luxuries for some time to come, so we feel well satisfied.

Now, if this little stunt of ours sounds real easy, you should attempt to cavort around over the waves in a land plane, with the engine liable to quit any minute, and then also try dropping from a roaring monster traveling through the air at almost a mile a minute. The water comes up to meet you and feels as if a cement walk had slapped you in the face.

Al and I both say, "Never again!"

The Raid

By

Private 231491

One of the strangest shows staged in the Great War is described by this Canadian signaler.

I WAS a signaler with a Canadian battalion, and had been in the trenches for about a year when, in the summer of 1918, after a long stay away back of the lines, where we rested and grew healthy for the subsequent terrific drives of Amiens, Gagnicourt and Cambrai, our battalion went into a quiet sector in front of Arras. I was assigned to battalion headquarters for that trip.

For an ordinary trip into a line equipped with well-kept trenches and snug dugouts, the duties of a signaler were what the poor buck private in the company liked to call "cushy"—a four-hour trick on the phone every half-day (and the phone is always in the deepest, most comfortable dugout), and an occasional jaunt down a trench to fix a telephone wire that has been broken by a shell. That and little else. What price glory! However, it's a different story on a busy front, where your lines have a habit of becoming bisected every half-hour or so. Probably the trenches are no good—shallow and caved in. Probably the telephone lines run over the top in a good many places. And of course a line must be repaired immediately it is broken. You don't wait until the shelling is over! Some of the scariest moments of my life have been spent twisting two ends of stubborn wire together, and wondering if the brother of the shell that brought me there in the flesh was going to leave me there in the spirit.

Well, anyway, this was a quiet sector—one of the first things we learned after arriving was that Fritz's line was more than a mile distant from ours. Now, of course it was distinctly unusual for No Man's Land to be that wide, but nobody, you may be sure, lamented the fact, since the danger from trench-mortars and snipers was practically nil.

"One thing is sure," somebody said: "we wont have to pull off a raid on this front."

Nobody liked trench-raids. I had never taken part in one but I'd heard plenty about them, of course. The last raid our battalion had executed had been in front of Loos, and though it had been short and to the point, it had been just so much hell while it lasted.

But there could be no raid on this front. No Man's Land was a mile wide—that settled it.

SETTLED nothing!

I was on the phone when the signal sergeant broke the news to me.

"How can we possibly do it, Bill?" I asked him. "We'd be wiped out before we got halfway across No Man's Land."

He told me how. And it gave me the creeps—but when he said four signalers would be needed, I simply had to volunteer, in view of the fact that I was the first man he had told.

All that day there was excitement throughout the battalion. I was heartily glad when night fell, and we got moving. It's the suspense that hurts—not the action. In company with the other three signalers, I toiled up a communication

trench. Ahead of us was a party of men from one of the support companies. Arrived finally in the front line, we waited until probably a hundred men had assembled from the various companies.

I was excited, fidgety, anxious to be off. Finally there was an order. Men formed into single file and moved off to the right. We tagged on at the end of the slow-moving file, behind a lieutenant. Looking ahead I could just dimly see that shadowy line of men twisting over the parapet and disappearing into the darkness of No Man's Land. I moved along, and presently arrived at the hastily contrived ladder.

The signal sergeant and the corporal were standing there with two telephones and two reels of wire. They handed me on of the reels. "Good-by!" and "Good luck!" from the sergeant and the corporal, and a moment later I was in No Man's Land, one little link in a ghostly chain of men that wound silently off toward the east.

It was a still, dark night. Off to the left a machine-gun spattered intermittently, playing on Railway Triangle. Away to the rear there sounded the occasional *crump* of a five-point-nine.

I stumbled along, paying out wire. My reel was connected to a phone back at battalion headquarters. The other reel was for later use. The going was difficult. Barbed wire, shell holes and battered trenches beset us at every hand.

I found that I was trembling. I jeered at myself—chided myself. Didn't our scouts go wandering nonchalantly about No Man's Land almost every night? Hadn't they already been out in this No Man's Land, ferreting about, discovering that which was the cause of *my* being there? Weren't they up at the head of this file of men, leading us to the old abandoned German dugout which was to be our habitation for the next twenty-four hours? But I was still scared. Shivers ran up and down my spine. I had never been in No Man's Land before. And never had I dreamed of being there under such weird circumstances.

After what seemed hours, the man in front of me slowed up, and at length the whole file halted. In the darkness I could see the edge of a caved-in trench. Into this trench, scene of some by-gone battle, no doubt, we presently turned and moved slowly along its uneven base.

All around was desolation, the more horrible because of its murky ambiguity. Shell-torn tree stumps loomed like ghosts, seeming to move, though the actual stillness of everything was appalling. Barbed wire, tortured into grotesque patterns by forgotten shells, hung crazily, here, there and everywhere. Sheet iron, huge oak beams, telephone wires, unexploded shells, tin cans and countless other incommoding paraphernalia of war lay in this unholy wasteland like a jazz orchestra in death.

And over all hung the eternal menace of lead from machine-guns and rifles, should the enemy suddenly learn of the extraordinary movements taking place so close to their front line.

Ahead the noiseless file of men was gradually being swallowed by the earth. I crawled along and came at last to the entrance of a dugout, in the bowels of which a lighted candle gleamed faintly. I entered, and went down the stairs, down the rugged stairs of an old, mysterious, ownerless dugout situated seven-eighths of a mile from the Canadian front line, one-eighth mile from the German front line.

It was then ten o'clock. Until nine o'clock of the following night we were to stay in that dugout, then hop over the top!

TALK about being stranded on a desert isle! *Robinson Crusoe* was only picknicking! When day broke we were absolutely cut off from the entire world, a hundred men in a hole in the ground. We dared not poke our noses out for fresh air.

I can see that great musty bombproof dugout now: Men and officers sprawled about on the floor, on bunks, thick as lice, some sleeping, some reading old pocket-worn letters, some gambling. Some scared, some excited, some bored, all inwardly boiling with suspense. Lord!

It isn't zero hour that hurts—it's the waiting for it; it's that ghastly half-hour before dawn when you've crawled out of your cubby hole to await the opening of the barrage. Then, over you go with your blood up, and it's plain sailing from then on—more or less. But here was no ordinary waiting for zero hour. Here was a twenty-four-hour wait in an isolated hole in No Man's Land—and home was a long way back.

Time was a snail that night and day. Every watch in the dugout seemed to be on strike. But at last, as of course it had to, the moment for going over came. We adjusted our equipment, our helmets, our

gas-masks, our phones and our wires, our grenades and our ammunition. And up the stairs we filed, to emerge into the silent and pregnant darkness.

I carried a phone. Two other signalers bore a reel of wire between them. The fourth signaler was to remain on the dugout stairs, reporting to battalion headquarters all that would happen before we reached the German front line, mopped it up, and established my phone there for a triumphant but fleeting moment.

Silent, no one daring even to whisper, we crouched in the dark, waiting. And finally the heavens split. It was the barrage! It played for several moments on Fritz's front line, then moved back to his support trenches.

We were off! Smoke-shells burst ahead of us, forming a screen behind which we moved. I was like a wild man suddenly let loose, and so was everyone else, I guess. No longer intensely frightened, but excited to the point of hysteria almost, I dashed along, stumbling, slipping, falling, my phone banging against my hip at every step. Beside me ran my two pals, paying out wire, a heart-breaking job under the circumstances.

"What a surprise for Fritz!" went my thoughts. No answering fire met us, no shells, no machine-gun bullets. Fritz must be flabbergasted! Lord, this was going to be a cinch!

AND it *was* a cinch. When we reached the German trench it was all but deserted. The part of it that I could see contained several dead men, killed by the barrage. The rest had disappeared into their dugouts the moment the barrage had opened, and were just beginning to come out again when our hundred mad khaki-clad soldiers appeared out of the darkness on their parapet—a parapet they had had every reason to believe ridiculously safe from the personal encroachment of the mile-distant Canadians.

Our guns were still pouring bursting metal on their rear trenches and on their artillery emplacement.

Right then my pals and I began to get busy. Choosing a vantage spot a few yards from the parapet, behind a piece of slanting corrugated iron, I flopped on the ground and yanked the phone from my shoulder. Amidst a perfect bedlam, we set up our phone, attached it to the wire so laboriously reeled out—and tuned in.

No answer. The line was dead.

I looked back the way we had come. Shells were bursting in the darkness. So Fritz had got a gun or two working at last! He was firing willy-nilly, but one of his shells had obviously found our line. There was nothing for it but to start back and look for the break.

I SET out on the double, letting the wire run through my hand. It was a mad night! Away back our guns were splitting the heavens with noise and fire. Flares lit the sky in front of the German line to the left and to the right of the attack. Looking over my shoulder, I could see nothing but an inferno of smoke, lit with flashes like lightning, where I had left the phone. I hoped everything was all right. Fritz's whizz-bangs began to drop around me, occasionally too near for comfort. I stumbled along. Where was that damned break?

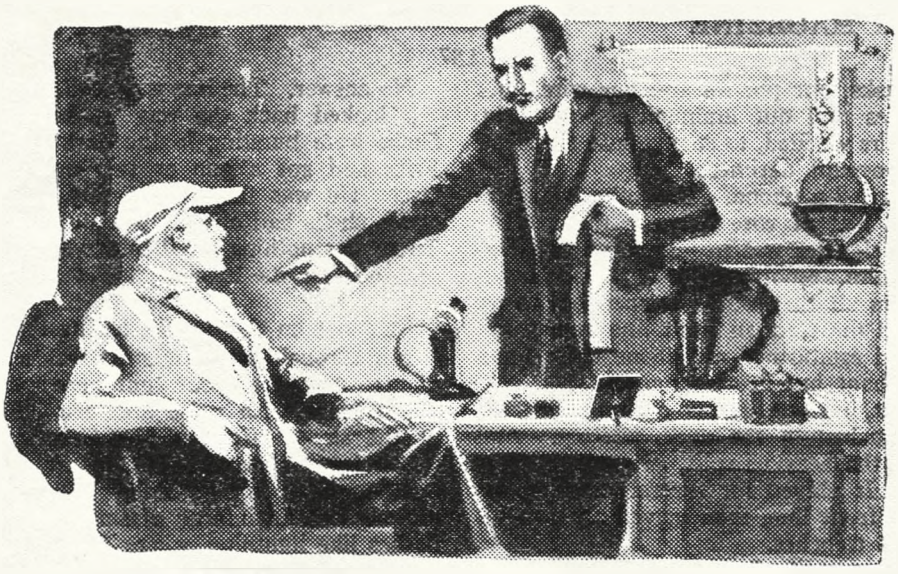
Only minutes had passed since the beginning of the raid, but a thousand things seemed to have happened. Only minutes and it would be over, the men hastening back to the haven of our distant trenches. Where *was* that break? . . . . Ah, at last! I held one end of the wire in my hand. Where was the other? Ferret, ferret! Then around in circles, ever-widening circles, till finally, down on my knees, I had the lost end, was twisting it savagely with the other.

Done! Shells were falling more thickly now. I scudded back toward the phone, hoping my pals would be able to communicate with headquarters for a moment at least before the raid ended and our men withdrew.

I met them coming back.

"We got headquarters!" they shouted as I joined them. "Just long enough to give the good news before the captain ordered us to withdraw. The colonel was tickled pink. Everything went off beautifully. Hardly any casualties. We'll probably have trouble getting back, though."

We did have trouble, but we got there, and most of the hundred raiders with us. It was all too simple. The surprise was complete, appalling. You could almost call it the perfect raid. But the attack itself isn't the story. The big adventure was that twenty-four-hour wait in a hole in No Man's Land. I wonder if any of the other fellows who were there will read this and remember?



The Libel that Wasn't

By **John Quincy**

Dramatic situations are not uncommon in the newspaper business; but this story is really exceptional.

MY office was just off the news-room and I spied the bulky form of Chief of Detectives Shanley as he asked where he could find the managing editor. I immediately closed the door to my office, deciding to let Will Parker, the city editor, take care of him; but in my bones I felt it was one of those things that would be brought to me.

Newspaper offices, more probably than any other business, are cursed with the old pastime of passing the buck; and this office was no exception.

Nor was I mistaken in this instance. Whatever Shanley wanted it wasn't within the authority of Parker to grant; presently the big detective knocked at my door.

"This here bird says I'm to see you," he announced, jerking his head toward Parker, his face wearing a villainous snarl.

"Well, come in, Mr. Officer," I replied. "Just what is the trouble?"

He entered my office, took a seat opposite my desk and surveyed my lowly sanctum.

"I didn't tell that squirt out there exactly what I wanted," he began, "because I had a hunch I'd have to see some guy with more of a suck than he packs around here. All I told him was that I wanted an extra edition of your paper printed, and that I wanted it printed containing a fake story. I know that's quite a request, but just the same that's what I want."

"Yes, Mr. Shanley," I said, now interested in what this sly gentleman was after, "that is quite an unusual request. Ordinarily, you know, we don't put out extra editions on fake stories. Best newspapers don't, you know, and we are considered a pretty good newspaper."

I thought that would at least break down that frown on his face—but it didn't.

"Well," he said, folding his legs and tilting his slouch hat, "let's get down to cases. You say you don't put out extra editions on fake stories—but you don't hesitate to put out editions panning the Police Department for so-called crime waves, and ridin' us when we don't make a hundred pinches for some two-bit larceny."

Here he hesitated, and I didn't care to break off the conversation, because I wanted him to unload his story.

"Now," he said sternly, "you have a chance to help us out. You're supposed to be running a newspaper in the public's interest.

"The trick I want you to turn for me is in the public's interest. It means sending to the stir, for life, two of the most notorious and dangerous crooks in the Middle West. And when I say crooks, I mean crooks—two of the smartest bank-messenger robbers in the country. And when I say dangerous, I don't mean 'alleged,' I mean dangerous with a big capital 'D.' So damn' dangerous that they have killed six men in as many cities. I've got 'em both—each in a separate cell. But I haven't yet got the goods on 'em. And they're too smart to squawk. I can't pull the old stand-by 'squeal' game on 'em. You know what that is, I suppose?"

He glanced at me a second, and was about to continue when I broke in:

"I'm not exactly sure that I do."

"Well," he said, "it's merely the act of putting two prisoners in separate cells and then if neither one tumbles after third-degree tactics, we just tell one of 'em that the other squealed, make the story sound true-like, letting the duped bozo think his partner made a clean breast in order to obtain immunity or at least leniency; then the criminal immediately cries:

" 'The dirty double-crosser! He did it himself!'

"Then we get somewheres, see?"

"Yes, I see," I was forced to admit.

"But," the detective went on, "as I said before, these guys wont fall for that amateur racket. These guys are big-time. They know all the tricks and know more about police and their ways than the police do themselves."

I WAS now deeply interested in wanting to know exactly what the officer's plan was, and I asked him to tell me exactly what he wanted.

"Here is what I want," he said, and I could tell he wasn't going to mince any words in his explanation.

"I want an extra edition of your paper printed. I want a big headline carried which reads, 'Joe Burson confesses to part in six hold-ups—blames his pal Mike Depue for murders.'

"I don't know anything about type, but that's the substance of what I want the headline to say. Then I want the story to tell about Joe Burson confessing to helping Mike in hold-ups in six towns, but all the way through I want Joe to hang the actual shootings in each case on Mike. I think when Mike gets his mitts on one of those papers, he'll fall. I actually think it's the only thing that'll make him fall. Now, are you going to coöperate with us or not? If not, O. K. and good-by and good luck; but I don't see how, if you refuse to help out our department now, you can at any time in the future ride us for not clearing up crime problems."

HERE the big detective pulled a long ugly cigar from his vest pocket, lit it and set back as if pleased with his speech, to await my decision. But I wasn't going to make the decision without some more information.

"Has either one of these crooks got any money?" I parried.

The detective's answer was blunt.

"Thousands," he said, "perhaps tens of thousands and they've got a Chicago gang behind them that'll furnish 'em more if they want it. Even now they're threatening *habeas corpus* proceedings, and with the little we have got on 'em, his royal highness, the judge, will grant their release, unless—"

"Yes, I know," I shot in, "unless I do as you say. But don't you realize, Shanley, that my purpose in asking whether they had any money is because a man that is broke wont sue for libel, while a man that's got plenty will."

Here I brought a smile from the big investigator.

"Yes," he said, "I know what you're 'fraid of. You're 'fraid that if our scheme don't work, they'll put the works on you for damages, but there is where you're wrong."

"I don't understand," I put in quizzically.

"Because," he said, "I only want your press to print one copy of the paper containing this story. As soon as that one copy serves its purpose in making Depue squawk, I'll take it away from him. There will be no record of the story. He can't sue. Now do you get me?"

NOW, here was a situation. The officer's story sounded good, and his explanation of how he aimed to protect my paper from a libel suit was convincing. And he had me in a nine-hole. Our paper had been razzing the police; now when the police asked us for help, it would go cross-grain and be cowardly to refuse. And since it only entailed the setting of about half a column of type, making of one extra plate

and the printing of just one paper, I decided it would be the best, diplomatically at least, to put the scheme over.

"Shanley," I said, "I'll do it. When do you want the paper?"

"At once," was his answer.

I wrote the story myself, headlined it myself, gave implicit instructions to the foreman to set the type, and throw it away after it was in page form. I even went to the pressroom, where after grabbing several "spoils" because of the usual preliminary press-work, I obtained one perfect copy and ordered the press stopped. The whole undertaking was simple. It was merely a question of what newspaper men term a "make-over"—throwing out the "confession" story and putting back a legitimate one as soon as the prized one copy was in my possession.

This I gave to Shanley, who had waited in my office anxiously for it.

"Great!" he shouted, elated. "Now all you have to do is wait about two hours, and you can reset the type you've thrown away. Although your story isn't true now, it soon will be."

This pleased me immensely, and I saw visions of a "scoop" from the favor I had just granted.

But I waited two hours—yea, I waited two days and two weeks; and the scoop didn't materialize. In lieu thereof I received a visit just sixteen days after the incident from one Mr. Joe Burson, a dapper young man of about twenty-four with pleasant personality and excellent carriage.

He had asked for me personally, and after introducing himself in a somewhat haughty manner, closed the door of my office behind him, pulled a chair close to mine, lit a cigarette and bluntly remarked:

"How much money has your paper got?"

I hesitated and studied the fellow, but my hesitancy in answering did not seem to worry him. He merely tilted his head to the ceiling and blew smoke-rings.

"Why, I should say," I parried, "that we are at least one step ahead of the sheriff."

"By which you mean to say," he broke in, "that you are amply supplied with dough-rae-me to fight a libel suit."

"A libel suit? What over?"

"Oh, don't try to spring that baby innocence stuff on me. You know how you tried to frame me, but you discovered it wouldn't work. Well, you've stated in black and white that I confessed, which you know I didn't, or I wouldn't be here now. You know that story was a ruse, and you know also it was libelous."

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" I said, deciding to get as tough as this bird, knowing, or at least thinking, I held the trump card on him—the fact that only one newspaper was printed containing the pseudo-confession—and that paper had been returned to me by Shanley and duly destroyed.

"You can't sue," I continued, "if you can't prove the story was printed."

I was surprised when he returned me a smile instead of a mean look.

"It just happens that I can prove it," he said smoothly, producing a bill-fold from which he removed a clipping which he dangled before my eyes.

You could have knocked me over with a match. There was a clipping of the story that appeared in our paper!

"Let me see that," I said, reaching eagerly for the clipping, but he quickly pocketed it.

"And I've got a lot more of 'em," he said with a fox-like gleam in his eye. "Think it over. If you want to settle without going to court, it's O. K. with me, but it's going to cost you either way. You better save yourself the court costs. The loser gets stuck for them, you know."

With that he departed.

I SAT down in a half daze. The first thought in my mind was that I'd been double-crossed by somebody in our own organization, probably a pressman.

But still, I had been in the pressroom, saw that one paper printed, ascertained that the few "spoils" were destroyed, saw the plate removed from the press and returned to the stereotype room, where it was thrown into the gigantic metal-pot and remelted. I also threw away the type from which the plate was made, and had seen the stereotype foreman cut the matrix into ribbons.

I went immediately to the office of Mr. Brewer, the publisher, whom I had told about the scheme which failed. He was as amazed as myself.

"I can see nothing to do but fight the suit," he said coldly, after we discussed the affair from beginning to end.

"But we haven't a case," I said hopelessly. "He didn't confess, and there is no record of a confession. If he had confessed, he would be in the penitentiary today.

Our only 'out' that I can see is the fact he is a crook with a bad reputation which couldn't be damaged, no matter what was printed about him."

"But on the other hand," my superior said, "he can produce as many character witnesses as we can. That would be easy for his gang and its bank-roll."

I returned to my office in despair.

THREE days later Burson reappeared, now nonchalant and pleasant.

"Did you ever hear the story about the man who set the trap for the fox but got caught in it himself?" he asked, grinning.

"I am not interested," I shot back. He merely smiled.

"Well," he resumed, "are you interested in having your auditor write me a check for fifty thousand dollars in full settlement of claims?"

"No, I'm not interested in that either," I said angrily. "But I am interested in that clipping you have, and—"

"Clippings, you mean," he corrected me.

"Well, if you have more than one, what's the harm in letting me look at one? If you'll let me see one of these clippings, we might reach an understanding. Remember I said *might*."

He swallowed this and produced his billfold again and cautiously handed me a clipping.

Sure enough, there was the story just as it appeared in our paper. The type was exactly the same, and the streamer line and drop headlines were set in the same style type as we used. Although I didn't remember the story verbatim, it read about the way I remembered ours did.

Then I looked on the other side of the clipping. It was a single-column advertisement for the Werton Brothers Clothing Company.

"Werton Brothers, Werton Brothers," ran through my mind like wild-fire. Why, Werton Brothers hadn't advertised with us for six years! They advertised exclusively in the opposition paper. Then the explanation struck me!

"Sit down, Mr. Burson," I said, still holding the clipping, which he made no effort to retrieve.

"Mr. Burson, of course you have heard of laws providing prison terms on charges of conspiracy?"

"Yes sir, I have," was the reply. "What has that to do with it?"

"And you've heard of laws providing prison terms for perjury—that is, if you should get on the witness-stand and swear this clipping appeared in our paper, when it didn't—of course you'd be committing perjury, wouldn't you?"

"Cut the kidding," he said with a snarl. "You know damn' good and well that clipping appeared in your paper."

"And you've heard of laws providing prison terms for blackmail, Mr. Burson?" I continued.

"Say, what are you driving at?" he shouted angrily.

"What I'm driving at is going to drive you to the penitentiary," I shot back, rising to my feet to wallop him if he didn't like the way I put it.

"Say, listen—" he began.

"You listen to me," I replied, my temper now at fever heat. "I know your game. You've had the *Recorder*, which is our bitter enemy, set that story in type as nearly letter perfect as you could remember it before Shanley took the only paper that existed away from you. You've had the *Recorder* run off several copies, and you've clipped them out and tried to pass them off as ours. It's nothing but a damn' conspiracy concocted by the *Recorder* to ruin us financially and drive us out of the field, but it's not going to work."

"Say, you're talkin' out of your head," he growled, "and you can't prove a word you're saying."

"Can't I? Well, go bring your suit—sue for a billion dollars if you want to, and we'll get you into court and make you and the *Recorder* plenty sorry. Not only that, but we'll send you and the *Recorder* publishers to prison."

"And how?"

"Just by producing evidence to show that Werton Brothers, whose ad is on the other side of your clippings, haven't advertised in our paper for six years. It's lucky for us that when the *Recorder* printed those few copies for you, they stuck the type on a page opposite the Werton Brothers ad. That saved us."

HE grabbed the clipping from my hand and perused the Werton Brothers' ad. He knew I had him.

"You win," he finally said. "I guess we've pulled a bloomer. Let's forget about the whole thing."

We did, and the paper was rescued from what, for a time, seemed doom for our publication and my job.

The strange story of a steamship captured by Chinese pirates—and of her later escape.

The Sunning Piracy

By J. W. Hurst

ONE afternoon last year, the 15th of November, 1926, to be precise, I was on the bridge of the British S.S. *Sunning,* bound from Amoy to Hongkong, keeping watch. We had on board two European passengers, ninety-six Chinese passengers, and a cargo of general merchandise.

It was nearly three-forty-five P. M. and my relief was due in about twenty minutes. I was gazing intently in the direction where I expected the Lammocks Islands should show up any minute, when suddenly my ankles were seized from behind, my feet were pulled from under me, and my nose appeared to go halfway through the deck. With furious determination in my mind to do unto others as they had done unto me, only twice as much, I started to get on to my feet, when I saw that two desperate-looking Chinese were pointing guns at me, and realized that my idea of punching some one on the nose was not going to be founded on fact.

They were pirates. I had not been very long on the China coast, but long enough to know that. The merry-looking devils who had taken such an unconventional method of introducing themselves pushed and prodded me with their guns, demanding my rifle and revolver, which were in the center of the bridge. I was then prodded down to the chart-room, where I saw Captain Pringle coming out of his room.

I shouted to him, but it was no good; other pirates had joined the band and relieved him of his rifle and revolver; and the same had happened the other officers and Indian guards; but there were two weapons they had overlooked. I had a small automatic and a few rounds of ammunition planted away in my room; Billy Orr, the second engineer, or first assistant, as you would call him in America, had a .45 revolver in his room wrapped in an old boiler suit, along with ammunition, and they never got that either.

I found that out at four o'clock.

MEANTIME Captain Pringle and I were prodded back to the bridge, and as none of them could speak English, we had to try and understand them by signs. The pirates wanted the ship taken to Bias Bay, as a well-dressed Bias Bay stockholder explained, tracing the course on the chart with his pipe. He appeared to be the pirate chief, as he had the others well in hand. They set a course themselves that would have put us where we would have wanted a diving-suit to climb the masts, and it took the combined efforts of all hands and the interpreter to convince them of it.

Our interpreter was Mr. Lapsley, a re-

tired official of the Eastern Telegraph Co.; he was a passenger who spoke Chinese. We had tried the Chinese wireless operator, but he only spoke Cantonese, and the pirates were Hakkas from a different part of the province. They did not understand each other.

When I went off the bridge, I found the two European passengers, chief officer, wireless operator, and the engineers off duty in the chief officer's cabin. We were given complete freedom, the pirates knowing we were disarmed. I found there were about forty pirates on the job, who had come aboard dressed as passengers, and they were dashing about shooting in the air to frighten the other Chinese passengers. At about four-thirty P. M. I thought of the gun hidden in my room, and decided to make an attempt to get it; so I went to my room, but unfortunately a pirate was sitting outside in a deck-chair; so in order to create no suspicion, I simply got a tin of cigarettes.

About five minutes afterward I made another attempt, at the same time I observed a ship approaching us, and I pointed this out to the man outside my cabin. He immediately went on the bridge; then I slipped into my room and found my gun.

I MENTIONED the idea of a counter-attack to the others in conversation, but they did not seem to think much of it, so I resolved to try Beatty, the chief officer. There were forty of them against only seven of us Europeans, the crew of course being Chinese; but they could not all be Number One scrappers, even though they were all armed, and we would not have to take them on all at once, as they were all scattered about the ship.

Shortly afterward I searched the other rooms and I came across the other gun overlooked by them in the second engineer's cabin. As it was too large for my pocket, I had to put it down my trousers. In the meantime we made ourselves agreeable to the pirates and gained their confidence. The only amusement we had was given by Billy Orr and Duncan, who played ukuleles; and as the pirates did not seem to object, we had plenty of it. The ship that passed us was the *Anhui,* another of the company's ships; and as we did not dip our flag to her as is the custom, we were quite convinced that they would see something was wrong and wireless to Hongkong, which meant that a gunboat would be sent out. But since we were informed that if a gunboat appeared, they would shoot us all, things were not looking very promising.

After a while I managed to get a word with Beatty, and told him I had two revolvers down my pants that were beginning to look like a drug on the market, and we arranged a plan in which we could not see any failure.

In the first place I wanted to get rid of the revolvers and ammunition and plant it in a place which would be handy when required. Beatty and I went on the bridge, and while he pointed out toward the land, I slipped the war material into the chart drawer, as it was obvious that if they searched me and found anything, my number would be up.

Of course we had to be careful how we spoke, as we were not quite so sure that they did not speak any English.

At dinner, about seven P. M., Captain Pringle took the bridge, and the rest of us had dinner together; as there were no pirates in the saloon we freely talked over our chances of recapturing the ship, and it was arranged that everyone should go to the Captain's cabin to sleep, as it was situated underneath the bridge with a skylight leading up to the bridge; of course there was to be one engineer on watch, but we could not help that.

About nine we were sitting in the Captain's cabin, when the pirates came up and demanded to know who slammed the steel grilles, which led up to the saloon deck—when slammed they automatically locked themselves. It appeared that the chief engineer had done it. We were not ready then, but they became very suspicious and watched us closely. They made the third engineer break open the grilles, and our chances in that direction were closed.

On the bridge we kept two deep-sea leads to keep the bridge mats down from the wind; they each weighed twenty-eight pounds, and it was decided by Beatty and I when the time came we would use them and quietly knock out as many as possible, then seize their arms.

We made it up that if a gunboat did not turn up before we reached Chilang Point, which is about thirty miles north of their stronghold, we would have to go at them and take a chance. They were looking forward to seeing it, as they intended to take the ship themselves from there, which meant that we would be given no liberty at all. We showed them Chilang Point, all right, and a little bit more than they expected.

JUST before midnight we observed the loom of the light; it was barely visible, and now was the time to act. There were only two pirates guarding the bridge, and they were standing close together. Beatty pointed out the light, at the same time handing his glasses to one of them; he then directed the gaze of the other in the same direction. The night was dark, the only light being from the compass. I picked up the lead and brought it down on the first one's head, and then the second one's head.

The first one dropped without a sound, but the other only got a glancing blow, which brought him down all right, but he fired two shots which proved he was not out, so I gave him another blow and quieted him.

The Captain came over to see what was the matter, and I gave him a revolver and he understood. Beatty met the pirate who was guarding the Captain's room, and shot him right away, and he fell at the bottom of the ladder.

The other pirates, hearing the shots, got hold of the chief engineer, who was on watch, and held him in front of them to act as a shield. We were compelled to shoot him in the leg; otherwise they would have got to the Captain's cabin and used the others as a shield.

When he was shot, he dropped on the deck; that left the pirates without any shield, and we soon scattered them. Beatty then broke the skylight and hauled up the lady passenger, second engineer, third engineer and wireless operator to the bridge. With the revolvers we got from those who were killed, we armed the lot of us.

One of the pirates managed to get on the bridge and fired, and Beatty broke the only rifle we had over his head. After repeated attempts to capture the bridge, during which time we had quite a lot of trouble with revolvers jamming, owing to the different sizes of ammunition we were getting from the dead men's pockets, the pirates resolved to set fire to the ship, which they did, thinking to smoke us out, but they made another mistake. We had the wind blowing behind us, and they set fire to the ship behind us; but we dropped the anchor, and the ship swung round, blowing the smoke onto themselves.

A LITTLE while after the chief engineer tried to get on to the bridge, and he was mistaken for a pirate by Billy Orr, and shot in the chest, but we eventually hauled him on the bridge. Shooting continued throughout the night intermittently, and eventually our ammunition was finished and we were only left with boat axes.

The Russian lady passenger was sitting in the corner of the bridge not troubling anyone. I expect she was used to that kind of thing in Russia. Mr. Lapsley disappeared when the fight started; the pirates got him, I believe, and shot him. We never saw him again.

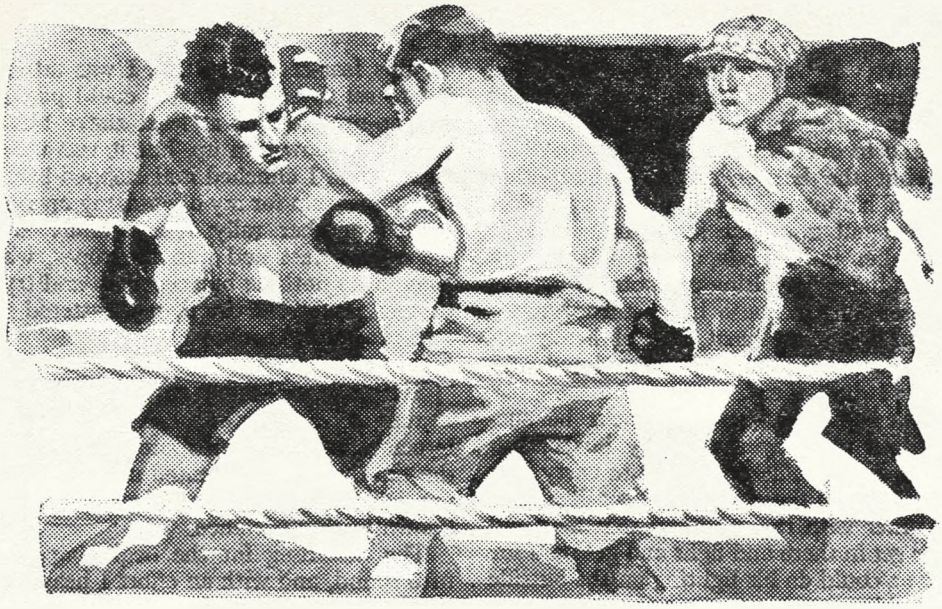
The pirates then sent along one of the Chinese passengers and asked if they left the ship, would we stop firing. As we had no ammunition, we willingly agreed; so two boats went away.

As three of the other boats were blazing, and the decks were falling through into the saloon along with the bodies that were lying there, things were getting pretty serious for us. So we decided to launch the only remaining boat which was starting to catch fire. We launched this boat, and in it were Duncan, Mrs. Pockaviera, wireless operator, two quartermasters and myself, with the object of saving the Chinese women passengers, but the rope that was holding us burned through, and we drifted away.

THE seas were very heavy; we were continually shipping water, and had to keep bailing out. When daylight came, we were within one hundred yards of one of the boats with pirates in, but as they were pulling away for all they were worth, we did not worry much. We hoisted the sail, and it broke the mast three times, and about two-thirty P. M. we were picked up by the S.S. *Ravensfjells* from which we were transferred to the H. M. S. *Verity* and taken to Hongkong. The others left on board fought the flames all night until assistance arrived and they were towed to Hongkong.

The H. M. S. *Bluebell* picked up one of the boats containing ten pirates and it is believed the other boat sank in the heavy seas.

At the trial in Hongkong, eight of the suspects were proved guilty and hanged; the others got off. It was estimated—and confirmed when they confessed—that about fifteen were killed on the ship, and the total number of pirates was thirty-five, so I doubt if there were many left to tell the tale. This is my most queer story, and I would not like to go through it again even to amuse the readers of THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE.



The Ice-Cream Boxer

By **J. R. Hardie**

One of the most curious pugilistic victories ever recorded is here chronicled by the fortunate winner.

HAVING been a boxer or a prize-fighter, as you choose, for some years, I can now look back and laugh at the following experience, but at the time it was mighty serious to me.

I had begun boxing in a medium-sized Missouri town as an amateur, and having won the district championship, was sent to Kansas City, where after a hard uphill fight I won the bantam-weight championship of the Middle West.

After some thought and much advice, I decided to turn professional, and accordingly received several offers following my initial appearance. Finally, after much deliberation I decided to accept the offer of a friend who was promoting boxing-shows in one of the larger mining towns in Oklahoma, to meet the local pride over the ten-round route at the bantam-weight limit of one hundred and eighteen pounds at three o'clock the day of the fight.

Now, a word as to this local champion: his everyday occupation consisted of driving an ice-cream wagon, which supplied the residential section with ice-cream cones, and so forth, on sultry afternoons, and he boxed only as a means of securing a few extra dollars. He really had no love for the game; in fact, he was what is commonly known as a "safety-firster," never taking any chances and seldom giving the crowd a thrill; also he had to be pretty sure that the going was not going to be too rough before he could be induced to appear. Owing to the fact that my own guarantee was rather large, however, the promoter could not afford to bring in outside talent; so after much persuasion he had induced the ice-cream boxer to take the fight.

THE night of the fight arrived, and a large crowd was on hand, the preliminaries over, I climbed into the ring and after waiting some time, my opponent still had not put in his appearance. I finally learned that he had somehow been told some tall stories about me and my reputation, and had decided to be elsewhere upon this particular evening; so, after dressing for the ring and apparently starting for it, he had slipped out a side entrance. The

promoter, however, probably expecting something of the kind, had quietly followed him, and after gaining the street had attempted to overtake this faint-hearted battler, but the battler evidently had other ideas of his own along that line, and after stepping out upon the street had immediately taken to his heels, closely followed by a rotund and perspiring promoter, who had visions of a fat house being turned away without their raw meat, and of heavy expenses incurred, with nothing on hand with which to meet them.

After a race of several blocks he succeeded in catching the flighty boxer, and after a short scuffle proceeded to carry him bodily back to the arena and deposit him in his corner with the reminder that he could either get in there and fight and get paid for it, or he could do his fighting on the outside for nothing.

NOW, here is where I enter this little story. After the usual delays of fitting the gloves and listening to the referee's instructions, the fight was on; and what I mean it was *on*. The bell rang, and I came sidling out of my corner to meet, not a lamb being led to the slaughter, but a regular he-tornado.

This ice-cream peddler—apparently half-scared to death—was determined to sell his life dearly, and proceeded to rain boxing gloves upon every part of my anatomy. Of course I was not expecting anything of the kind, and judging from my opponent's behavior up to now, was quite confident, in fact overconfident, and the badly scared lad continued to pump gloves into my face and midsection until I was bleeding and swelling every place I had been struck. All this time I had been futilely trying to ward off this fear-crazed battler, I was attempting to set myself so that I could put over a sleep-producer or at least shake him up enough to slow him up, but it was useless. Every time I clinched and stepped back to get momentum for my offense, my opponent started another rally that literally swept me off my feet and into the ropes, where I could do nothing but cover up and try to protect, as best I could, my battered face and protesting body.

THIS sort of thing continued for four rounds, with my opponent growing more ferocious and gaining more confidence all the time, with his repeated success in forcing me to "get on my bicycle," as it is known in ring parlance.

The bell rang for the beginning of the fifth round, and with an effort I heaved my tired and aching body off the stool and stumbled to the center of the ring, but no opponent met me. I gazed around dazedly, and through eyes almost swollen shut I saw my opponent still on his stool, eyes glassy and staring, mouth wide open, torso heaving like a pair of worn-out bellows. As if in a fog I heard the referee tolling off the fatal ten.

After it was all over, I was led, still wondering, back to my dressing-room.

There, after considerable recuperative measures had been used upon me, and I was able to sit up and inquire as to what had happened, my manager sarcastically informed me that my erstwhile opponent had simply fainted from exhaustion from beating me up, and had been unable to answer the bell.

I had taken a beating; my opponent was unmarked; and I had won by a knock-out without once having landed a solid blow!

A Personal Service for

PARENTS

DURING the past eight years, we have been privileged to develop the most complete private school and camp information service ever maintained by a magazine. We have visited over 800 private boarding schools of all kinds in every part of the country and 500 private camps for boys and girls in New England, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, the Middle West and the South.

The catalogues and confidential reports on these camps and schools are on file in our office. If you live at a distance, fill out the application for information or write us a detailed letter about the boy or girl and the kind of school or camp you wish. Please note all points given below. Your letter will have personal attention. You incur no obligation in making use of this service, either immediate or in the future. Address

The Director, Department of Education, The Red Book Magazine, Graybar Building, New York City

Please send me information and catalogues about boarding schools or camps

(Please Check) for Boy, aged.....years.

Girl, aged.....years

Grade in school.....Now.

attending.....
(*Name of School*)

.....School

Health.....

Religious affiliations.....

Location of school or camp desired (name states).....

.....

.....

Fee (Approximate fee for board and tuition for school year.)

$.....
(*School fees range from $600 to $1500 per year according to location and advantages; camp fees from $200 to $400.*)

Remarks:.....
(*Type of school or camp desired and special features.*)

.....

.....

Please send catalogues and information to

Name.....
(PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY)

.....

Address.....

.....

Would you turn down an added $5000 a year?

—*just because you're afraid to make the move that spells* SUCCESS?

OF course you'd take it—that $5,000 check! And if—then—your employer said to you, "All I ask in return is that you devote a few spare hours each week, at home, to training for the 'job ahead' "—why, you'd jump at the chance.

But—that's not the question—

The point is—have you the vision to start *right now* to get the training, knowing that the "raise" and the bigger job will almost inevitably follow?

Dryden rose from $150 a Month to $11,000 a Year

E. J. Dryden, of Laredo, Texas, grasped his opportunity. He was earning $150 a month when he started training with LaSalle.

After his first lesson in the Sales Section of Business Management, he tried out his newly acquired knowledge. In six weeks he made $750 in commissions, working after hours.

He has since followed thru with other courses, and for two years past his earnings have been better than $11,000 a year.

At 47 Whitney was Clerk—4 Years Later, Treasurer of Big Corporation

For more than twenty years lack of training had kept R. M. Whitney from climbing higher than a clerkship. He was 47 when he enrolled with LaSalle for home-study training in Higher Accountancy.

Within four years, however, he made up for twenty years of lost opportunity.

He completed his training with LaSalle in only five months. Almost immediately came the offer of a better job.

Less than three years later, the Davenport Machine Tool Company of Rochester, N. Y.—*the very company he had worked for as a clerk*—invited him to come back on his own terms. He returned as Auditor, at a salary-increase of better than 300 per cent. He has since been made Treasurer.

How You Can Win That Extra $5000 a Year

"Exceptional cases," you say—that of Dryden and Whitney—*But—don't you think an extra $5,000 a year looked just as impossible to them when they started, as it does right now, perhaps, to you?*

Of course it did!

These men, however, recognized their chance—they "stuck to their guns"—they got the training!

And just as sure as the sun will rise tomorrow, the same practical home-study training which lifted them to high positions will increase the salaries of thousands of men—men who are now learning of this opportunity for perhaps the very first time in their lives—

Will you be one of them?

Only you can decide—

But one thing is certain. Before you turn this page—before you swing your thought away from this pressing problem of your future—you should send to LaSalle and get the facts.

The coupon will bring you, without cost or obligation, two books—one a 64-page book outlining the opportunities in the field that most appeals to you and showing you exactly how to meet them—the other, "Ten Years' Promotion in One," the story of how one man, after many wanderings, found the path to responsibility and power.

As you value your future, fill in, clip and mail the coupon NOW!

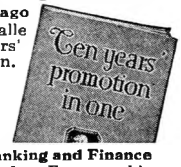
Find Yourself Through LaSalle!

LaSalle Extension University

The World's Largest Business Training Institution

Dept. 7369-R **Chicago**

I would welcome an outline of the LaSalle plan, together with a copy of "Ten Years' Promotion in One," all without obligation.



- ☐ Business Management
- ☐ Modern Salesmanship
- ☐ Higher Accountancy
- ☐ Traffic Management
- ☐ Railway Station Management
- ☐ Law: Degree of LL.B.
- ☐ Commercial Law
- ☐ Industrial Management
- ☐ Modern Business Correspondence
- ☐ Credit and Collection Correspondence
- ☐ Telegraphy
- ☐ Banking and Finance
- ☐ Modern Foremanship
- ☐ Personnel Management
- ☐ Expert Bookkeeping
- ☐ Business English
- ☐ Commercial Spanish
- ☐ Effective Speaking
- ☐ C. P. A. Coaching
- ☐ Stenotypy—Stenography

Name.....

Present Position.....

Address .....

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING DEPARTMENT

HELP WANTED

AGENTS—WE START YOU IN BUSINESS and help you succeed. No capital or experience needed. Spare or full time. You can easily earn $50-$100 weekly. Write Madison Industries, 564 Broadway, New York.

INSTRUCTION

MAIL CARRIERS—CLERKS—RAILWAY POSTAL CLERKS. $158.00 to $225.00 month. Steady jobs. Men, 18-45. Sample coaching free. Write immediately. Franklin Institute, Dept E25, Rochester, N. Y.

PATENT ATTORNEYS, ETC.

PATENTS—Trademarks—Write for our Guide Book, "How To Obtain a Patent" and Record of Invention Blank, sent Free. Send Model or sketch and description of your invention for our Inspection and Advice Free. Reasonable Terms. Highest References. Prompt service. Victor J. Evans & Co., 696 Ninth, Wash., D. C.

INVENTORS should write for our guide book, "How to Get Your Patent" and Evidence of Invention Blank. Send model or sketch and description of invention for Inspection and Instructions Free. Best terms. Randolph & Co., Dept. 177, Washington, D. C.

MISCELLANEOUS

TOBACCO HABIT Cured or No Pay. Any form, cigars, cigarettes, pipe, chewing or snuff. Guaranteed. Harmless. Used by over 600,000 people. Full treatment sent on trial. Costs $1.50 if it cures. Nothing if it fails. Superba Co., N1, Baltimore, Md.

BOOKS, MAGAZINES, Art Publications in French, English, Spanish. Photo art novelties, samples, lists, 20 cents in postage. VILLAVERDE CO., Dept. 208, Box 1329, Havana, Cuba.

Next Month in The Blue Book Magazine

Photo by D. C. Ingram, Courtesy U. S. Forest Service

Fires, such as this Forest Service man is locating, are only one of the enemies they have to fight—as is well evidenced in that captivating action-filled novel by Arthur H. Carhart—"THE FOREST LEGION."

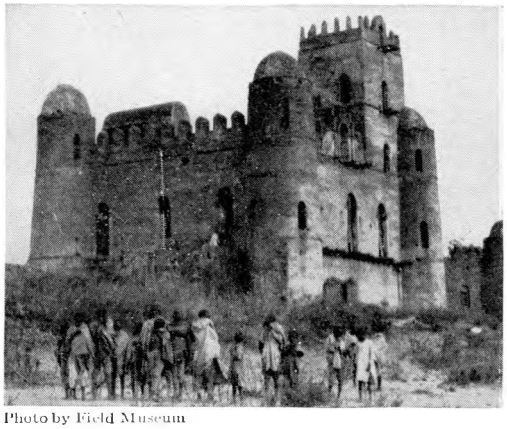


Photo by Field Museum

At the left is a rare photograph of the ancient castle, built centuries ago by the Portuguese in remote Abyssinia, where transpire the final battle and other dramatic events of James Edwin Baum's unique novel "SPEARS IN THE SUN."

At the right is a glimpse of the Chinese river life which forms the background of "THE KANG-HE POISON JAR," that lively story of an American's tremendous adventure so well narrated by Lemuel De Bra.

These and many other fascinating stories of adventure in interesting and picturesque places—stories like H. Bedford-Jones' tale of mystery on a Malay island, Clarence Herbert New's "Free Lances in Diplomacy," Warren H. Miller's Saharan drama "The Hell's Angels Squad"—will make our next, the August, issue especially worth while.

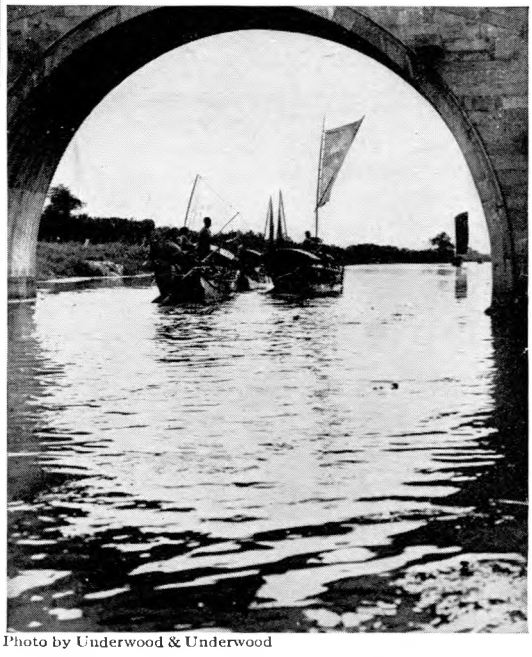


Photo by Underwood & Underwood

William T. Tilden 2nd

to protect his throat,
smokes Luckies

"The voice is essential to stage work and its care one of the actor's greatest worries. During the course of some of my stage appearances, I am called upon at intervals to smoke a cigarette and naturally I have to be careful about my choice. I smoke Lucky Strikes and have yet to feel the slightest effect upon my throat. I understand that toasting frees this cigarette from any throat irritants. They're 100% with me."

William T. Tilden 2nd

"It's toasted"

No Throat Irritation No Cough.

The Cream of the Tobacco Crop.