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MAGAZINE

JULY, 1929

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Bertram Atkey

The nimble wit that created those favorite BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE characters, the Easy Street Experts, has found a delightful opportunity in revising the records about one of the world's greatest heroes. Don't miss the first of this joyous series—on page 122 of this issue—

"HERCULES IN HELL"

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THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE
Vol. 49 JULY, 1929 No. 3

To Understand the World

"ONE of the characteristics of the world we live in," observes Walter Lippmann, "is that we are forever trying to explain it. We feel that if we understood it better, we should know better how to live in it, and should cease to be aliens who do not know the landmarks of a strange country."

To explain it—to give us understanding of the world we live in: that is the big thing that fiction does for us; and here lies one reason for the tremendous fascination a good story holds over us. For a mere newspaper report of a strange or exciting series of events does not enable us to understand them; it no more than states the facts or poses a problem. And even our own personal observation often gives us no more. An ably written story, however, offers its readers not only a description of interesting events, but it also provides for us some interpretation of them. And we who enjoy the fiction which interprets the so-various life of this vast world are thereby indeed enabled to understand it better, and know better how to live in it.

From this point of view it is of special interest to read the stories which follow in the pages of this magazine. For even the least serious or most highly fanciful of them does in some measure explain our world for us. Indeed perhaps Edgar Rice Burroughs' "Tanar of Pellucidar," which abandons this world for one of his own imagining, most of all illuminates and interprets our life through the force of its brilliant contrasts.

Consider also Harold Wire's fine novel of the modern West "Mountain Men:" here you have not only a vivid outdoor story but also its author's explanation of his people's motives and passions, his appraisal of the lives they lead and the land they dwell in. And Clarence Herbert New's powerful drama of present-day Italy, in this month's story of the Free Lances in Diplomacy: here we have first a lively story; second, and perhaps more important, we have an engrossing discussion of the extraordinary political situation in Italy and a valuable explanation of its effects upon the rest of the world.

Similarly in Warren Hastings Miller's stirring tale of the Foreign Legion "Discreet Rescue;" in Arthur Hunt Chute's rollicking tale of fishermen ashore "The Party at Bay of Bulls;" in Jonathan Brooks' attractive race-track story "The Winner's Circle;" in Meigs Frost's splendid mystery tale "The Old Police Combination;" in Captain Dingle's thoughtful tale of the sea "The Anchor;" in Robert Mill's spirited exploit of the New York State police "The Gilman Case;" in Bertram Atkey's fanciful modernization of an old Greek fable "Hercules in Hell:" in each you are given a story well worth while for its own sake and are further offered a reflective and observant man's interpretation of the world and its folk.

—*The Editors.*

Drawn by W. O. Kling

SONGS OF SEA AND TRAIL

I—"Git Along, Little Dogies!"

As I walked out one morning for pleasure,
I saw a cow-puncher all riding alone;
His hat was throwed back and his spurs was a-jingling,
As he rode by me a-singin' this song:

"Whoopee ti yi yo, git along, little dogies!
It's your misfortune, and none of my own.
Whoopee ti yi yo, git along, little dogies,
For the State of Montana shall be your new home.

"Early in springtime we round up the dogies,
Mark them and brand them and bob off their tails;
Round up our horses, load up the chuck-wagon,
Then throw the dogies upon the trail.

"When the night comes on and we hold them on the bedground,
These little dogies that roll on so slow—
Roll up the herd and cut out the strays,
And roll the little dogies that never rolled before.

"Your mother, she was raised way down in Texas,
Where the jimson weed and the sand-burrs grow;
You we'll fill with prickly pear and cholla
Till you are ready for the trail through Idaho.

"Oh, you'll be soup for Uncle Sam's Injuns;
'It's beef, heap beef,' I hear them cry.
Git along, git along, git along, little dogies—
You're going to be beef steers by and by."

MOUNTAIN MEN

A captivating novel of the 1929 West—the story of a Forest Ranger's great adventure in the high Sierras, by the able author of "Rock of Ages."

By HAROLD CHANNING WIRE

Illustrated by W. O. Kling

DUSK came softly over the High Sierras. Tom Cook—"Dad" Cook to all comers, and district ranger of the Inyo Forest—sat with boot-heels on the edge of his desk and watched the play of light beyond his station door. A picture was framed there—Mount Whitney, bold, forbidding, flinging its black pinnacle upward against a red fan of sunset.

It was the first of June, and although from this same office chair Dad Cook had witnessed some fifteen other first-of-June evenings, the scene held him as spellbound as if his gaze had just now struck upon the mighty peak.

Fifteen years ago the Sierra Nevadas had flung down their challenge to him, when from the Mojave Desert he had faced the sheer eastern slope and felt a grim defiance in the granite wall. Up that wall he had blasted trails, and then had spun a web of telephone wire for two hundred miles along the interlocking ranges of the roof. He had fought fires and conquered them—yet he had not conquered the Sierra Nevadas. They rose above him tonight, challenging still, forever mysterious.

Whitney melted slowly into the darkening sky. He continued to stare at it, while his thoughts from long habit took up things brought about by the first of June. This month marked the beginning of the field season. Headquarters must be moved from the winter station here in the valley town of Lone Tree and established some thirty miles up the pack-trail. Soon he would sign on his summer rangers and scatter them over the area. There would be fires to fight and cattle-range troubles to settle; and this year there would be something more.

Cook surveyed his boot-toes and scowled. "I'm sure going to miss Jimmy Cotter!" A tension surged through his whole body. It was seven months now since Jim Cotter had vanished, murdered somewhere up on top.

When his eyes lifted and turned again to the door, a man was standing there, towering black in the dusk. He almost filled the opening, with close bronze hair beneath a limp Panama, a little stooped from the weight of a hand-bag he carried.

He spoke at once. "Good evening, Ranger."

The strong, full-toned voice sounded familiar. Cook stood up; himself a big man, angular, erect, firmly planted on his two feet, with only gray hair showing age. Suddenly he exclaimed: "Well, if it isn't you! Just a minute now—I'll remember your name."

HE looked into a young face, less than thirty, white, too soft, though brown eyes with a quiet reserve made up for that.

"Breck!" he remembered. "That's it. Gordon Breck. Well, son, how's the movie business in Hollywood; or was it ponies you were backing, down at Tia Juana?"

"A little of both," Breck admitted. "But I'm through."

"You?" Cook questioned. "Through with the game? Why, I thought the last time you were up here—"

Gordon Breck had put down his hand-bag and his hat, and now approached with a level serious gaze. "Go ahead and say it," he urged. "The last time I was here to see Cotter, I came like a damned young sport, all smoked up over spending a lot of money and the big things I was doing down below. I called Cotter a fool for

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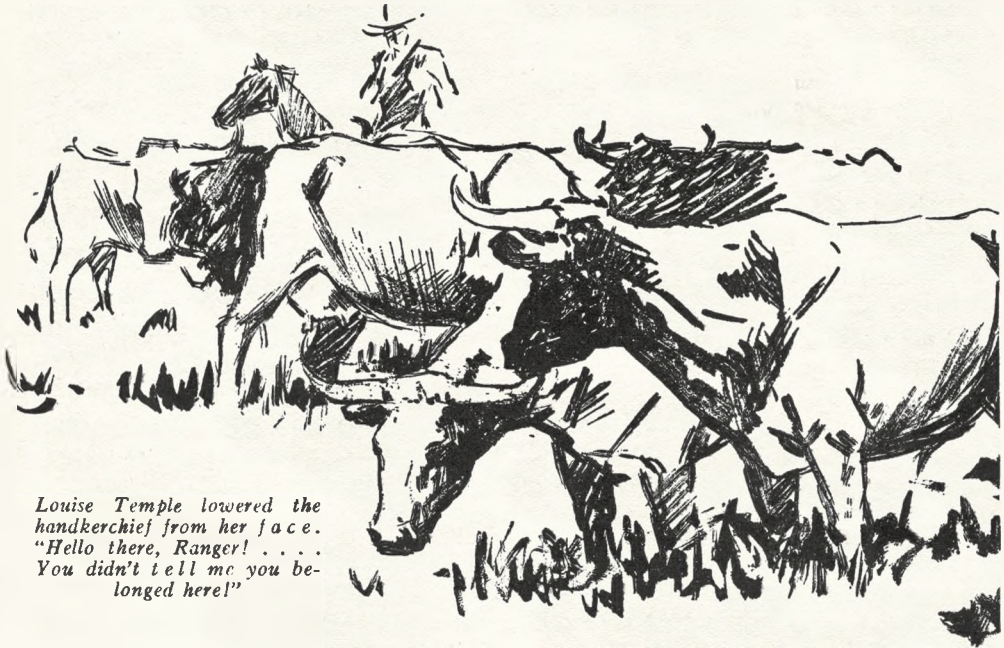
wasting time in the Forest Service. I couldn't see any use in it. Maybe I can't now. No matter. That isn't the point."

Cook resumed his chair, produced a pipe and began to fill it. "Of course you know about Cotter, being his friend."



Louise Temple lowered the handkerchief from her face. "Hello there, Ranger! . . . . You didn't tell me you belonged here!"

"More than a friend," said Breck, controlled now. He dropped into a seat across the table from the ranger. "I owe him something. That's why I'm here."

Lifting his pipe to a lighted match, Cook glanced over the bowl and into the young man's eyes. Something was in them that had not been there before. They were darkened; behind that darkness lay fire.

"Well, then," Cook asked presently, "just why are you here?"

Breck shot a glance backward to the open door and waved one hand in the direction of Whitney. Only the tip of the peak showed now, rising across the black valley bottom to catch the last faint gold of evening.

"I want a job," he said, "up there. I want Jim Cotter's place, if you haven't put anyone in it yet."

Cook surveyed him, puzzled and scowling. "You aren't a mountain man."

"I wasn't raised here, if that's what you mean," Breck answered. "But neither was Cotter. I can ride a horse and pack a mule—at least I could once. I'm handy with a gun if necessary. Don't those things about make me a mountain man?"

Cook wagged a solemn gray head. "No —you'd need something more. Look at me. I can go down to your city and jam myself in a flat and eat off a white tablecloth, but I'd hate it and wouldn't get along with folks there. Just so, a man has got to have his heart in these mountains or they'll get him. He's got to love 'em and fight 'em and all the time understand that he wouldn't be happy anywhere else."

The old ranger hesitated, a slow smile lighting his eyes. "Think I'm a simple fool, don't you?"

"Not quite," Breck laughed. "I don't have your feeling, that's all. Mountains are just rocks, to me. Anyhow, as far as the job goes, I can learn and learn fast."

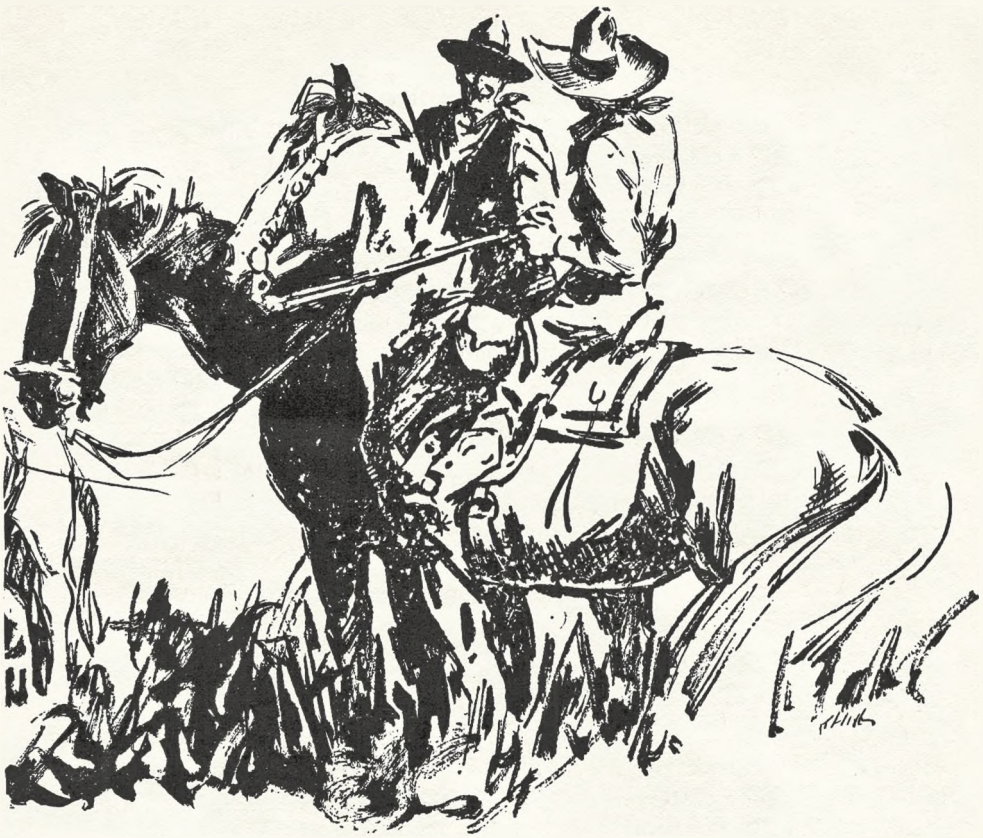
"I believe it," Cook asserted. "College man, aren't you? Traveled—family with money. What I don't see is why in hell you want the job at all. It's short pay, hard work and likely to be dangerous."

"You've just named my reasons," Breck returned. "Short pay, but something I earn myself. Hard work—God knows I need it. Dangerous, the same danger Cotter faced. There's the truth of my coming here!"

"What do you mean, son?" Cook asked.

"Cotter and I were pretty close friends in college," Breck answered. "And in the war he—did a big thing for me. I owe him something. I'm looking for the man who killed him."

Cook's gray brows lifted. "Know the man, do you?"



"If I did, I wouldn't take this way to get on his trail. He's one of a certain gang. I do know that."

"How?"

BRECK drew a letter from his coat pocket, folded it at one paragraph and stood up to switch on a light. "This is the last word I had from Cotter, seven months ago. I'll read a part.

" 'There's something brewing up here, Gordon. I mean that two ways. A white-mule outfit is making straight poison for all the country; but that's out of my department, and I haven't gone to much trouble over it. I did make one arrest. The fellow was freed and back here in less than a week. All I got out of the deal was an enemy. So I'll let prohibition take care of itself. But when a gang of men find they can get away with one law, they throw down all of them. Things have been happening—too much to tell you in a letter. Anyway, I am not certain until I work it up a little more. I'm going out tomorrow on a live hunch and hope to know the facts by night!' "

Breck folded the paper and returned it to his pocket. "Cotter was killed that day," he said quietly, "as near as I can figure it. His hunch was good, and he found out too much."

Dad Cook sat with head bowed, the pipe-stem clenched between his teeth. Silence descended for a time upon the bare board room. Breck remained standing.

"I didn't come as soon as I heard about it," he said at last, "because the season was ended and you were leaving the mountains. Now you're sending summer rangers back up there. Am I going?"

Cook leaned heavily into his seat. "Cotter didn't tell me as much as he put in that letter. Some of us could have helped."

"Jim liked to play a lone hand," said Breck.

"Yes. And he acted a lot on impulse." Cook's gaze narrowed. "If I read you right, you're some quick yourself."

"Perhaps."

"Well, that's all to a man's advantage at times, but in this business he's got to think a long ways ahead. Cotter was a good ranger, and I didn't intend to waste another one up there until I had found out for myself who killed him."

"You might as well put me on the job," Breck insisted.

"Just how do you expect to handle it?"

"I hadn't thought, exactly. You're the only man who knows I am Cotter's friend —or of the bond between us. Some one would take his place, naturally. I'll learn the job and work at it right along his tracks. This other can be my own personal affair, if you like. Cook, I've got to get busy! I'm pretty much at loose ends over several things."

Cook watched him with concern. "Is it drink, son? You don't—"

"No, not that. It's, well—oh, the devil! I've just fallen out of love."

"And that," the ranger agreed solemnly, "is more of a shock than falling in."

Breck grinned. "Shock, nothing! This was just a fade-out. Anyway, I want to work. Will you sign me on tonight?"

"Not so fast," said Cook. "You'll find this man-hunt is no personal affair to be settled on the side. It may mean getting one, or half a dozen, or rounding up the whole range. Did Cotter ever write about the Tillson brothers?"

"No, unless they were the ones he meant in this last note."

Cook nodded. "They're tough. And when you say tough in this country, it carries weight. Now, we don't go much out of our way to catch a moonshiner in these mountains, because the court usually shoots him right back on us, like Cotter said. Makes a powerless fool out of the ranger. The Tillsons know that and play on it. There are three of them, grazing cattle in the summer on Sulphur Creek, while their real business is making rat-poison by the carload.

"I don't give a damn about that. Where we tangle is over forest fires. If they want to make private use of the North Trail, for example, they start a fire down south and get every man jack of us fighting it. If it isn't big enough, they make it bigger. And if it shows signs of going out too soon, they'll start it up again."

"Good Lord, Ranger!" Breck broke in. "If you know all that, why are they still in the mountains?"

"You know a thing first," Cook observed sagely; "then you prove it."

BRECK nodded agreement, though an impatience was growing within him.

"The job is no week-end party," Cook went on. "If you sign on, it's for the summer—under orders. The Tillson outfit is at the bottom of our trouble, but there are plenty others. You'll learn the rest if you go up."

"Then it's settled?" Breck asked.

"What's settled?" Cook left his chair and strode heatedly to the door and back again. "You mean settled that you're going? Hell, yes! No one else would take the damn' station!"

Breck sprang up to face him. "Then swear me in! That's what I've been waiting to hear."

From a desk drawer the ranger secured a small bronze badge decorated with a solitary pine tree and the letters "U. S." He pinned it on Breck's shirt over his heart. Then he held out one hand.

"Shake, son. This is the way I swear 'em in. I never go wrong, either."

Breck received the firm hard grasp, returned it, and for an instant stood with his eyes locked by the blue ones of the old ranger.

"Now then," said Cook, "I'm busy. You'll bunk in the spare room here tonight. Tomorrow we'll drive to the foot of North Trail at Carrol Creek and pack for an early start next day." He stepped back, surveying Breck's tailored figure. "Have you anything to wear?"

"I'll buy an outfit here."

"All right. Rig yourself up with mountain clothes and at least a month's grub supply. Sorry I can't scout around town with you. I'll say just one thing. Don't let that piece of bronze make you feel too important. On the other hand, don't let it slow you up when the time is proper."

CHAPTER II

THERE is still a spirit of the old untamed West about Lone Tree that even electric lights and gasoline filling-stations cannot banish. The town itself is but a green patch set in a desert valley below the Sierra Nevada wall. The mountains dominate it with the cold ferocity of tiger-teeth bared against the western sky.

Yet it is not a mountain town alone. The desert, the mines, the cattle ranches pour their men upon its streets; and life, any time after dusk, is lived with frontier vigor.

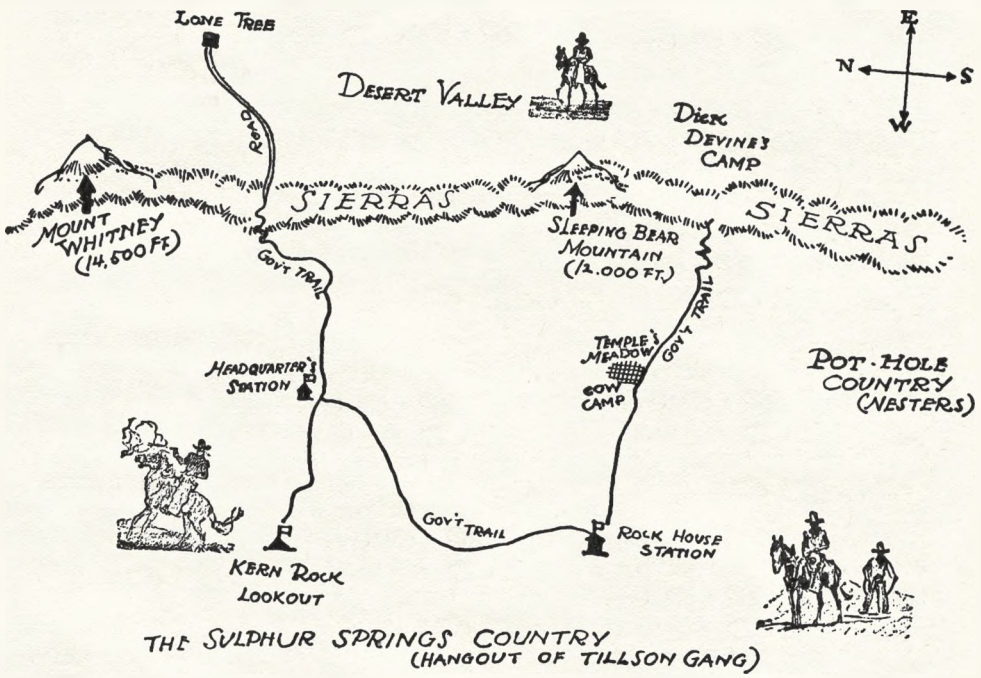
By the time Breck left ranger headquarters and started to gather an outfit, full dark had come. The town had changed miraculously. Cowboys clumped along the walk and gathered in groups at street-

corners. Others were riding in, two by two, spurs jingling, boots polished, all sporting colored silk handkerchiefs knotted at their throats. Among the mounted ones were several girls who rode like men and talked the same language. It seemed to be the cow-country's night.

In the general store where Breck ordered his supplies, he questioned the man who waited on him. "Is Lone Tree usually as live as this?"

ened. What the devil did the fellow mean? He turned angrily from the grocery counter and found himself scowling into a long mirror of the men's furnishing department. What he saw gave him a queer shock.

Among the racks of coarse, serviceable clothing his tailored figure was ludicrous in contrast. His low shoes were like paper against the cowhide boots on the shelves. Then he looked at his face, white and soft beneath the brim of a tan felt hat. He



"Yep, first of June," was the cryptic answer.

"What has June to do with it?"

The storekeeper paused from weighing rice on his scales and turned slowly. He had a pinched, unpleasant face, and tilted his head down to scowl over the edge of steel-rimmed glasses. "New here?" he asked.

"New in Lone Tree, yes."

"One of Tom Cook's men?" A wave of one hand indicated the Forest Service badge.

"You're right," Breck replied brusquely, nettled by this cross-examination.

"Well," said the man, squinting at his scales, "I guess Cook knows his business."

Breck waited for more. That was all. His cheeks felt flushed and his jaw tightdisliked his own reflection and walked back to the grocer feeling more friendly. "I see what you mean," he said.

But that friendliness was not returned by the other. It was some time before he asked: "Taking Cotter's place?"

"Yes. Did you know him?"

The man nodded. "Too bad he went like that. But accidents do happen up there."

"Accidents!" —Then Breck cursed his ready tongue. By some indefinable change of expression he knew the storekeeper had baited him, and he had given himself away. It was a lesson to remember: keep what you know to yourself.

Finished with ordering his supplies, he left the store, and found, when outside, the street had become even more crowded. He

hadn't yet learned what it was all about. Back at headquarters he asked Cook: "Is this circus night?"

"The town sure is full," the ranger agreed. "It's always like this the first two weeks of June. Cattle season, you know. They're rounding up the stuff that has wintered on the desert and will shove 'em over the top when we open Government grazing on the fifteenth. That will be about your first worry."

"Trouble in it?"

"Considerable, some years. A man is permitted only a certain number of animals, but if the winter has been dry, he'll crowd his permit in order to get everything he owns up in the high grass country. I've been pretty slack with them so far. This year is different. If we want to enforce one rule on the range, we'll have to enforce the whole lot."

Cook's slow smile considered Breck. "Yes, son, there'll be trouble in it. You will have to take count and settle disputes; and whichever way you decide, you'll be in bad with some one."

Breck gathered his bundles of work-clothes and started to the bunk-room, but stopped at the door. "If it's all right with you, I'm going to give my badge a rest tonight."

"Why?"

"Because I'm new here, and it looks bad for a ranger to be green about the country he's to work in. I'll probably ask some foolish questions and somebody will give me a smart answer. I don't want to stop and think what a Service man should do."

Cook chuckled. "Some one been playing horse with you?"

"A little," Breck admitted and dropped his badge on the ranger's desk.

"Fair enough," said Cook. "Leave it. Say, if you want to mix with the crowd and maybe get acquainted with men you'll see later, why don't you go to the cowboys' dance? It's in the old movie palace west of town. They'll be well liquored up by ten o'clock and at their best about midnight."

"Will the Tillsons be there?"

"Sure enough. They run these shindigs as part of their business. Costs a man five bucks to get in. Liquor free. There'll be Jud, Hep and Art—Jud being the oldest and the tallest, though they all run close to six feet. Hep and Art are mostly shadows for their brother. Jud's the he-wolf of that pack."

Cook paused, glancing at his watch. "It's sort of late to find a ticket. Usually you have to be known. But they haven't been troubled for a long time, so you may get by. Worth trying, anyhow."

WHEN Breck had changed into khaki and was again on the street, he became conscious of a new ease in both mind and body.

"Clothes make the man," he reflected, and added to that: "Inside and out!"

Though his boots were new and stiff, they clumped along the board walk in the way that others clumped about him. They slowed his pace and put a roll in his gait. All around were men in the same rough dress. He no longer felt a stranger in the mob; he was a part of it.

The feeling exhilarated him. He looked into hard brown faces as he passed, forgetting that his own whiteness was still unchanged, and nodded an occasional greeting as eyes met his. Men nodded back.

His plan was to wait until the dance had started, when he could enter the hall without drawing too much attention. There was still that matter of the ticket.

For an hour he walked through the streets, then turned toward a growth of cottonwoods at the western edge. Paths of light fell from the windows of a barn-like building far back in their midst. A high board fence encircled the place, broken only by a single gate. Two men stood there.

Breck halted, watching as half a dozen riders swept up, tied their mounts to a rack, then pushed on through the entrance. As they passed, each handed something to the men. From the hall music burst suddenly. The dance was on. He waited a minute longer, his eyes upon the two gate-keepers. They were short, stocky. The Tillsons were probably inside. Boldly, then, he stepped up and extended a five-dollar bill.

"What's this for?" one of the men demanded. He made no move to take the money.

"A ticket," Breck said easily, tossing the bill at him. "I got in late. Where's Jud? It's all right."

"Friend of Jud's, are you?"

"Sure thing. Come on—what's the idea?" Breck pushed at the gate impatiently.

Still one man blocked the way and stood

"What's this for?" one of the men demanded. He made no move to take the money. "A ticket," said Breck. "I got in late. . . . . It's all right!"

with his head turned a little to one side. Then with sudden decision he nodded. "Go in, brother." And Breck moved on, following a path toward the hall.

From the shadows behind him a third man stepped out and joined the two. He was tall, slender, thin-faced.

"Who's your friend, Jud?" the gate-keeper asked.

"I'm just goin' in to see."

CHAPTER III

BRECK felt a rise of excitement as he pushed through a door and became at once a part of the crowd within the old building. The room was long and wide, with raftered ceiling. A stage that filled one end showed its original use as the town theater.

Some dust-covered scenery still stood there, and the curtain, only half rolled up, displayed a faded picture of the Venice Grand Canal, though recently the Italian gondolier had been given a cowboy's hat of the same green paint that had been put on the inside walls, and one of the red-and-white mooring poles bore the sign: *"Hair-cut—Two bits."*

Breck walked away from the door and stood against the wall, watching. He had come with certain preconceived ideas as to what he would find at a cowboy dance, his knowledge having been gained from moving-picture sets. He was surprised now.

The music was good. The orchestra of half a dozen young men with sleek hair and black suits sat upon one end of the stage—an imported group, giving Lone Tree the same dance numbers that were being featured in the night-clubs of Los Angeles. Cowboys on the floor were in their evening dress of blue overalls, spurs, and five-gallon hats, but they danced the Charleston and the Black Bottom, and balancing in small-toed, high-heeled boots, glided through a waltz with almost feminine grace.

Pretty girls were plentiful. Breck had not intended to dance. Now he was not so sure of it. Bright-colored dresses flashed in the crowd, very short and very thin, for summer was coming on and already this June night held the desert warmth. Brown faces slipped past him, cheeks flushed, eyes bright, red mouths turned laughingly up to their partners!

One girl in particular attracted him, and as she danced by in her cowboy's arms, his eyes followed. She was small,—her dark curly head just above the fellow's shoulder, —and as deeply tanned as any of the men about her. Evidently she was accustomed to wearing a man's shirt, for the rounded neck of the dress she wore now showed a narrow, sun-burned V over the whiteness of her throat. Not exactly beautiful, Breck decided, as in dancing, she turned again toward him. Her face in repose looked a little tired, though when she smiled at something her partner whispered, the look vanished in a swift parting of her lips and an upward tilt of her head. At that moment, Breck's decision not to dance left him, and he only waited until he could approach this girl.

He remained leaning against the wall with the stream of people flowing by. There was a punch-bowl on a stand at the end of the room opposite the stage. Here the girls stopped often, but he noticed that the men shunned it, and went alone through a small doorway. The room was soon heavy with dust and cigarette-smoke and the thick

odor of whisky—not good whisky either. Breck moved on.

From the clamor of voices an occasional distinct sentence drifted across to him. "Hi there, cowboy! What you-all doin'?" The answer was lost, but men burst into laughter, and girls looked away. Came snatches of business. "Dry summer, you bet. . . . . Two thousand head. . . . . Permit." And then a hail that brought Breck up with a start: "Hello, Jud Tillson!"

He turned toward the sound of the greeting. The speaker had danced on, but three men stood between himself and the door, their eyes leveled in his direction. They were tall men, lean-bodied, all bearing the same characteristic of thin, sharp faces. Dad Cook said he would not recognize the Tillson brothers. That was true. He would never have picked these three from the many that crowded the dance-hall; for several others, talking loudly and swaggering with guns hung from their belts, made a better show of being hard.

Two shifted their eyes when he turned to survey them. But one held his gaze, stood motionless for a second, then strode casually across the intervening space. In that short time Breck gained a new conception of the man.

His step was slow, deliberate, like the calculated tread of a tawny mountain lion. He came within a pace and halted. Breck returned his gaze, looking into steel-blue eyes that narrowed slightly, opened, narrowed again. There was never an instant when they seemed fully closed. His face was set in a changeless mask, the lines of it finely chiseled about a sharp nose, angular chin and broad, high forehead. Instinctively Breck knew he was up against a man of no mean intelligence, a man who understood the world and especially the path he intended to cut through it.

HE spoke, and the somber expression of his face shifted only in a further narrowing of his eyes. "I'm Jud Tillson," he said.

"Glad to know you," Breck answered, though his right hand remained at his side.

"Thought you did know me!" Tillson snapped.

So Breck had told the gatekeeper. He frowned and surveyed the man thoughtfully. "I did know a Tillson," he said at last. "But you're not the one. My mistake."

A moment of silence came between them. Breck held the steel-gray eyes forcibly. Jud Tillson was trying to stare him down. They stood with dancers brushing their elbows, air growing heavier with the fumes of raw liquor, quarrelsome voices rising where there had been laughter before.

"What are you doing here?" Tillson demanded.

"It's a dance, isn't it?"

"You didn't bring a woman!"

AS he searched for a reply, Breck was conscious of the small, dark-haired girl moving slowly past him, and of her eyes intent his way. "Is it against the rules to come alone?" he questioned.

Tillson hooked his thumbs into his belt. His voice came slow and much too even. "Are you sure you aren't making more than one mistake tonight? Isn't it maybe a mistake for you to be in here at all?"

"No," Breck assured him, "not the slightest."

He said no more. Tillson turned on his heel and walked away. He was still aware that from the dancing throng two dark eyes sought his face. He met them. The music ended, then at once began a new number. Impulsively he stepped out to the girl.

"May I have this?" he asked, adding with all the urgency of pent-up feeling, "Don't say it's taken!"

"It is taken," she smiled. "But you may have it."

A tall figure moved toward them from some distance down the room. The girl clutched his arm. "Quick!" The next moment they were lost in the crowd.

Neither one spoke while they danced halfway around the room. Breck studied the soft little head. Why had she left that fellow? He wanted to ask, but waited, feeling he would learn in time.

Presently, in the slow movement of a waltz, she looked up, smiling quizzically. "Well, are the rubes as funny as you thought they'd be? I hope we haven't disappointed you!"

Little shadows of amusement flitted around the corners of her mouth. Her eyes were bright with laughter, yet there was something else in them, that perhaps had drawn him to her from the first. She did not look happy.

"Rubes?" he puzzled. "What do you mean? And why should I be disappointed?"

"Didn't you expect a cowboy dance to be screamingly crude? Of course this is your first."

"How do you know it is?"

"Because you have no hat. Did you hang it some place?"

Breck glanced about. It was true. He was the only one uncovered.

"Too bad," she sympathized, "because now you wont ever find it again—that is, if this dance breaks up the way they usually do; and I expect it will."

Conscious of an increasing wrangle of voices, Breck understood.

"Well, all right," he admitted. "This is my first cowboy dance, and I came out of curiosity."

The girl looked up. Her eyes were not brown as they had seemed from a distance. They held a warm tinge, almost gold.

"At least you're honest about it," she said. "And really, I was curious about you too. Are we as good a show as you hoped? Goodness, wont you have a story to tell when you get back!"

"I'm not going back," Breck denied firmly. "As for the dance, it is about what I expected, except for one thing."

"What?"

The tightening of his arm was not altogether voluntary; the girl had taunted him, and he knew it. But though his arm drew her to him only the slightest bit, the result was volcanic.

She halted in the middle of a dance step, flung down his hand and faced him with flashing eyes. "Don't you try that on me, you city man!"

Until that instant Breck would not have said anyone on the floor was paying attention to himself and the girl. Now all at once he was confronted by a dozen sullen faces. The music went on; dancing in other parts of the room continued. But in this corner where they stood, men left their girls and crowded up in a close ring.

"What is it, Louy?" some one asked.

The girl laughed, surprised at the crowd herself, Breck thought.

"Something wrong?" Another man edged through the mob and thrust out a flushed face.

"Yes, you are!" she answered, giving him a little shove. "Why spoil a good dance?"

With her eyes sweeping the line of men, she put her hand back on Breck's arm. They danced unconcernedly over the cleared floor, but Breck could feel her rapid breathing. His own pulse quickened at the memory of a dozen hard, whisky-reddened faces crowding upon him.

The group broke up as quickly as it had formed. Men returned to their partners and swung on with the music, though one of the lot followed. When the music ended Breck felt a heavy grip on his arm. He turned to confront Art Tillson.

It was a handsome, arrogant face he stared into—not much more than a boy's. It had the sharp-featured Tillson strength, save for the somber look in his eyes. Even this moment's rage did not hide that.

"Is this fellow botherin' you, Louise?" he asked. "If he is—"

"Art!" she broke in. "You're a little bit drunk. Go outside for a while."

He looked at her sullenly. "Throwin' me down?"

"No, of course not!"

"You cut my dance." Tillson swayed unsteadily, clutched her arm. "Come on—this is mine."

Breck saw her move in an attempt to hold back. Instantly he stepped between them, forcing young Tillson away with his elbow. The boy whirled, his face livid with knots over his jaw. He stood with eyes narrowed in the way Breck had already seen Jud narrow his.

"Buttin' in, are you! Want to fight about it?"

BRECK felt all eyes upon him. The music had stopped. Everyone was waiting. His mind worked swiftly.

"Well," he heard Tillson sneer, "are you crawlin' off?"

"Not a bit."

"Come outside, then!"

"Why outside? What's the matter right here?" Breck demanded.

Outside, in the dark with few to see, was not what he wanted. He glanced at the stage, then beckoned to a grinning cowboy in the crowd. "Get up there and clear a ring! You're going to have a show!"

The puncher yelled and others joined him. They leaped across the footlights and booted the orchestra from their chairs. A squared circle was made in the wreckage of old scenery. They tried to roll the curtain, but halfway up, it stuck.

"All right," Breck cried, springing ahead of young Tillson. "This act's ours!"

From the stage he looked back to where the girl had been standing, but she was not in the crowd that surged toward the room's end.

He did not see her until in a swift glance down before he faced Tillson, his eye caught sight of her near the door. Jud Tillson was there too, facing her and talking angrily. She seemed to be leaving the place, but Tillson turned her back and walked toward the opposite side. Breck read a threat in the man's attitude, and in that moment would have rather been down there confronting him than the one on the stage.

It was not for him to choose. Art sprang with the rush of a crazed cat.

Half a dozen cowboys had appointed themselves seconds on each side; one stepped into the square to referee. None was too steady on his feet. Tillson's first plunge at Breck knocked the referee into the scenery, and no other volunteered.

Breck had counted on his knowledge of boxing. He found out instantly that this was a fight. Tillson came with head lowered, right arm driving with killing force, and followed up with a left equally powerful. When Breck struck it was as if his fists had crashed into iron. He saw a brown malletlike thing rising again, and partly turned the blow from his jaw, yet faces spun about him dizzily. A roar filled the room.

Stepping back, he gained his balance, judged his position better and closed in before Tillson had recovered for a fresh attack. He jabbed as their bodies locked, heard a grunted oath, took a terrific thrust against his own side.

Two arms tightened about him, crushing his ribs. Tillson's head under his chin rose to snap his neck back until breathing stopped. He tried to struggle out, found himself powerless, and then the truth of this fight came in a mad surge of strength. It was the other's intent to kill.

WITH that all semblance of what the city was pleased to call civilization slipped from him. He had no sight, no feeling, no thought save one—with blood on his face, snarling through thickened lips, body torn naked to the belt, he fought with the rage of his primitive ancestors, and for the same reason—to preserve his life.

With Tillson's arms locked about him he let himself drop backward, turned as Tillson relaxed in falling, and was free as they struck the floor. Instantly, then, he sprang up, took the advantage and struck the other down the moment he rose. The roar that had filled the room died suddenly. The strangeness of the silence made him conscious of things outside his battle. He heard a warning voice snap: "You, Jud, stay out of it!" There was a retort and immediate shifting of men. They seemed to be taking sides, some back of Art Tillson, others behind himself. What happened then passed actually over his head.

He had crouched to meet a blow. At once the space that had been a ring was a crush of men, drunken curses, the spat of fists upon flesh. In a wave he was borne on, knocked down, cast over to the edge. Before he could move the house was plunged into darkness. Some one had pulled the light-switch. The tumult that broke out then shook the windows and seemed to be bringing down the very roof.

At one end of the stage a match flared, and in its light Breck saw a grinning face. The man's voice was lost in the din, but his mouth framed a bellowed word: "Fire!" Laughing crazily, he dropped the match into a pile of boards and canvas and danced about as the flames shot up.

Whirling to the floor below Breck saw the mob surge to reach the exit. One girl stood over at the side, alone, motionless against the wall. In springing toward her he jerked the ropes that held the stage curtain. It crashed, and the house was again black.

His hands found the girl as he stumbled along the wall. "Quick!" he ordered. "This way!"

When she did not move he picked her up bodily, thrust her feet-foremost through an open window and let her down outside. He followed, saying again: "Quick!"

The high board fence was not far off; he lunged against one plank, crashed through, managing somehow to drag the girl with him, and reached the thicket of cottonwoods.

Suddenly she halted. "You might tell me what it's all about. And please stop holding me so tight. You hurt."

Breck had been unaware that he was embracing her. He removed his arm.

The girl gasped. "I've seen cave-man tactics before, but that's the first time I've been dragged through a fence by the hair of my head!" She gave a breathless laugh. "What was it—a rescue?"

Breck stared. Looking back, there were no flames from the building. Some one must have thought to stamp out the fire. He could hear motorcars being started, and through the trees voices sounded in casual: "So long—see you later." He felt foolish.

"I thought Jud Tillson—" he began.

She cut him off with a laugh. "So that was it. Louise Temple—rescued—*having* to be rescued! And from the Tillsons!"

Breck met her laughter with a cold gaze. Presently she leaned toward him, softly smiling. "Of course I'm grateful—even if it wasn't necessary. It only seemed so funny for a minute. Good night."

He offered his arm formally. "I'll see you home, if you wish."

The boy whirled, his face livid. "Buttin' in, are you! Want to fight? Come outside, then!" "Why outside?" Breck demanded.

"No: thank you again, but I'm staying at the hotel, and so are the Tillson brothers. I think you have seen enough of them for one evening."

When she disappeared in the direction of the town's main street Breck turned the opposite way and walked for some time along the dark road. The dull throbbing in his arms and body was explainable; the confusion in his mind was not. At this moment he could work up a good rage when he thought of Louise Temple. He could easily hate her. Yet he knew that after a while he would remember her eyes, with their half-amused, half-unhappy look, and the tilt of her small dark head.

DAD COOK was still busy over some papers at his desk when he entered ranger headquarters. The older man looked up briefly, squinted at Breck's torn clothes, then resumed his work with only the casual question: "What you been doing, son?"

"Dancing," Breck replied, continuing to his room. "And making a few enemies." He dropped on his bunk and scowled into the dark. "Yes," he amended, "several!"

"SAY, Dad, who is Louise Temple?"

Breck paused in his early morning meal and glanced across the table at the ranger.

"Old man Temple's kid," said Cook, continuing with flapjacks, ham and eggs.

Interesting, Breck thought, but not very complete. Yet he did not press the question, for there were more immediate things to occupy him. Both he and Cook had been up at daylight, and by this time the room about them was piled with boxes of provisions, fire-tools, telephone supplies and other equipment ready to be packed to the mountain station. A flivver truck stood outside the door.

"You'll ride the cushions today," Cook said when the meal was finished, "but tomorrow you'll be forking hard leather." He crossed to a plank chest and unlocked it, asking over one shoulder: "Have you a gun?"

"No," said Breck. "I intended to buy one in town this morning."

"Don't do it." Cook stooped, dug in the chest, then came back with a long, blue Luger.

Breck stiffened with recognition. In a flash of memory he saw that same round, cold bore thrust between his own eyes—then a vision of Cotter, himself wounded, a struggle, the gun turned, its sharp spat muffled, and only Cotter rising where there had been two. He heard Cotter say: "I'll keep this. Might bring me luck some time."

Cook placed the gun on the table with-

out speaking. Slowly Breck clutched it, feeling the old familiar balance of the brown grip in his hand. It showed considerable use. Thin gray spots were beginning to appear through the blue metal, eloquent of the many miles it had ridden in Cotter's holster. But when he pulled the ejector and looked down the barrel the rifling there made a clean bright spiral. The weapon was still good for its duty.

"I've seen this before," he said.

Cook bent over the gun with fond eyes. "I suppose so. And I guess Cotter would want you to have it. So it's yours."

He straightened, turned and gazed toward the mountains before he spoke again. "I'm a peace-loving man, Breck, but I hope to hell you get a fair chance to use that gun —and use it plenty!"

BY midmorning they had the flivver truck loaded to its top, had made last-minute purchases of more tobacco, and locking the Lone Tree house, left it to a summer of desertion.

At the post office, where Breck stopped to give orders about forwarding his mail, he caught quick glances from a line of men who squatted along the board walk.

Most of them were cow-hands, though a few in mixed garb were not to be definitely placed. When he came out of the post office one of the cowboys looked up with a friendly, "Howdy, Ranger!"—at which one of a pair who might be from the mountains, or the desert, or neither, offered a low grunt.

Breck climbed into the truck, asking as soon as Cook started on: "Who are those two at the end of the line?"

Cook glanced around. "In black ranch hats? They're nesters from the Pothole country. The Potholes are a bunch of small meadows along a mountain just south of the district you're going to take over. These people homesteaded it before it was put in the reserve."

"Not very friendly to the Service, are they?"

"No, I guess not. Tillsons use them one way or another. But we don't have much trouble except over a brush-fire now and then if their grub runs low."

"What do you mean?"

Cook's gray brows drew together in a quizzical smile. "Why, they get thirty-five cents an hour for fire-fighting. Easy money if they keep their fires out of big trees where it would make real work."

"They *set* them?"

"I wouldn't be dumfounded." And Cook laughed. "They're way off twenty-five miles from your station. What's to keep 'em from sticking a match in the brush?" He shrugged, and his smile faded into serious eyes. "In a way it's a good thing. If they burn off little patches of brush every year we'll never have a big area go up all at once."

Breck pondered on that. He was beginning to sense that this ranger business was something more than riding a horse and carrying a gun. Cook would not be one whom it would be safe to cross—yet he winked at these deliberate fires.

"You see, son," the ranger went on, as if answering Breck's mental question, "you don't want to have too many enemies riding your trail. Right now the Tillsons are plenty. After a while we'll get around to the nesters, though I think removing this other crowd will settle that, too. The head gun in the Potholes is a man named Weller; you'll meet up with him soon enough."

For an hour they forced the truck up a long gradual slope that shelved out from the wall of the Sierras. The town dropped behind them and then was lost in the desert sink. As they approached nearer to the granite barrier ahead there seemed no way for a trail to climb its sheer face.

"I suppose you know you're looking at the highest mountain in the U. S.," Cook observed. "Ever climb it?"

"No," said Breck. "But I'm going to."

"Worth the trouble. From up there a man sees just how much he amounts to in this world. About as much as a snort in a cyclone!"

By noon they had climbed the desert shelf and were near the road's end where Breck saw some sort of camp along a willow creek. A corral enclosed one end of a box cañon farther on, and from this rose a cloud of dust. He glimpsed a herd of animals racing before a lone horseman, then caught a deep voice, slow and good-natured in spite of the curses it uttered.

"That's Sierra Slim," Cook explained, "one of my forest guards. Must have seen us coming and has wrangled up the pack-train. You'll meet a real mossback mountaineer in Sierra. He's going to be your partner till you're well broke in."

They stopped their truck under the trees, climbed out, and a moment later Breck watched a lank, loose-jointed figure amble down from the corrals. He wore a black

cowboy hat, very wide and limp of brim, with its high crown knocked into a peak. The dents looked as if they had come there by chance, and would take on new shape the next time Sierra Slim threw the hat down and picked it up again. The rest of his costume was equally haphazard—flannel shirt with bright red and black checks, belt, jeans, shoes with golf soles.

But Breck forgot clothes when the man approached and he looked into eyes as blue as a summer ocean. They did to a long, unhandsome face what two pools of color might do to an otherwise drab landscape. Quiet humor glittered in them.

"Slim," said Cook, "this is Breck. He's going up with us to take over Rock House station."

Sierra reached out his right hand. It was firm, though not hard and calloused. Like others of his kind Sierra Slim never touched a piece of work nor rode a step without wearing heavy leather gloves. His face, his neck, his wrists might look like the sole of a boot, but not his hands.

"Glad to know you," he offered perfunctorily.

He hooked both thumbs into his belt, closed an eye and screwed one corner of his mouth up toward it, then delivered himself in a manner that was to amuse and often puzzle Breck in days to come.

"Goin' to take Cotter's place, eh? Well, for me, now, I can't see myself doin' it. Understand, I aint exactly sayin' I wouldn't. And again, that don't mean I would!"

Glancing beyond Sierra Slim, Breck caught a twinkle in Dad Cook's eyes. A little later when Sierra had wandered off, saying he would rustle some grub, Cook laughed. "Slim's meaning is hard to get at sometimes, but don't let that bother you. He isn't half as confused as he makes out."

AFTER noon chuck all three turned to the job of packing for an early start tomorrow. Everything had to be stowed in the leather kyaks that, two for each mule, must be nicely balanced in weight. Breck had once gone through the experience of having a load turn under his mule's belly because one kyak was heavier than the other, so judged his outfit carefully now.

"Of course," said Cook, grinning as he stood up from a pile of telephone insulators, "you can hang on a rock to even them after you get going. I've seen it done."

Breck left his work for a time and surveyed the equipment at Cook's feet. "Seems to me," he observed, "that most of your load has to do with telephones."

"It has. That will be your first job—two hundred miles of line, and most of it torn down by fallen trees or snowed under. Like that every spring. You wait, son! Two weeks of climbing those giant fir will tell what you're made of."

Toward evening Sierra Slim dragged a dozen pack-saddles from under a tarpaulin and inspected them.

"Dad," he asked, "what animals are you figurin' to give Breck?"

"General Custer and Kit Carson."

"A hard-fighting pair!" Breck laughed.

Sierra stood up and knocked his hat onto one eyebrow. "They sure is!" he agreed. "Kit, he's all right. But that Cus, he aint been topped off yet this season."

BY sundown they had twenty-four kyaks filled and standing two by two under the trees. Pack-saddles rested in a row on a log, lead ropes coiled near by. Each man's riding-gear lay close to the spot where he had unrolled his bed. It was the camp of a pack-train ready to hit the trail at dawn.

A cool wind from over the mountains forced down the desert heat. Cook built a campfire, and in the hour before turning in all three sat with the red glow upon their faces, their shadows dancing off to mingle with the canon blackness. The time had come for pipes, and far-off thoughts, and words slow-spoken. Talk drifted inevitably to the Tillsons. Cook made a remark. Sierra Slim delivered his noncommittal speech. But for a while Breck remained silent.

"I did think my business would be a simple matter," he confessed at last. "Just find out who killed Cotter and then—wipe him out. But this isn't that kind of a war."

"You don't know your man," Cook affirmed, "and until we learn more you had better not do any advertising. So far I've passed Cotter's death as an accident. Shot by deer-hunters."

"I know," said Breck. Remembering his slip before the storekeeper in Lone Tree, he added: "I see I'll have to force an issue with the Tillsons in line with my job—and settle with Cotter when I settle that."

Cook nodded. "You're beginning to open your eyes, son."

"I aint," Sierra muttered, rising. "I'm shuttin' 'em tight. And don't you-all disturb my beauty sleep!"

Later, Breck lay in his blankets and stared for a long time into the shadows. Now that the fire had died, the world about him spread cold and still beneath the stars. His eyes went to where a trail left the creek bottom and cut its sharp line upward along the mountain spur. Only a short length showed before it swept around the ridge, but it fired his imagination with the very mystery of swift vanishing. He understood something of the country beyond, yet on his other trips he had seen it as a tourist.

Tonight that upward trail was the path of his own life. Into whatever it led, he was now a definite part.

CHAPTER IV

"ROLL out, Ranger!" The words roared through a heavy sleep. Smells of bacon and coffee mingled with smoke. Breck opened his eyes. It was still dark.

Rising upon one elbow he saw Dad Cook holding a pot over the fire. The old man jerked his head sharply.

"Up and at it!" he ordered. Breck obeyed. This was business.

As he started down to the creek he heard a rush of animals in the corral, the sudden squeal of horses, then Sierra Slim's gentle cursing. A wash in water that was only a few miles from snow aroused him thoroughly and brought a wolfish appetite. Cook and Sierra were already eating when he returned. He squatted beside them and ate heartily—fried meat, fried potatoes, thick slices of bread, strong black coffee.

Dawn was in the canon as they finished.

"Now, boys," said Cook, "let's get along. No telling how much snow we'll have to fight on top, and I want to make the station before dark."

He pointed to a line of animals that Sierra had brought to the tie rack. "Breck, those horses on the end are yours. The gray is Custer; the black's Kit. Better saddle Kit. We'll cinch a load of nails on Cus and let him buck at that if he feels ornery. Yonder's a mule—God knows it's a mistake, but you fall heir to him. His name is Goof."

Breck walked to the mule first. He was brown, short and shaped like a bottle. His face was long, sorrowful, with eyes that expressed a deep and thoughtful pessimism. For a time he surveyed Breck from between narrowed lids, then wrinkled his nose slightly and thrust his ears back against a lean neck. Immediately his look of pessimism changed to one of evil intent.

Sierra, passing by, grabbed one of the furry ears and whispered something into it. Breck was certain the mule grinned.

"Goof's all right," Sierra asserted. "A mule's the most misunderstood critter in the world. You've got to get acquainted with 'em. They want to be bulldozed some, being like a woman that-a-way. Then they'll work harder and ask less than any horse ever foaled. Me, I like mules!"

Breck went on to his horses, saddling first the black, a truly beautiful animal, tall and spare-bodied, legs not too slender for mountain work, and a sensitive, intelligent face. The gray was old and showed a disposition that had been ruined in his first training. Upon him Breck lashed the two pouches of nails and let him have his morning fling.

He loaded Goof more carefully. First the kyaks, hooked on the pack-saddle forks and hanging down, one on either side; then his bedding, doubled and laid crosswise; and over all a waterproof tarpaulin.

"What lash do you use?" Cook asked, working on the next mule.

"Squaw."

"Man of my own heart! The diamond hitch has a prettier name, but I'm chasin' squaws in these mountains. When a diamond lets loose it's loose all over. Take a squaw, now, and if you start in the morning with a wet rope you can cinch up the slack easy enough when it dries out."

Farther down the line Sierra Slim was again demonstrating his affection for mules. A big red beast reared away, breaking the tie. Breck sprang out to head him off.

"Leave him stand there!" Sierra yelled. He grabbed a length of log-chain and clanked it in his hand. "See this?" he asked in a slow conversational tone.

The mule faced him.

"I'm agoin' to knock you down with it," Sierra went on, "if you don't mind."

A look of solemn attention filled the mule's eyes.

"Now then," Sierra snapped, "come here!" The mule came.

Packs were large and animals were restless; it was almost sunrise by the time they had cinched on the last load, and mounted, were splashing across the creek.

MORNING in the high Sierras! Dew along the creek-bottom and the sharp tang of sage. Creaking of leather and jingle of spurs. The muffled pad of mules,

Breck had no thought save one—snarling through thickened lips, he fought to preserve his own life.

broken by the ring of their shoes on rock. The sigh of wind in pines farther up. And then the red sun bursting like a prairie-fire over distant desert hills.

Breck turned in his saddle, awed before the life uncovered around him. He led the train, with Cook midway keeping the mules there at a good pace, while Sierra Slim herded the rear. His eyes traveled backward over the animals, sixteen all told, as they trudged up with white packs rocking from side to side, attitudes of willingness, anger or resignation expressed by each pair of furry ears.

The trail climbed rapidly. Soon the desert had fallen into a deep sink where floes of salt on a dead lake reflected the changing colors of sunrise. Up and up! At times the train was like a line of ants clinging to the sheer granite face. Again, Breck looked down at the string doubled four times upon itself.

Still higher! "Know how to tell altitude by the trees?" Cook asked.

He waved a gloved hand upward. "This gray piñon starts at about four thousand and goes to around five. Then see that dark band of long-needle pine yonder? It takes up where the piñon leaves off—growing into seven thousand. Directly above that we'll come to smooth-trunked lodgepole pine and know we're headed for eight thousand. At Farewell Gap we cross the first summit with a few fox-tail beginning to show. That's ten. They're the last, and dwindle into timber-line at about eleven thousand. It's a good thing to remember. Might help you get your bearings some time."

At eleven they reached the first summit; through Farewell Gap Breck gazed back for his last view of that land so far down. When he turned west again a cold breeze blew upon his face, fresh from snowfields that glittered in the sun. Now as far as he could see lay a country of pine ridges and barren peaks interlaced through meadows of brilliant green. Here was the roof of the high Sierras.

Noon passed, and then one o'clock, before Cook halted the train for half an hour's rest. Breck dismounted, stiff in the legs and glad to walk. Sierra Slim boiled a gallon pot of water and threw in a fistful of tea. That, with whatever food each man had put in his saddle-bags, was lunch.

IT was while they squatted near the fire, warming their hands and eating, that Breck heard a clatter of hoofs somewhere below. He looked down into a narrow cañon that cut the mountains to the south of Farewell Gap. A second trail led up there, and presently two horsemen appeared on it. He waited until they crossed a treeless area before shifting his glance back to Cook and Slim. They too were watching.

Three riders passed up the cañon, unencumbered by pack-animals and followed by a gray wolflike dog. They were half a mile distant, yet their tall figures and their alert seat gave identity. Coming onto a shelf they put their horses in a jog-trot and vanished where the two trails joined.

"That," said Sierra Slim, "aint noways hard to read!"

"They might be riding in to establish their cow-camp," Cook offered skeptically.

"Ah, sure," Sierra scoffed. "And they might be in to see how the trout is bitin'! There's just three trails into these parts. We've got the North Gap. Them Tillsons have come up the Quakin' Asp, seein' no one else is ahead of 'em. And what will you bet that their rotgut machinery hasn't used the South Summit, probably last night?"

Cook nodded but said nothing. Breck stared at the spot ahead where the three brothers had vanished.

In a minute Sierra stood up, stretched his lank frame and let it settle again. "Ah, shucks!" he said dismally. "I'm agoin' to quit this Forest Service. Things is startin' to pop too damn' early!"

THROUGHOUT the afternoon they fought snowdrifts over the roof, crossed wind-swept ridges, plunged into swollen streams of ice-water. Mules lagged. Men hunched in their saddles. But when, an hour before sundown, a green, fenced meadow came into sight, mules picked up their pace, and the men straightened.

From the rear of the train Sierra yelled: "Fish!"

Cook laughed. "New hand catches trout for supper," he explained. "So grab a line first thing, Breck, and get us a mess."

They approached a log cabin. And then it was Cook who burst out angrily: "Look there!"

The door had been chopped from its hangers and now lay ironically under a sign nailed close to the opening. *"Property of the United States. Trespassers will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law."* Six bullet-holes neatly pierced the letters.

Cook flung himself from his horse, and with Breck and Slim, entered the room. Wreckage in there was complete. A plank table had been cut up and used in the fireplace. Broken bottles and empty tins littered the floor; out in the kitchen cached supplies of flour and rice had been opened, then left to the rats. Cook's eyes hardened.

"Do we charge this to the Tillsons?" Breck asked.

"No. They don't go in for stealing. Some one came in here after we left last season. Might be nesters from the Potholes, or trappers; but we'll mark it against the Tillsons, anyway. One set of lawbreakers breeds another."

They strode outside together and halted for another look at the sign. "Shows you," said the ranger, "what a clean-up we've got to make in these mountains!"

As soon as Breck had dragged off his packs he threaded a fishpole and went to a stream below the cañon. At once he passed a bend and was alone. He became conscious of every new sound mingling with the water's low murmur. Some were familiar, others not so easily placed.

He recognized the distant *"Arump! Arump! Arump!"* of a mountain grouse, followed by rapid drumming. Bear-tracks showed near a pool—broad, short-toed imprints that sank deeply from great weight. A rock thumped on the bank above him, bringing down a shower of rock. He looked up—deer, perhaps.

Yet continuing upstream he was possessed by an uncomfortable feeling at his back. That cañonside was too open for deer. They kept to the cover of brush.

Fish took his flies too easily to absorb him in whipping the creek. His glance often left the water and swept upward along the mountain. After half an hour he squatted at a pool to clean his catch. He remained there for some time, staring at the ridge now outlined against a red sky.

"Nothing in it," he argued. "But you might as well go up."

He climbed the bank. There was nothing on top. But presently he found a stone that had been disturbed. About it all others were still embedded in the soft earth where they had lain under snow during the winter. This one had a fresh side.

Farther on he found another that had been moved. He followed up the ridge, then crossed over the backbone. There the careful progress from stone to stone ended and a man's boot-marks were plainly visible on the ground. Shortly after that he came to where a horse had tramped, impatient at being tied to a tree.

Here was a clue, though a vague one. He knelt. The horse was shod with new shoes having short lugs at the heels. He measured them with the spread of his four fingers.

Over the supper table a little later, while Cook talked of the work beginning tomorrow, of telephones and pasture-fences and a climb to the lookout-house on Kern Peak, Breck's thoughts were up the cañon.

"Cook," he said at last, "what size horseshoe is about the span of my four fingers?"

"Sort of small—say Number One. Why?"

Breck had decided to keep his discovery to himself for the time being. "I was thinking of Kit's hoofs," he answered.

Sierra Slim squinted one baleful blue eye across the table. "The hell you was!"

AGAIN that call bursting through the dawn: "Roll out, Ranger!"

Ice was on a pool as Breck went down to wash at the creek. He saw Sierra amble off toward the pasture, vanishing into a dawn that was still half night. Cook had started a fire in the stove when he returned to camp.

"Wood," the ranger said shortly. Breck picked up an ax. There seemed to be an economy of words this morning.

Outside he found a log and swung at it with full-armed blows. He felt a quick surge of life within himself, and all about the mountains came awake to the sharp ring. A bluejay scolded from the pines. A squirrel peered from the far side of a trunk, showing only two pointed ears and beady eyes. Presently from toward the pasture came a pounding of hoofs, then the animals loped into the pole corral, led by an old blue mare with a bell strapped under her throat. Sierra drew the gate shut behind them. From the cabin Cook called: "Come and get it!"

Breakfast was a wordless meal. But as Sierra finished his third cup of coffee he shoved back his bench and at once resumed his good nature.

"Well, Chief," he asked, "where do we head first?"

Cook rose and gathered the dishes into a pan with one sweep of his arm. "You and Breck," he said, "will take the Little Whitney and Kern River line going out. Then come back by Sulphur Cañon. Unless the wire is all down you ought to make it in a week. I'll be working the lookout and Temple Meadow."

He turned gravely to Breck. "If you live through a week of Slim's dutch-oven bread you've got a tin gizzard!"

CHAPTER V

GRUELING work filled the days that followed; yet for Breck they were strangely satisfying. Work oriented his life. It was like the magnetic pole that holds a compass needle steady. He rose each morning with definite purpose, and felt by night that he had earned his sleep.

He looked back as if through a long span of time to other days. Occasionally friends of those days returned to him. Often, shaving, he would survey the face reflected in the mirror, proud of the leathery look beginning to show upon his chin and cheeks, and imagining himself some day meeting So-and-So upon the trail. He would grin, at that.

Mostly the people passed in vague procession through his mind, though one stood out in all her vividness—Irene Sutherland. He could consider her casually now. Still, he did consider her. . . . .

Work went on. From headquarters station he and Sierra followed a single strand of wire hung from tree-trunks, part of two hundred miles that radiated like a spider's web over the mountain range.

Breck realized that any traveler, if he only knew it, was never more than a few hours' ride from this thread of communication. Each night they cut in with a portable instrument, and upon hearing Cook's voice come back from headquarters, were satisfied that so far their job was good.

As days passed with long hours of work and hardship mutually shared, Breck felt a bond growing between himself and Sierra.

"Sometimes I feel right sorry for myself," Sierra offered once, stretching his legs toward the fire and gazing across the red glow. "I'm so damn' ignorant."

Breck glanced away, saying nothing. He knew this was not a plea for pity.

"I know I'm missin' something," Sierra continued, "out o' books. Take yourself now; I reckon you know more from readin' than from seein'."

"Yes," Breck admitted. "Perhaps I do. Yet right this minute you wouldn't trade places with me."

Sierra wagged his head. "I guess that's a fact—and it's why I aint always sorry for myself. Times is when I'm sorry for *you*. Like when I've watched you stand up in front of a sunset off over them peaks, and I know you aint seein' at all what I see."

"What is it you see, Slim?" Breck asked.

"Damned if I know. Some folks might call it God. It makes me plumb solemn inside, and makes me know how ornery I've been that day, and then—hell, I can't say it! But I reckon if I'd pray I'd get an answer. That's how I feel."

Sierra paused to roll a cigarette. Breck sat pondering the expression of faith that, after all, was what Slim had given. To

pray and know you'd get an answer! Could the mountains do that for a man?

Talk drifted to Lone Tree, and men, and girls. "Slim," Breck asked, "why haven't you ever married?"

Sierra screwed his mouth sidewise. "Ah, shucks! What'd I do with a woman? How so'd I pack her around these hills? Besides, I never seen any in my life that I'd trade a mule for, except one. And she wouldn't want my kind. Fact is, I wouldn't try to make her want me."

He looked up from a close survey of the red coals. "Maybe you seen her at the dance. I wasn't there myself. Old man Temple's kid."

The name jolted Breck from quiet musing. "Louise?"

"Yeah. Louy. There's a girl!"

Sierra rolled another smoke. "Most of the cowboys hereabouts is spreadin' their ropes for her," he went on. "The damn' fools—tryin' to tie her in some shanty, cookin' their greasy grub!"

"I saw her in Lone Tree," Breck offered. "Doesn't she belong in the cow-country?"

Sierra nodded. "You'd say so, sure you would."

Breck laughed, recognizing the rebuke.

"You'd say she belongs here," Sierra explained, "because you found her here. That kid's a thoroughbred. Let me tell you: There's been four generations of Temples grazing their stuff on Temple Meadow. Then along came a girl, and the old man tried to make her over into a boy. Didn't work at all. Louy went to school and got ideas about paintin' pictures, and then told Tom she was clearin' out, goin' to the city and learn more. She did too, went plumb to New York—studyin'. I seen some of her pictures, and they're pretty, sure enough.

"But then two years ago her old man got throwed and is crippled for the rest of his days. Did Louy keep up her fight with him? Not any! She aint scrappin' a fellow when he's down. That's why she's back here, ridin' range the way Tom has always wanted her to ride. Poor kid! God, I know she's given up everything!"

BRECK sat with thoughts flashing back to reconstruct their meeting at the dance. Again he heard Louise say: "I hope we rubes haven't disappointed you." Now he began to realize her meaning. He had taken too much for granted that night.

"Will she be up here?" he asked.

"Yep—with the drive on the fifteenth." Sierra's gaze speculated upon him. "You, now," he said suddenly, his tone low and serious, "*you* ought to marry that girl! Yes sir, you two would mate right well."

Breck laughed. Sierra's putting it like that gave him a queer start. He shrugged.

"What about Art Tillson, Slim?"

"That's a fact. She favors him some."

"Can you tell me why?"

"God knows—unless she thinks she can help him. Art's in the wrong corral."

From what Breck had seen he considered young Tillson the same sort as his two brothers. He said so.

"You haven't studied 'em enough," Sierra asserted. "Aint none of them three alike. Jud, he's a fightin' man and don't pretend to be nothin' else. I can't help but admire that sort. Hep, he's the skunk. Sneakin', low-down in every way. Art's just a kid, and if he had a chance he'd make a good straight cow-man. He don't know it himself. Right now he struts around and feels important as part of the Tillson gang, but there's something under all that. Look at his eyes, close, next time you come together."

For an hour Breck lay back on his saddle, while Sierra Slim talked on, looking deep into the lives of mountain folk and seeing there traits that they themselves might not understand. The fire died. Dark closed in. Breck sought his blankets, amazed at what he had heard. "I'm so damned ignorant!" Slim had said.

THEY reached the end of their line at Kern River, and swinging back, turned toward headquarters station by way of Sulphur Creek.

"This here," Sierra observed, "is Tillson country."

Breck halted to study the slope before them. They had climbed the two-thousand-foot wall of the river gorge, and now stood on a narrow shelf of yellow earth that offered a stretch of open ground before the mountains again rose steep and wooded. Sulphur Creek cut it midway, the high-banked cañon guarded by portals of granite. To enter there a man must first cross this quarter-mile of barren ground.

Sierra waved toward the black cañon depths. "I'd lay a bet that this minute we're bein' watched. And if you was to go too far toward a certain spot you'd stay there with a piece of lead in your neck."

Cowboys riding in, spurs jingling, tied their mounts to a rack, then pushed through the entrance.

"Just where is that spot?" Breck asked, half-smiling, half-serious.

Sierra shrugged. "How do I know? I aint lost nothin' there!"

"I have," said Breck. "Considerable."

"Yeah, but you listen to me and don't go rootin' around too much. I've been readin' the cards, and yours aint turned up yet. Take your time; there's plenty to be learned first, because business like that is all over with in a second. You got to know your country damn' well before trackin' a lion in it."

"Sure," Breck agreed. "And wont I know it best by riding through?"

Sierra grinned. "Ah, hell, pardner—this aint no bridle-path in a park!"

They rode on along the sulphur shelf and across the creek. There Breck caught a strong warm odor. Steam rose from a small yellow-crusted spring on one bank.

"Lots of them holes in the cañon," Sierra offered. "And some caves too. Aint so good for cattle, and no one wanted the country till Jud came along and took out a permit. I figure he's in a cave makin' use of this steam."

MOST of the return line was badly down, delaying them past the allotted week. It was the twelfth of June when they rode into headquarters.

"Breck," Cook said over the table that night, "you can figure on moving to Rock House day after tomorrow. That's the fourteenth, just one night ahead of the cattle drive. Sierra stays on patrol here. Tomorrow the Kern Peak lookout will be coming in, and you'll both pack him up with his stuff."

He went to his desk and returned with a contour-map mounted on linen and folded to fit a shirt pocket. "Study this when you're on Kern Peak. That's the top of the West up there, and you'll learn more geography in an hour than you could in a year's riding."

"Maybe we'll find old White Whiskers talkin' on the phone," Sierra put in.

Cook shrugged.

"White Whiskers," Sierra explained, "is a spook that drove one lookout plumb loco. Man's name was Platt. Went outside one night, and when he came back there was this old gent with a long white beard sittin' at the map-table. Platt run all the way down here—fifteen mile—in the dark!"

"Giving me a tenderfoot yarn?" Breck asked.

"No," Cook vouched. "That's true."

The next morning a lean-bodied man with iron-gray hair rode into headquarters, astride a Government mule and leading two pack-animals.

"Hello, Donny!" Cook hailed him, then introduced him to Breck. "This is Donaldson, the man who spots fires for you to fight. You'll cuss him out plenty before the season ends!"

Donaldson swung from his mule. Breck looked into eyes as cold and keen as steel bullet-points. Donaldson had the hermit's brown expressionless face, and his voice was thin from long disuse. "Howdy," was his only remark.

He prospected on the desert, Cook had explained, spending the winter there alone, and each summer came to this even more lonely lookout post. Now he stood for a moment scowling off to where Kern Peak rose in a stark granite pyramid above timber-line. "That old crow's-nest," he said, "don't look a bit good to me!"

Breck thought of that later as he rode up the Kern Peak trail. Donaldson's thin, straight back was just ahead. He wondered why the man would take this job if he felt that way. Mountain fever, was it? The call of the high country? Something of the same witchery, he knew, had already laid hold upon himself.

They passed timber-line at noon, then from the last dwarfed trees threaded upward through boulders as big as cabins, crossed a field of snow, and continued around a slope too steep for direct ascent. Air thinned. Horses halted, blown after fifty yards. Breck felt light-headed along with a growing exuberance as if he had drunk wine. They were half an hour in climbing the last five hundred feet to where one small room, glassed and held by guy-wires, exactly fitted the pyramid's apex.

Its only furniture inside was a cot, an iron stove and the observer's platform with a map-table in the center of the floor. Breck halted, struck motionless as he entered and had his first full view. The whole Sierra roof lay below him—dark forests, green meadows, gray rock ridges, out of which Kern Peak rose in majestic solitude.

As he crossed to the south windows Sierra Slim came to his side and pointed with a lean forefinger. "See that bowl of a country yonder? That's around your station at Rock House Meadow. You can pick up a stretch of the trail with your glasses."

Breck looked. When he found the trail he traced it back toward headquarters, making himself familiar with the route he would follow in the morning. Presently he halted, then moved the glasses about a limited area. At one point tomorrow he would cross a ridge at the head of Sulphur Cañon. He let that discovery rest in his mind.

Donny made tea to warm them before they started down. "Sorry you boys have to go," he said. "Sure going to be four long months."

"Reckon you'll see old White Whiskers?" Sierra asked as they stood drinking over the stove.

The lookout shot a quick glance toward the observation platform. He started to speak, but instead shrugged and threw another stick of wood into the fire.

Breck's spine tingled coldly. He was a little dizzy in the thin air, his ears droned with the monotone of wind in the guy wires outside that held the hut in place, and his mind was keyed to a sense of utter desolation. He could easily imagine old White Whiskers coming in after dark to sit there by the telephone!

Half an hour later he paused on the down trail to gaze back. The wind died for a moment. He saw Donny at one open window of his glass house, forlorn, shrilly whistling: "Nearer, My God to Thee."

CHAPTER VI

THERE had been some thunder during the night, and as Breck threw back his tarp at dawn, a storm threatened south over the country into which he was to move. A cloud curled through the morning sky like a black fist with forearm resting on the eastern summit. It expanded quickly. Pink flashes played on the upper side. By the time he had wrangled up his animals and was ready to pack, that one cloud covered the whole range.

"Sharpen your axes and inspect your tools first thing," Cook advised him. "There's fire up yonder, though this is pretty early for lightning to strike us."

Breck's start was later than he had hoped. But there were two packs of supplies to be loaded for Rock House station, and neither Goof nor General Custer liked the idea of moving on. For a time the trail south was easily followed. Then as it climbed toward a summit, winter snows had melted and swept the mountainside clean. He was guided only by the Forest Service blaze, a slash and a notch, at intervals on the pine trunks.

His eyes must bear ahead constantly. To lose one blaze of the winding trail meant a return to pick up the last. Ascent was slow. At noon he ate in his saddle, pushed on until he crossed the divide, and about three o'clock halted to survey the new country opening below. The bowl surrounding Rock House Meadow was still some ten miles to the south. He turned his horse to the west. There lay the head of Sulphur Cañon, beginning less than two miles from where he stood and plunging down into the woods and dark broken country of lower Sulphur Creek.

It was not an inviting area. From this view it was apparently impassable, except afoot, where a man must go over the cliffs on ropes and trust largely to luck. Yet the Tillsons used it, and the Tillsons were not walking men. He unfolded his contour map, reading the lines that denoted the meadows and cañons. At Sulphur Creek was a blank patch marked *"Unsurveyed."*

HE thrust the map impatiently into his pocket. Time was too short today for a ride very far down; but then, gauging with his eyes, he picked up a transverse ridge that left the bank of Sulphur Cañon a short distance below its head, and turning south dropped toward Rock House. It looked like an easy route. He could explore a little of the country down there, then follow the ridge back to his main trail.

Goof objected. Breck snaked him again, and soon they were sliding from the summit on a long swale of loose rock.

Reaching the cañon, he entered abruptly into twilight. Clouds had thickened overhead, interlacing branches of pine brought further darkness. There had been a slight breeze on the summit; here the air was motionless, almost tense in its calm.

Presently he came to a small yellow-crusted pool. A little farther on a waterfall cut the cañon bottom, forcing him to dismount and lead his train to the next level. When he mounted again, Goof suddenly threw up his head and turned to the opposite bank, ears pointing. Breck let himself back to the ground.

He stood tense, watching across the hollow of his saddle, alert for any noise or movement. Nothing showed in the shadows of the pines. Only a far-off roar broke the silence. It sounded like another waterfall, yet grew louder, approaching from above. Abruptly a new note joined in, a wail that rose and diminished. Black clouds resting on the cañon top began to move, flowing like a river between the walls. The roar increased, though muffled still, as if all the winds of the heavens were penned behind great doors about to be swung wide.

Again Breck raised himself to his stirrup. The sharp crack that sounded instantly might have been the first charge of thunder, save for the whine past his head. He dodged. The lead-rope burned through his hand as Goof reared, pawing. Custer lunged. They broke away together, bucking their packs as they raced down the cañon. Kit showed his mountain training. He remained motionless while Breck leveled his gun over the saddle upon a rock where he had caught a flash of fire.

The shot seemed to have loosened the storm. Wind tore through the pine tops. Great trunks swayed, cracked. Clouds turned red with lightning, and the roar burst into crashing thunder that shook the earth beneath his feet. Still nothing moved beyond the sights of Breck's gun. He waited a moment longer, then sprang to his horse and raced in the direction his packs had vanished.

Their trail was distinct for half a mile, but soon rain broke in spouts and after that he rode by chance, hoping to find them at some meadow or halted with lead-ropes tangled in down timber. He saw nothing until, having descended to a shelf, he found a white patch of Goof's tarpaulin. Near by was one small hoofprint that the rain had not washed over.

He followed on. Black night came before he passed through a growth of yearling pine and glimpsed ahead the open space of a meadow. He dismounted, tied Kit, and continued on afoot. Where trees ended and grass began, something sharp struck his wrist. He leaped back, gun drawn, then realized it was the barbed wire of a fence.

That meant a pasture and perhaps a cabin. He was rain-soaked; the wind now was close to freezing. He decided to leave the horse in the shelter of the trees and moved on cautiously. Half an hour of feeling along the fence brought him to a corral. Beyond loomed a small log house. It was deserted; even from where he stopped he could make out the door swinging on a loose hinge. Yet he approached with gun ready and stood near the casement before peering in. When he struck a match, the room showed wet and empty.

In the quick flash of light he peered into the corners, then to the ceiling. Small logs placed across the beams formed a loft that dripped with water from a poor roof. The whole place was soaked but offered shelter from the wind, and there was an iron stove at the one end. The match burned out; he fumbled for another, found some that were wet, felt again with numbed fingers.

Outside the wind had changed its moaning. Breck paused in his search, listened and stood motionless in the dark.

Hoofs thumped on the soggy earth. He judged two animals. It might be his packs coming down toward the meadow. But then above the splash of rain and rattle of wind about the cabin, he heard a man's muttering. Instinct carried him a step toward the door, away from the confining walls. Suddenly he halted. The sound of approach was too near. Another muffled voice joined the first.

Though the tones were too indistinct to be recognized, Breck could guess the owners. This was Tillson country. And that shot awhile ago told plainly enough what had brought them out tonight. He glanced to the loft overhead and reached up instantly with his arms. Tumult of the storm covered the noise as he sprang, caught one log and drew himself across others that formed a crude floor. Face down to the cracks, he lay through a breathless moment while the thud of horses' hoofs ended and a man's tread came in below.

Abruptly this one spoke. "He aint here yet."

Reply came angrily from farther beyond the doorway: "We can wait! Let's get in out of the rain."

Breck knew this last was Jud Tillson.

CHAPTER VII

THE horses thudded on again, and presently there sounded the creak of a corral gate being opened and closed. Then both men returned to the cabin.

"Hell of a night," one began. "He ort to be here. Aint no—"

"Shut up your grumblin' and rustle some wood!" This was Jud again.

The other tramped out. The cabin was as silent as if deserted. Breck peered through the crack, knowing he was within a yard or two of the man down there, yet could see nothing. Clumping of boots returned. Wood crashed down. Stove-lids rattled. A match flared, and soon after that the room was flooded in red light, for the men left a lid off and stood warming their hands above the open flame.

In a moment, when they took off their hats, hanging them to dry on pegs behind the stove, Breck had his first full look at Hep. His head was bent a little, but his face was clearly revealed in the firelight. Dark hair fell in strings over a flat narrow forehead. He had the same thin, sharp-featured face as the other brothers, but weaker, with loose, puffed-out mouth.

Both men stood through a time of silence. Hep spoke first, sullenly. "He ortn't keep us waitin' like this!"

Jud said nothing.

"Maybe he aint goin' to come at all," Hep insisted.

"I told him to," Jud answered.

"Yeah, but Art's gettin' damned independent these days. He needs a good handlin'."

Looking down, Breck saw Jud's head lift sharply. He could not see the man's eyes, for they were leveled across at Hep; yet he could sense the narrow scrutiny within them.

"Whatever Art's getting is none of your business," he said evenly. "And if any handling is to be done, I'll do it. See?"

Hep's gaze shifted before his brother's. His loose lips opened, closed. He glowered as he rolled a cigarette.

Rain leaked down upon Breck's back, trickled along his sides and fell through the logs where he lay. Not much of the stove heat came up to him. His outstretched arms grew numb; his fingers clenching the gun stiffened and ceased to feel the cold metal. But the wind had died a little and he could not risk a change in his position.

He was certain that more than an hour passed. Jud and Hep smoked, stamped their feet, said nothing, until abruptly Jud threw down his cigarette.

"Cover the stove!"

The lid slipped over the hole. Instantly the room was again dark. Breck heard the men move outside and took that chance to shift his body.

Presently a soft whistle sounded in the distance.

Jud spoke from close beyond the door. "All right, Art. We're here." He and Hep returned, followed in a moment by the brother, who pushed back the stove-lid

Cow-hands darted along the line, pushing back bunches that broke from the main flow, charging the rear animals to keep them moving.

as they had done, swung the rain from his hat and hung it on a peg.

"Well," Jud asked at once, "did you?"

"I stopped him—yes."

"What do you mean—stopped him?"

"Just what I say. I turned him from Sulphur. His packs broke loose, and God knows where they led him."

"You damn' fool!" Hep cut in. "You didn't get him?"

Breck saw Art's young face, red in the firelight, hardened in scornful lines. "I aint shootin' in the back," he sneered, "like you do!"

HEP lunged toward him. Art doubled his fists. Jud halted both with a look from narrowed eyes. "Art," he said, and the cold quality of his voice carried meaning far beyond his words, "you made a mistake. I told you to stop that fellow, and you knew what I meant." He paused, rigid, save for a slow movement of jaw-muscles. "Next time you do it!"

Art turned impulsively. "Damn it, Jud, aint I had enough of this? What's it going to get me, anyway?"

"It has already got you a herd of a thousand cattle. I'm giving you that."

"Yeah, with a fine lot of strings! I've got to run 'em here on Sulphur Creek and work for you whenever you say. Hell with it!"

"Just the same," Jud urged, "they're yours."

Art rolled a cigarette, surveying Jud from over the edge as he licked it. "All right, if they're mine, I can do what I please with them. So I'll just stop the outfit tomorrow and graze this season on Temple Meadow."

A sneer came across the stove from Hep. "Sweet! I reckon that would just suit Louy. Let your critters make calves while you—"

"What the hell do you mean? I know what you're thinkin'!"

"And I know what you're doin'!"

That time Jud made no move to interfere. Art's fist flashed across the fire. Hep slumped, and when he rose Art followed, knocking him back into one corner.

Breck found his own teeth clenched and looked down upon Art Tillson with new understanding.

In a moment Hep got up, wiping a bloody mouth and muttering under his breath. Art ignored him.

"Now then," said Jud casually, "if you two fools have got it over with, we'll talk business. We might as well keep in here until daylight; then you'll go meet your herd at the Summit, Art, and shove 'em down Sulphur. Hep and I'll go direct to camp and fix things there. As for that fellow—next time I lay out a job, you work on it. No more mistakes!"

Hep drew a box near the stove and sat down, closing his eyes. Jud remained standing, hunched over the fire. Art went

outside. He was gone only a minute when he reappeared at the door.

"Jud, there's a couple of packs in the corral!"

INSTANTLY the stove was covered again. Hep sprang from his box. Then Jud gave orders. "You two go to the fence. I'll stay off in the shadows."

All three moved over the floor, and their footsteps died away.

Breck rose to his knees. Urgency of action drove the stiffness from him. Swift reasoning flashed through his mind. He had to get out; those packs were his. If the Tillsons looked farther, they might find his horse. This loft was a poor place now.

He was certain the men had gone some distance beyond the cabin, at least as far as the corral. Leaning from the loft's edge, he looked down into a black, empty room. He swung over, clung to a log beam, dropped noiselessly. Nothing showed beyond the door as he took a step, gun poised, every sense alert for sound or sight. He had reached the casement, with one foot on the ground outside, when a gray shape lunged, snarling fangs opened, at his throat.

As he met the body with his gun muzzle buried in the long hot fur, he remembered the Tillsons' wolflike dog. His gun crashed, and the open mouth closed weakly. Before he could move again, a man's hulk blocked the way.

Breck covered it, keeping himself in the dark. "Stop there!"

"No need for that, stranger," came Jud's voice. "You, Art and Hep," he called over his shoulder, "stow away your guns and come up here."

A movement sounded outside.

"Keep your hands up!" Breck warned. He watched the oblong of dim light that marked the doorway.

Three forms appeared. He stood back against the wall. "One of you uncover that stove."

It was Jud who obeyed, and then spoke first. "Howdy, Ranger."

Breck nodded, surveying the man for any sign of what the next move might be. Yet if Jud suspected he had been in the cabin for some time, he hid it.

Art and Hep squatted on their heels and held empty hands to the fire.

Breck felt the need of opening matters at once.

"Too bad I killed your dog," he began, indicating the gray shape stretched on the floor. "He charged from around the corner as I came in."

Jud kicked the carcass to one side. "Aint going to be any trouble about that. Suppose we talk things over while we're all waitin' for the storm to blow past. You're the new guard at Rock House, aint you?"

"Yes; and I'm willing to talk—as far as Forest Service is concerned."

"That's what I mean. My way is to come out in the open with new rangers. Right now, you strike me as being a fair-minded sort. Understand?"

"Not yet," Breck answered, "but I'm a good listener."

"Then here's what I mean. Don't let yourself have any call to ride this Sulphur country. I want full use of it."

BRECK nodded. "I understand—but am I to keep out just because you *say* so?"

"I pay for what I get!"

Jud paused. Breck felt the cold gray eyes measuring his price.

"What does the Government give you for riding this range?" Jud went on.

"One hundred and five a month."

"Making four hundred and twenty for the season," the other added. "All right, in that same season I'll pay you two thousand to stay out."

Breck lifted his head sharply. He had been prepared for a bribe of a few hundred. But this—two thousand! It came to him that the Tillson business might concern more than he had been told.

He saw a flicker of satisfaction cross Jud's face and knew that his surprise was being misinterpreted, and so for a moment held back his flat refusal.

"We can all use money," Jud urged, "and that's a good little pile."

"Fair," Breck answered. "But I'm not ready to take it."

Jud's eyes narrowed. "Good God, man! What do you want? You don't need to take my promise. I'll have the money cash in full for you tomorrow night. Is that better?"

For a moment Breck had played the game, but now sudden revolt checked him from any further show of dickering. "I can't take it," he said bluntly.

"You needn't think it's a standing offer!" Jud retorted. "Now or not at all."

Breck met his eyes level across the red fire. "Then it's not at all."

"I don't believe you're that big a fool,"

said Jud. "And for once I'll go back on my own word. I'll give you a week to think about it."

He turned away, drawing a watch from his pocket. "Hell, boys, it's three o'clock!"

Breck could see that morning was not far off. The blast of wind and rain no longer beat upon the cabin.

"I suppose you figure to head in with the cattle drive and take count at Rock House," Jud offered.

Breck nodded.

"Then your quickest way would be south from here, meetin' the bunch at Long Cañon."

No doubt there was a double purpose in this directing, steering him out of Sulphur; but Breck believed he would have no immediate trouble. Jud had given him a week.

"Get out of here, boys," Jud ordered. "We've got to be on the Summit when they come over. So long, Ranger—see you at the count." He strode off without a look backward.

ART followed, arrogant disdain on his young face as he passed. Only Hep shot a sidelong glance—furtive, evil-eyed, his puffed mouth drawn down sneeringly. Breck watched him beyond the door, tense with a feeling that had grown strong and certain through the night. Hep had killed Jim Cotter! He had no more proof than his own reading of treachery in the man, and the retort Art had hurled at him—yet he was convinced.

His thoughts mulled on it as he returned to the stove, stripping off khaki shirt and breeches to let them dry. There another realization came. He had entered into this Forest job to fulfill a pledge; but that was no longer the whole of it. Tonight he had brought all things squarely upon himself.

Firelight picked out the badge from his shirt hung above the stove, and a slow warm pride possessed him as he stared at the lone pine tree, flanked by the letters U. S. Something of the grim eagerness of first enlistment days returned to him.

CHAPTER VIII

WITH the streak of dawn Breck saddled his stock and rode south into a deer trail beyond the meadow. There he found the Tillsons had gone by the same route. Tracks of the three horses showed plainly in the wet ground, winding up over the ridge, then climbing the backbone some distance before they descended into the next cañon. Breck followed, observing country now that had been in darkness when he raced through last night. Apparently it was not far in the Sulphur Springs region—more at the edge of it, above and a little to the south.

Water was fresh in the first stream he crossed, but the second flowed warm and odorous and one bank showed the yellowish crust. Some way ahead there was a change in trail marks. He saw they had thinned out, only one animal having passed where there had been three. Art was the one who had continued. That was according to Jud's orders last night. Breck turned in his saddle. What had become of the other two?

Dismounting and anchoring Kit with lines down, he walked a few steps above the trail, then retraced it, keeping parallel though out of sight. The forest silence was broken only by a blue-jay chattering at the sunrise and the murmur of the creek. He reached the stream, halted a moment, then followed until it again crossed the deer trail.

One look there told that two men had left the path, riding their mounts downward in the shallow water. He drew the map from his pocket, studying it to see if he were not far enough south to have come within the explored area.

Close to the white patch marked *"Unsurveyed,"* he found the beginning of this creek. Here seemed a definite clew to one doorway of the Tillson stronghold. At least it was the route Jud and Hep had taken this morning.

TEN o'clock brought Breck again to the blazed Rock House trail, and a little before noon he topped the ridge that flanked Long Cañon. What he saw then gripped him with swift wonder. Thousands of cattle had come over the eastern summit and were pouring down the cañon trough in a red, bellowing stream.

Cow-hands, looking like black specks from this distance, darted along the line, pushing back bunches that broke from the main flow. It wound on endlessly, slowly heading downward until Long Cañon could spew them into the bowl of Rock House Meadow. There they would be held overnight. In the morning Breck's job of allotment would begin.

He could see no real chance for trouble. A book in his pocket told the exact number of animals on each man's permit. Cook's instructions had been: "Allow twenty over your count—you might make that much of a mistake—but no more." To which he had added a word of warning: "Go out on patrol the night the drive reaches Rock House. Some one usually tries to push a few bunches ahead of the day."

By the time the last animal had come over the summit, the stream was a mile long and a quarter wide, entirely filling the grass bottom of Long Cañon. Breck rode down to fall in behind the drive, coming into the roar of sound where cowboys' "*Hoosh! Hoosh!*" rose above the low moaning. Dogs were herding the stragglers from trees along either bank. Some of the hands were Piute Indians from the desert, short dark fellows with paint horses. They nodded to his greeting. Cattlemen shouted "Howdy!" as they flashed past, charging the rear animals to keep the river moving. It was in one of these rushes that he saw Art Tillson astride a chestnut horse. Then came a cloud of dust, and he could see no more than the rise and fall of red backs, white horns, lashing tails. Behind him his packs snorted out the thick air. He followed the example of the other men and hung a bandana over his nose.

The drive flowed on. At times the punchers dropped out to talk and drink at the creek, and dogs alone kept the line moving. Some of the cow-hands came around Breck, sizing him up, but for the most part they were aloof, and he knew any friendship must start from himself.

One in particular swung often within a certain distance, remained there for a moment, then darted off, riding a tall blue-roan horse with more than the usual cowboy's abandon. Finally the figure approached closely out of the dust, and he realized it was not a man.

He turned his mount that way. Louise Temple lowered the handkerchief from her face. "Hello there, Ranger!"

"Glad to see you," Breck replied. He held out his hand to her.

She grasped it across the space between their saddles. "You're surprised?" she asked, adding: "So am I. You didn't tell me you belonged here."

There was no sarcasm in her attitude today. Breck met her openly. "That night I wasn't sure I did belong."

"Are you sure now?"

"Yes." As Breck gave his answer, he was aware of her looking at him intently.

"Well, anyway," she observed, "you're beginning to look as if you do."

His own gaze traveled over the girl, and he admitted to himself that she was even prettier than he had thought at the dance that night—at least, more picturesque. Now she wore a roll-brimmed sombrero of deep brown that went well with her tanned skin and dark eyes. A man's shirt of white silk lay open against her firm slender throat, and was drawn down tightly over her breast to be tucked into blue denim breeches. Short spurs jingled at the heels of her black cowboy boots.

He looked around to see if there were any other girls in the drive. She was alone. Then something Sierra Slim had said returned to his mind. "Don't make any wrong guess about Louy. She's working at the cattle business and nothing more. Maybe the way she lives up here looks like free pickings. But just try it!"

"Ranger," she said, riding close, "I don't believe I know your name."

He told her.

"Gordon Breck?" she repeated. "Haven't I heard of you before? Let me think—"

INWARD warning urged Breck to prevent that thought. Surely she had known Jim Cotter; and Jim had probably spoken his name, perhaps mentioned their close friendship. Breck did not want her to make the connection.

He swept a gloved hand toward the river of animals. "What part of this drive is yours, Miss Temple?"

"Louy, if you like," she said impersonally. "I sha'n't call you Mister." And then in the same offhand manner: "I am allowed six hundred head on my permit, but I think there are seven."

Breck turned to her with a short laugh. Her eyes met his gravely, and he was undecided whether she was spoofing him or not. His laughter died, and matching her own serious look, he said: "I can let you have six hundred and twenty, no more."

"And what about the other eighty?"

Breck shrugged.

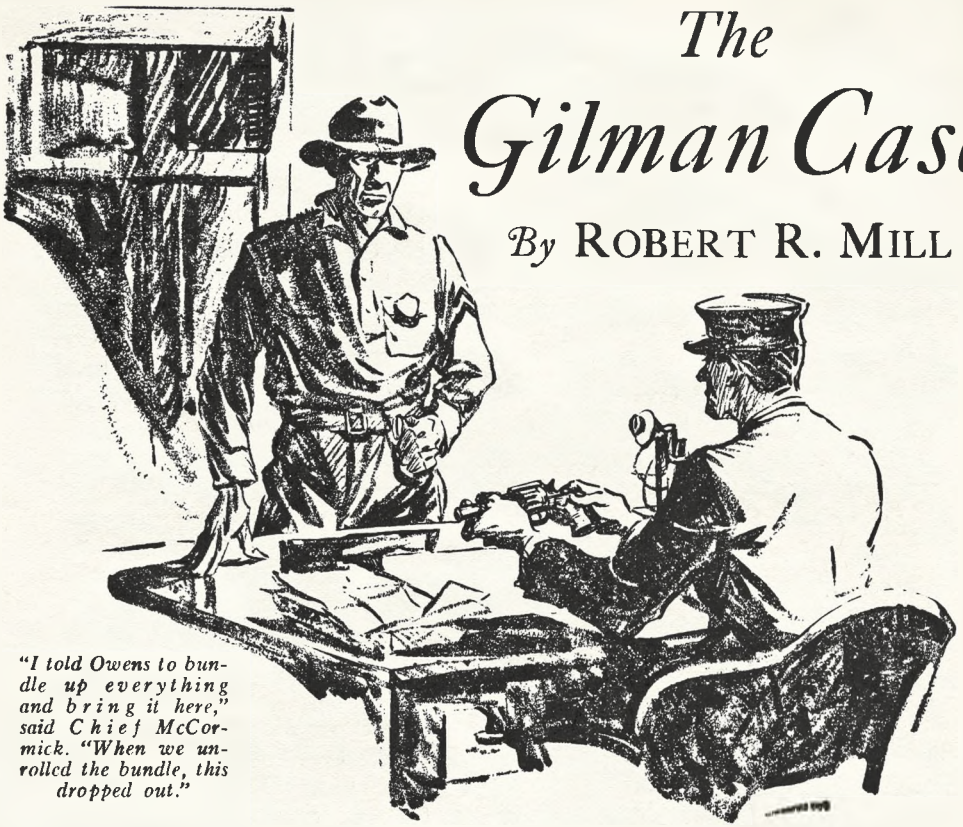
"My, aren't you a hard-boiled ranger!"

"Very!" he agreed.

The next installment of this vivid novel of the real modern West will appear in our forthcoming August issue.

The Gilman Case

By ROBERT R. MILL



"I told Owens to bundle up everything and bring it here," said Chief McCormick. "When we unrolled the bundle, this dropped out."

Wherein two troopers of the New York State Police solve an exceptionally interesting murder mystery.

Illustrated by Paul Lehman

"WELL, Sleeping-sickness, maybe this is your chance to be famous!"

Corporal Benjamin David, mounted upon his black horse Bootlegger, tossed this bantering remark to Trooper Henry Linton as the two men, both clad in the uniform of the Black Horse Troop of the New York State Police, rode slowly along between Pleasantville and Tranquil Lake.

"Me?" demanded Trooper Linton. "Not a chance, Delirious. The old man decided long ago I wasn't dumb enough to make a good corporal." He stroked one ear of Booze, his own mount. "What's it all about? Or isn't a mere trooper supposed to know?"

"I don't know myself, exactly," the corporal admitted. "Maybe suicide and murder; or maybe just murder. Maybe an inside job, or an outside job. I don't know. Anyway, three persons are dead. The D. A. is puzzled. Said he didn't have time to give his thoughts—if any—to the old man over the telephone."

The two men rode on in silence. They were in the outskirts of Tranquil Lake when Trooper Linton spoke.

"Ever meet the police force here?"

"No, Linny."

Trooper Linton whistled.

"You may have been to France, Useless, and they may have pinned a medal on you—but you haven't done any traveling, and you can never be classed as cultured, until you've met Tranquil Lake's police force! Its name is Chief McCormick—Chief Edward McCormick."

Corporal David waved to a pedestrian, then turned to his companion.

"All right, Educated. Ever met the D. A.?"

Trooper Linton shook his head.

"Infant," declared the corporal, "you

aint seen nothin' yet, if you don't know District Attorney Jerome Sellers of Wilson County! —Whoa, there!"

HE pulled Bootlegger to a halt before a typical country store. Upon the porch was an aged man clad in overalls. His long hair was matted, his eyes watery, and his gaze unsteady. The trembling fingers of his right hand clasped a knife. In the other hand was a stick upon which he had been whittling.

"Good morning," said Corporal David. Trooper Linton, who had checked his horse, grinned broadly.

"Morning," said the man on the porch.

"Is this the right way to Tranquil Lake?" asked the corporal.

"It be," replied the old man.

Corporal David leaned down from Bootlegger, his tone and manner confidential.

"I'm Corporal David of the State Police."

"I be John Small," said the old man. His eyes became glassy. "Most everybody in Tranquil Lake knows old John Small." He laughed. "Reckon I be a thousand years old."

"Easily," agreed the corporal. "Live around here?"

"I lives in a shack up on the hill," came the answer. "I never sleep."

"Quite so," agreed Corporal David. "He might well follow your example." He jerked a thumb toward his companion. "He's always asleep. Well, so long, old John Small."

They rode on, through the main street of the village.

"Didn't know you had any relatives here," said Trooper Linton. "How are the rest of your family?"

Corporal David placed his hands upon his broad hips. Bootlegger, despite the absence of guidance from the reins, continued to pick his way through the traffic. The corporal spoke in a low voice.

"Linny, there are times when your name should be Ninny. There are three dead men here, and it isn't known who killed them. Three isn't a murder; it's a wholesale killing! For the next day or two you and I are going to be clubby with every halfwit in this section. We are going to start with *you*—and then proceed to eliminate the other halfwits."

He clucked a command to Bootlegger.

"Now then," he ordered, "wrap up all your comedy and put it in your saddle-bag until we get this cleared up! We are going to work, Trooper Linton."

Their first stop was at the town hall, which housed the police station. Here Corporal David met the police force, in the person of Chief McCormick; from him the troopers learned the problem confronting them.

Corporal David made notes as the policeman told his story:

Warren Gilman, 42. Nathan Gilman, 36. Elmer Gilman, 34. Brothers. Residence, 39 Church Street, Tranquil Lake.

At 5:10 a. m., alarm of fire sounded from Gilman residence. Fireman Gilbert Owens, first man to enter, found Warren and Nathan, who slept together, dead in bed in front room at south of second floor. Bodies burned beyond recognition. Room almost destroyed. Owens passed bodies to neighbors. Then made his way to front room at north side of second floor. There he found Elmer in bed unconscious. Room filled with smoke, but no flames. Owens carried Elmer to window. Felt moisture on coat of pajamas. Played flashlight over it. Saw blood bubbling from wound in left chest. Elmer taken to Tranquil Lake General Hospital. Pronounced dead by Dr. A. D. Prince.

Corporal David interrupted with questions, then wrote down the answers.

Gilman brothers lived alone. Had office on first floor of house. Insurance and investments. Also played stock market. Regarded as close and universally disliked. No friends. No known association with women. All regarded as wealthy. Recreations, golf and target shooting. Brothers were apparently on best of terms.

Corporal David closed his notebook.

"Found any gun?" he demanded.

A look of triumph crossed the face of Chief McCormick.

"We have. After Gilbert Owens passed Elmer out, he went back to hunt for the bullet in the mattress. Couldn't find a thing. I got there then, and I told him to bundle up everything and bring it here. When we unrolled the bundle here, this dropped out."

He held a revolver toward Corporal David, who made no move to accept it.

"Handled it that way before?" he asked.

"Why, yes," said Chief McCormick. "Reckon we passed it around a bit."

Corporal David took the gun. It was a .25-caliber revolver, with a long barrel, indicating it had been used for target purposes. He broke it open. There was a cartridge in each of the six chambers. Three of the six cartridges had been exploded.

"This gun," said Corporal David, as he

placed it in his pocket, "told the whole story. That story was there until you let half of the male population put their fingerprints upon it. Then you wiped out the best, and maybe the only, clue to the murderer of three men."

Chief McCormick's jaw dropped.

"Gosh! Never thought of that," he admitted. "But you say three men were murdered. How do you know that? Looked to me like Warren and Nathan was burned to death."

"Elmer was shot once, you said," Corporal David explained. "Three bullets have been fired from this gun. Use your head."

He walked from the room, motioning for Trooper Linton to follow. In the hall he paused.

"Now, Linny, we have to work fast. You chase around to the Gilman home and give it the once-over. Then lock it up and put somebody on guard. Hire a man, if you have to. Then scout around and get the low-down on the three brothers. 'Low-down' is probably the right word. From what I have heard, all three of them are charter members of the Better-dead Club. But that makes no never-mind.

"Get the low-down on their financial condition, too; they played the market. I'll meet you here about noon."

LINTON departed. Corporal David turned to Chief McCormick, who stood in a doorway.

"Say," he demanded, "where is the district attorney?"

"Gone after Albert James, the gun expert."

The corporal swore softly.

"Aint got much use for him, have you?" asked McCormick curiously.

"No," the man in the gray uniform admitted, "I haven't. He is a good man on guns. We can use him on that. But he has a lot of half-baked theories on other things he knows nothing about. And he tries to make you see things that aren't there to see. That's why I don't care to get mixed up with James."

He walked away.

"You can tell James and the district attorney that, if you care to," he called over his shoulder.

His first stop was the General Hospital, where he conferred with the physician.

"Here is the bullet we took from Warren's forehead," said Dr. Prince, "and here is the one from Nathan's forehead. Death was instantaneous in both cases. We had to use the X-ray to find the bullets."

Corporal David accepted the bullets, marked them and put them in the pocket of his blouse.

"Here is the bullet that killed Elmer," the physician continued. "I found it between his back and the back of his pajama coat. It had just force enough to leave the body, but not force enough to puncture the garment."

"Did Elmer die instantly?" asked Corporal David.

"No," said the physician. "The fireman who found him told me he saw blood bubbling from the wound. That would indicate he was alive. He was dead when I saw him. He must have died on the way here."

"How long do you think he lived after receiving the wound?"

"Between an hour and an hour and a half."

The broad forehead of David was wrinkled in thought.

"The alarm was sounded at 5:10 A. M. They took Warren and Nathan out first. They probably got to Elmer about twenty minutes later. I presume the house is only a short distance from the hospital. Therefore, Elmer died about 5:30. Consequently, it is safe to assume that he was shot some time between 4 and 4:30."

The physician nodded assent. Both men turned to greet Sellers, the district attorney, and James, the gun expert. The corporal handed the revolver and the three bullets to the latter.

"How about them?" he demanded.

James seated himself before a wicker table. He fixed a glass in his eye, produced another glass and a rule, and examined the muzzle of the revolver. Then he examined the bullets. He made several measurements. Then he looked up.

"These bullets," he began, speaking with a slow drawl, "were fired from this gun. That is my best opinion. After a more thorough examination I am sure physical facts will verify the opinion. I will be able to swear to the physical facts in court."

"You are able to testify to a lot of things," thought Corporal David. Aloud he murmured, "Thanks." Then he turned to Sellers.

"Didn't take you gentlemen long to get here."

"I made a hasty preliminary investigation," said the district attorney, "and then I called Captain Field. My next step was to go in my car for Mr. James. I knew you all would be needed."

Corporal David nodded assent. Then he turned as the door opened, and Trooper Linton entered.

"Thought I would find you here—" he began.

"Shut up!" ordered Corporal David. He faced the local officials.

"Looks as if we are getting somewhere. Three men have been murdered." He pointed to the revolver. "There is the gun that killed them. The fire was just a blind." He raised a warning finger at Trooper Linton, who obviously was struggling with the desire to speak. "Just a moment." He turned to Chief McCormick, who was coming toward the little group. "Who turned in the alarm?"

"A halfwit named John Small," the policeman answered.

"We met Mr. Small," said the corporal. He glanced at his companion, with triumph reflected upon his face. "Now we'll meet him again."

Trooper Linton could contain himself no longer.

"It wont get us a thing. This was an inside job!" he blurted.

BEFORE the corporal could answer the door opened again, and five men entered. One was John Small, and another wore the uniform of a fireman. The tallest of the other three stepped forward.

"I am George Knight of the *Star*," he began. He introduced his companions. He indicated the fireman, and Small. Addressing Corporal David, he said: "These gentlemen had a little difference of opinion. Owens the fireman says he carried Elmer Gilman out. Small says *he* did. So we persuaded them to come along and see you."

Corporal David wheeled upon Small.

"I must warn you that anything you say may be used against you. Now then, were you in the Gilman house this morning?"

"I was," the old man admitted. "Old John Small goes everywhere. He never sleeps. He was walking by. He saw the fire. He pulled the alarm. Then he broke a window beside the porch and climbed in. He toted Elmer to the window."

"See this man?" demanded Corporal David. He indicated the fireman.

"No, John Small didn't."

"You say you carried Elmer out?" the corporal asked the fireman.

"I did," came the answer.

"See Small?"

"I did not."

"Suppose you two run over to the firehouse," suggested Corporal David. "We'll see you there later." He turned to the reporters. "And if you gentlemen will excuse us for a moment we may have a formal statement to give you."

"Sure," said Knight. "We'll wait on the steps."

Corporal David addressed Linton.

"Now then, what do you mean, it was an inside job?"

"Listen," began Trooper Linton. "I examined the house. There was nothing broken except the window both Small and the fireman said they used to enter. That's plain enough, even for a corporal."

Corporal David ignored the remark.

"Who owns that revolver? Does anybody know?"

"Yes," said the district attorney. "Warren Gilman owned it. I happen to know that he used it to shoot at a target in the basement of his house."

"Did Elmer ever shoot the gun?" asked the corporal.

"Sure he did," interrupted Chief McCormick. "He often bragged about what a good shot he was. And he said he kept the gun in his room."

"What else did you find?" asked Corporal David.

"The Gilmans' business is in fine shape," said Trooper Linton. "No affairs with women. They did play the stock market. But they won. They were short on Universal Engines when it dropped, and they cleaned up a pile. Their banker told me that." He consulted his notes. "The banker's name is Peter Wilson."

SELLERS shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, Corporal, it looks as if it is all over. We will be forced to face the facts. It will be a great blow to the entire community, for if the Gilmans were not loved, at least they were respected. My duty will be very distasteful."

Corporal David walked to the center of the room. His thumbs were hooked in his gun-belt.

"What do you consider your duty?" he demanded.

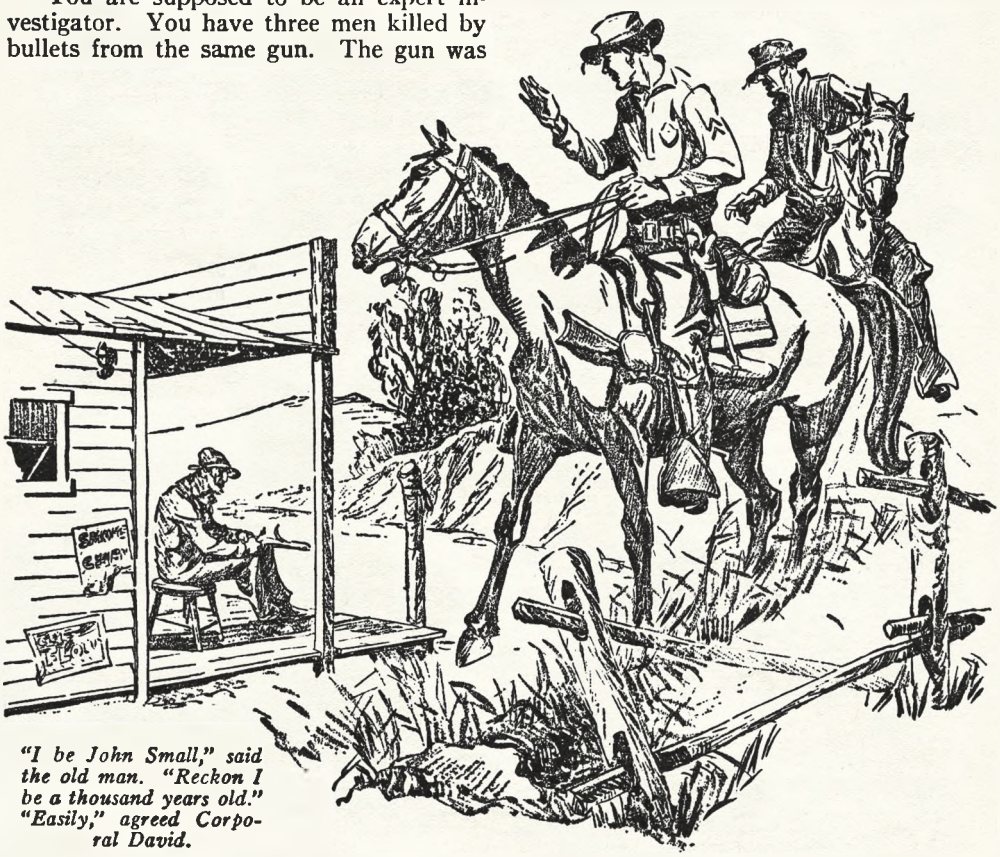
"Pardon me," said Sellers. "I should

have said the coroner's duty." He turned to Dr. Prince. "You will return the verdict."

"What verdict?" asked Corporal David.

The drawl of the gun expert answered:

"You are supposed to be an expert investigator. You have three men killed by bullets from the same gun. The gun was in the room of one of them. You know he was an expert in its use. You know the two brothers sleeping together died instantly. You know they couldn't have done the job because the gun was left in the room of the third brother. What is the answer, Corporal?"



"I be John Small," said the old man. "Reckon I be a thousand years old." "Easily," agreed Corporal David.

"Elmer, of course," admitted Corporal David. "But show me a motive."

Sellers pondered.

"I am not experienced in these affairs, but couldn't something have embittered him against his brothers?"

James nodded assent.

Corporal David faced the officials.

"You want me to believe Elmer killed his two brothers. You want me to believe he then went back to his room and went to bed. You want me to believe he killed himself. Well, I wont do it. Even if he had killed his two brothers—and you can't show me a motive for that—right then he would have been all through. I think the house was entered by an outsider, who killed the brothers, and started the fire."

The gun expert's dry laugh halted him.

"He must have been a remarkable man," James drawled. "He entered a locked house without leaving a trace. He knew a gun was in the house, and he used that gun. He fled, leaving the house locked." His voice grew caustic. "You are outnumbered, Corporal!"

"Very well," said Corporal David. "Call the reporters."

They entered.

"These gentlemen," said Corporal David, "believe Elmer Gilman killed his two brothers and then killed himself. Every physical fact supports their belief. Yet I don't agree."

He lifted his hand.

"No, I can't tell you who did it. That's my job to find out. You fellows can play with me, or ride me. Take your choice."

The tall reporter stepped forward.

"We like your face. Who shall we quote to the effect that this was an outside job?"

The man in gray smiled. He hooked his thumbs again in his gun-belt.

"Blame Corporal Benjamin David, of the State Police."

AT the fire-house both Small and Owens repeated their stories.

Corporal David was brief.

"You admit you were in the Gilman home?"

"Sure, old John Small was," replied the old man.

"That's enough for me," declared Corporal David. He stepped forward. "John Small, I arrest you for the murder of the Gilmans."

The old man's jaw dropped. But Trooper Linton stepped forward.

"You must be crazy, David—trying to play super-cop. Snap out of it, partner!" He produced his notebook. "At two o'clock this morning, Jess Putnam, one of the leading merchants here, picked up Small about nine miles from Tranquil Lake. Their car broke down about five miles from here. They didn't get in to the village until after five o'clock. Putnam was with Small when they walked from the garage, saw the fire in the Gilman home, and turned in the alarm. It all checks up. Get that, partner."

Corporal David's shoulders dropped.

"Sorry, Linny. Sorry, old John Small. You can go any time now." He turned to the others. "Guess Linny was right; I lost my head. Probably trying to play super-cop." He grinned. "Well, let's eat."

After lunch they went to the Gilman house. The floor was covered with sawdust.

"What's this?" demanded Corporal David. "Who thought of it?"

"I did," said Sellers. "I realized the water would ruin the woodwork, so I gave a man an order to enter and spread the sawdust."

"That's why the guard I hired let him in," explained Trooper Linton.

"Good enough," admitted Corporal David. "That explains everything. Now let's try to find something important."

They searched the house at length, but without result. There were no clues.

That night at the hotel Corporal David obtained a reluctant promise from Sellers to wait until the following night to render the formal verdict. The district attorney, after giving the promise, remained in the room of the troopers. He suggested that the reporters be invited in. He talked of police-work, sports and kindred subjects. It was after three o'clock when Sellers left.

"Not a bad egg," was Knight's verdict.

Corporal David grinned.

"No," he admitted. "But he doesn't like us. What I want is something to prevent him turning in a formal verdict. Arresting John Small would have done it, but Linny gummed that up!" He turned to Trooper Linton. "Not that I am blaming you, Diphtheria—I didn't have time to tip you off."

Then he glanced keenly at Knight.

"How about selling some prominent citizen on the idea of forming a citizens' committee and demanding an outside investigation? That will be rough on us, but it will give us time to work."

Knight grinned.

"I probably can do it. Who would you suggest?"

"In a small town," Corporal David explained, "the banker usually is the works. Linny, in your ravings today—or yesterday, rather—you said something about a banker you honored with some of your conversation."

Trooper Linton produced his notes.

"His name is Peter Wilson."

Knight made a note, and departed.

Ten minutes later the snores of Corporal David vied for supremacy with those of Trooper Linton.

CORPORAL DAVID, who preferred late and hearty breakfasts, was in the dining-room that morning when Trooper Linton, who had been working for several hours, came in hurriedly. Excitement was reflected upon his face. He flopped into a chair beside the corporal. The latter calmly drained the last drops of coffee from a pot into a cup and flavored it liberally with sugar.

"Anybody chase you?" he asked. "I told you to wait for me. You'll keep on running around alone in these small towns, and something is going to happen to you!"

"All through?" demanded Trooper Linton. "When you have given your tongue and your teeth their morning workout maybe you will be willing to get down to business. Say the word, Corporal?"

Corporal David reluctantly stepped away from the table.

"Guess they wont bring anything else in. Shoot, Trooper."

"Well," began Trooper Linton, "I went out among the population and mingled, just as you told me to. The first bird I tried to mingle with told me the Boy Scout meeting was two blocks away. I had better luck with the next. He allowed that if we were going to arrest desperate characters like old John Small we better tack two guns on our belts. I fixed it right for you by explaining you were subject to brain-flashes."

Trooper Linton paused for breath.

"The third guy I mingled with I beat to the draw. I started right in by telling him what a bum outfit this is. I explained that I hoped to get out the end of the month. I told him that the dumber you were, the higher up you got. He allowed that you ought to be head of the department, and I told him I had often told you that. Then I asked him what his arguments were.

" 'Started to arrest old John Small,' he croaked, 'then lost his nerve. Small gave a good alibi, so that dumb corporal let him go.'

"I registered polite surprise, as that movie queen who made a fool out of you last summer would say. I asked him if he wouldn't have done the same.

" 'No,' he snaps, 'I wouldn't—not if I was a cop, or trying to be a cop.'

"I asked him why not. He tells me."

Trooper Linton glared at the corporal.

"Dave, John Small and Jess Putnam were seen in Tranquil Lake at one o'clock on the morning of the murder. This guy I mingled with saw them."

Corporal David whistled softly.

"And who was the guy you mingled with?"

Trooper Linton's notes were produced.

"Vacuum-head. No, that isn't his name —that was what he called *you*. I put it down so I wouldn't forget it. Here it is: William North."

He folded the paper and placed it carefully in the pocket of his blouse.

"Don't want to lose that name."

"North isn't a hard name to remember," said Corporal David.

"Vacuum-head is," Trooper Linton objected. "Oh, I almost forgot to tell you. Mr. North is in the real-estate business. He hands out cards. I saved one for you."

"There are a whole lot of things I would rather have you do."

"Sure," Trooper Linton admitted, "you would rather have me find out why John Small lied."

"No," David objected, "I would rather have you find out why Jess Putnam lied. I am a lot more interested in him."

KNIGHT walked into the room. "Wilson now is a famous man," he began. "He is chairman of the citizens' committee. That committee, with some slight prompting, has demanded an outside investigator." Knight's eyes twinkled. "They appeared not to be satisfied with the way you boys are functioning."

Corporal David grinned.

"Who is the investigator?"

"Captain Field," the reporter answered. "If my information is correct, Captain Field is the commanding officer of the Black Horse Troop."

Corporal and trooper roared.

Knight's face was free of guile. "I have promised to meet him when he arrives, and tell him what bums you are."

"Before you do that," Corporal David begged, "tell me how Peter Wilson took the suggestion."

"I was going to talk to you about that," Knight said. "At first he protested against the whole thing—said the local authorities were entirely competent. He was in earnest about it too. Then he switched just as abruptly. I gave him a sales-talk, of course; but I am not quite that good."

"You are good," Corporal David admitted, "but I don't think you are that good, either. Well, my enemy, let's walk to the front porch and part with bitter words."

There were loungers in the chairs, and a group of people across the street.

"You are a dirty, double-crossing bum!" Corporal David roared at Knight. "I don't want to see you near me again!"

The reporter backed away.

"You may be as big as a house, but you don't scare me!" he retorted.

He started down the street.

"Yea, Vacuum-head!" he called over his shoulder.

THAT afternoon Captain Field piloted Border King, his big black horse, into Tranquil Lake. Knight met him upon his arrival. Men standing by declared the commanding officer of the Black Horse Troop left the conference with a promise to wring the necks of Corporal David and Trooper Linton.

But that pleasure was denied the commanding officer. The two worthies could not be found. So Captain Field called a conference of all parties interested in the case for late that night in the offices of the district attorney.

It was after midnight when the group assembled. Sellers stood at the end of the table. James the gun expert sat at his right; the banker Wilson at his left. Dr. Prince, the coroner, stood in one corner of the room. Captain Field, and Knight, sat upon a bench near the table. Reporters and citizens were gathered in the rear.

Sellers took charge.

"We are assembled here at the request of Captain Field. I think I am quoting him correctly when I say he wants facts, and not half-baked theories."

The big man in gray nodded assent.

The banker struggled to his feet.

"As chairman of the citizens' committee, I wish to explain that Captain Field is here at our request. That does not mean we are not satisfied with our local officers. They have seen their duty, and met it nobly. We merely wish to end the bungling that has existed in certain quarters." He paused.

"Gentlemen, I have made a preliminary investigation," Captain Field said. "I have found nothing to disprove the theory held by your officers. The revolting nature of this crime, however, prompts me to suggest that we hold off just a bit longer."

A note of apology crept into his voice.

"Two of the men I command, who have been working on this case, have vanished. I want to look them up, hear their story, and take such action as I may find necessary."

His frank smile shone out.

"I wish I could make you gentlemen understand how I regret all this. We never were popular here. Mr. Sellers was broad enough to overlook that. Now we have been found wanting in this emergency."

Sellers made a gesture which was intended to be gracious.

"Any other business?" he asked.

The drawl of the gun expert arose in the ensuing silence.

"My final examinations conclusively prove that all three mortal bullets—that is, the bullets taken from the bodies—were fired from the revolver found in Elmer Gilman's room. I am prepared to swear to that fact—I am prepared to demonstrate it to any jury. I can demonstrate it here."

"Not now," Captain Field objected. "It's after one o'clock." He yawned. "I do like to sleep occasionally."

"How about a statement regarding your troopers?" demanded one of the reporters.

Captain Field smiled.

"How can I make a statement about them? I don't even know where they are."

THE door opened. Trooper Linton entered, saluted the Captain, and stood beside the table. Behind him came John Small and Jess Putnam. Corporal David was the last man to enter. He saluted Captain Field, and that officer returned the greeting.

"Now then, Trooper Linton," barked the corporal, "stand with your back to this door. Nobody goes out of here, and nobody comes in." His keen glance roved over the room. "The whole cast is here."

The drawl of the gun expert cut in:

"Perhaps we are going to be treated to another dramatic arrest."

"Right!" barked Corporal David. He pointed an accusing finger at John Small. His words were addressed to the Captain.

"This man, who calls himself old John Small, admits he was in the Gilman house right after the murder. He claims he carried Elmer to the window. A fireman claims the same thing, but says he didn't see Small.

"Small claims he wasn't in Tranquil Lake that morning until too late to have done the murders. Jess Putnam supports him in that claim. But Trooper Linton located a man who saw them both hours earlier. What is the name of that man, Trooper Linton?"

The trooper, standing in the doorway, consulted his notes.

"Vac—I mean William North. He is in the real-estate business."

"Both Mr. North and Mr. Putnam," said Sellers, "are leading citizens of this town."

"That's fine!" retorted Corporal David. "I am going to give Leading Citizen Putnam just five minutes to tell me why he lied. I want him to tell me why he prompted old John Small to lie. Before he tells me this, I am going to warn him that anything he may say will be used against him. If he doesn't tell me I am going to arrest him and John Small for the murder of the Gilman brothers."

Putnam moistened his lips. His voice came as if from a distance:

"I—I have nothing to say."

"You are a dirty, double-crossing bum!" Corporal David roared. "I don't want to see you near me again!" The reporter backed away.

Corporal David produced a pair of handcuffs. He tossed them into the lap of Peter Wilson the banker.

"Hold them, will you? I may need them, and need them quick."

He turned to Small.

"You there, old John Small—I warn you that anything you may say will be used against you. Now then, tell me why you lied! And if you don't I'll arrest you sure-fire this time. Quick, now!"

The watery eyes of the old man wavered. He turned to Trooper Linton, standing guard at the door.

"You are the friend of old John Small. John Small did lie. He lied because this man told him to." The old man pointed at Putnam.

"That's good!" snapped Corporal David. "Why did he tell you to lie?"

"Old John Small doesn't know." The aged man's fingers twitched, his knees shook; he seemed about to fall. The corporal came to his side, and his huge arm crept across the thin shoulders as he piloted the old man to a place vacated by Captain Field.

"Buck up, old John Small." David's big hand pressed the thin one wavering before him. "I know you are innocent. You aren't going to jail! Just try to tell me everything that happened that night here in Tranquil Lake."

The old man struggled to control his wavering faculties. His words, when he spoke, sounded like a recitation.

"We put the car in the garage. Old John Small walked down the street with Mr. Putnam. We came to the house. There was a fight on the step. We went—"

"Wait a minute," Corporal David interrupted; "what house?"

"Mr. Wilson's house."

WILSON leaped from his chair. The handcuffs clattered to the floor.

"Sit down," ordered Corporal David, "and pick those up—I may need them." He turned to Small. "Who was fighting?"

"Mr. Wilson and Warren Gilman."

"Anybody else?"

"Another man. Old John Small couldn't see him."

"Good boy, old John Small. You've

done your bit." Corporal David stood with his hand upon the bent shoulders of the old man. There was a dangerous glitter in his eyes as he faced Putnam.

"Why did you tell this old man to lie?"

"I did it because I was afraid," Putnam began. Then the words fairly rushed out: "I was afraid of him." He pointed at the banker. "I knew he would take it out on me if we told. So that night I told old John Small to say nothing about seeing the fight. The next morning, when I learned what had happened, I knew it was nothing for us to be mixed up in. I found old John Small. I told him to say the car broke down. I told him to say we didn't get here until later than we did."

"Why are you afraid of Wilson?" demanded Corporal David.

"He owns me,"—Putnam blurted out the answer,—"he owns my house; he owns my business; he owns me body and soul."

"Yes!" The word came from between the lips of the corporal as a bullet leaves a gun. "And he owns the district attorney!"

Sellers struggled to his feet, his face livid with rage.

"More heroics! More super-cop stuff! More—"

"Sit down, Sellers!" The deep voice of the captain of the Black Horse Troop boomed through the room. "Sit down, or I'll knock you down!" Captain Field faced Corporal David, respect, trust and affection in his eyes. "Go ahead, Sergeant," he said quietly.

Bewilderment spread over the face of Corporal David.

"If it please the Captain—"

"All right, Corporal," drawled Captain Field. "But I said 'Sergeant.'" His face twisted in a crooked grin. "I meant it. Don't quibble with me, sir! Go ahead, Sergeant!"

Sergeant David advanced to the banker.

"Pick up those cuffs." Wilson was unable to move. His face was colorless. His lips moved, but no sound came from them.

"Peter Wilson," said Sergeant David, "I arrest you for the murder of Warren Gilman, Nathan Gilman and Elmer Gilman!" He snapped the handcuffs into position. Then he turned to Captain Field.

"If it please the Captain, may I borrow his bracelets?"

Captain Field grinned.

"Haven't got them with me." He indicated Trooper Linton. "Borrow a pair from Corporal Linton."

BUT before Sergeant David could follow the advice, Sellers made a blind dash for the door. Corporal Linton caught his outstretched hands and held him firm.

"Easy there," he cautioned. "If the traffic on this door keeps up, we'll have to put in a semaphore." He glared at Sellers reproachfully. "And you a district attorney too!" He grinned at Sergeant David. "Reckon the boy friend must have known what the sergeant wanted!"

Sergeant David advanced. Again handcuffs clicked.

"Sellers, I arrest you as an accomplice in all these murders. I'll read them off for you, if you want."

The district attorney glared at him.

"Pull them away from the door, Corporal," ordered Sergeant David. "Now, James, you get out and stay out. I happen to know you had no part in this; all you did is what you usually do: You were hired to make Elmer Gilman the goat. You made all the evidence serve that end. You always do. I should pinch you, but I'm not going to. I am going to leave you to live with your thoughts at night."

THE gun expert slunk from the room. Sergeant David turned to the old man.

"You can go, old John Small." Then he pointed toward the glaring banker. "That bird offered one thousand dollars for information leading to the arrest of the murderer. He and his pals actually put up the money. You furnished that information, old John Small, so the grand is yours."

He turned to the coroner.

"Thanks a lot, Doctor. You were on the level with us all the time."

He addressed Putnam.

"You made a mistake when you lied. I think you have paid for it." There was a challenging smile upon his face as he glanced at Captain Field. "Anyway, Putnam, I am going to let you go," he added. "A super-cop has certain privileges."

Then he faced the reporters.

"Well, boys, here is the low-down:

"Warren Gilman played the market, and he was a whiz. Always won. He grew to be an oracle. Even Wilson went to him for advice. He recommended Universal Engines. Then the stock dropped twenty points. Wilson had played so heavily that it cleaned him out. I expect the examiners to find a real mess over at his bank. It also cleaned out Sellers, who was let in on

the good thing by Wilson. Incidentally, the only reason Sellers wasn't bankrupt long ago is because Wilson let him ride along. That was why he owned Sellers body and soul, just as he owned Putnam.

"Well, you can imagine how kindly Wilson and Sellers felt toward Warren Gilman. Then they found out he had played the stock short. Warren Gilman is dead, but from what I can find out, that is a trick quite true to type of the family. But this time, instead of hitting the ordinary run of people, it hit Wilson and Sellers.

"They found this out the day Warren Gilman came home from a trip, and the day before the murder. They had the fight with him that night, just as old John Small described. Sellers was the man he couldn't recognize.

"Wilson went to the Gilman house that morning early. He knew the house. He knew the garage was connected with the house. He knew the garage was never locked. He knew the gun was in Elmer's room, and that it was loaded.

"He crept up there and got the gun, then went into Warren's room and shot him. Nathan woke up, and cowered under the sheet. Wilson fired again. The flare set fire to the sheet. Then he sneaked out. Elmer probably woke up and saw him. So the banker had to kill Elmer too."

Sergeant David wheeled upon Sellers and Wilson. "That's right, isn't it?"

There was no answer.

"After the murder," David resumed, "Wilson went to Sellers, and they both tried to throw us off the track.

"In reality, this was an easy case. Captain Field suspected Sellers when the call first came in. Sellers hated us; he called us only because he hoped to get us in bad and escape punishment through blunders on our part.

"Then he made his first mistake—ordering the sawdust on the floor. I knew he had no love for the Gilmans. He put it there to destroy footprints—not to save furniture. That made me begin to see light.

"He left to get James right after the crime was discovered. That wasn't logical. This was his big case; he could have phoned for James. But by going away he gave Chief McCormick, who means well, a chance to bungle the case without putting any blame on Sellers—and McCormick did it, when he rubbed the fingerprints off the revolver.

"It is interesting about Small and Owens both claiming they carried Elmer out. I think they both did. They were just so excited they didn't see each other.

"But to get back to Sellers: He tipped us off by his own attitude. He stuck around our room one night. He wanted the reporters there. He pretended an interest in our work, but what he really wanted was to know just what we knew.

"I first connected Wilson when I tried to think of somebody with enough power over him to draw him into this thing. I knew he never did it himself. Bankers are usually all-powerful in a small town. Wilson gave it all away when he first opposed an outside investigator, and then eagerly assented when we pressed him.

"But all this wasn't legal evidence. The lucky break came when Corporal Linton found out Putnam and Small lied. Putnam told me the whole story before we came in here, and the show here was just ballyhoo. Putnam insisted upon it; he was so scared of Sellers he thought we couldn't make the charges stick."

Sergeant David saluted the reporters.

EARLY that morning, with Sellers and Wilson safely lodged in jail, Captain Field and Knight were occupying one bed in a room in the hotel. Sergeant David and Corporal Linton climbed into the other.

"Move over, Sergeant," ordered Corporal Linton.

"Move over yourself, Corporal!"

There was the sound of a scuffle, then silence. Then Linton sang softly:

State cops are dumb, and getting dumber;
Aint we got fun?
Corporals now are acting sergeants,
Lord, aint they dumb!

Again there was the sound of a scuffle.

"Something tells me that two super-cops will soon be on stable duty!" came a voice from Captain Field's bed.

Once more silence reigned.

"Good night, Bad News," said Sergeant David.

Corporal Linton fumbled in the pocket of his blouse hanging near the bed. He produced a paper, unfolded it, and held it so the rays of the moon coming through the open window revealed the writing. For a moment he studied it, then replaced the paper.

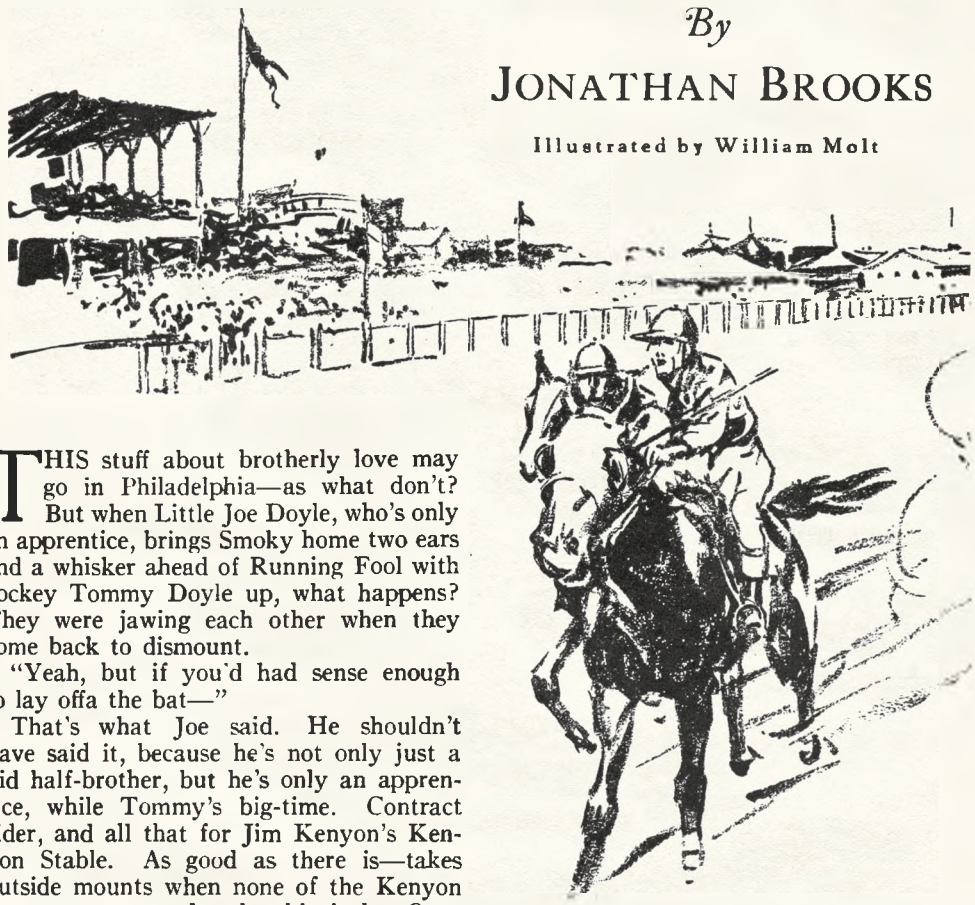
"Good night, Vacuum-head!" he rejoined.

The Winner's Circle

By

JONATHAN BROOKS

Illustrated by William Molt



THIS stuff about brotherly love may go in Philadelphia—as what don't? But when Little Joe Doyle, who's only an apprentice, brings Smoky home two ears and a whisker ahead of Running Fool with Jockey Tommy Doyle up, what happens? They were jawing each other when they come back to dismount.

"Yeah, but if you'd had sense enough to lay offa the bat—"

That's what Joe said. He shouldn't have said it, because he's not only just a kid half-brother, but he's only an apprentice, while Tommy's big-time. Contract rider, and all that for Jim Kenyon's Kenyon Stable. As good as there is—takes outside mounts when none of the Kenyon horses are out, and makes big jack. Once he tied I. Parke's record of five in a row. None better, and famous for his finishes. Boy, he boots 'em home. And Little Joe is only an apprentice, and if you think a bug can crack at a jock like that—

"If you'd had sense enough to lay offa the bat,"—well, never mind. But he can't, that's all.

"Think I can't use the bat?" snarls Tommy. "Watch this!" and he lands on Little Joe—*pow!* "And this!" Again. But they're parted before Little Joe gets going.

It is a cinch they would have fought it out later that night, only Little Joe lives at home with his mother, while Tommy and Diddy Doyle have a nifty apartment downtown with garage accommodations for Tommy's roadster—so they didn't get together.

Diddy Doyle is Tommy's full brother and used to be a rider himself before he got too fat from unhandsome living. Now he books outside mounts for Tommy, and he touts and he grifts and he grafts.

The next day there was a row, though, because Tommy Doyle had a chip on his shoulder.

"Apprentice hand-rides Smoky home ahead of Running Fool," the papers said. "Kid brother gets up to head Brilliant Doyle in one of Doyle's great finishes."

They didn't say Tommy was whipping, but everybody knew it that knows anything, because he always was a bat rider. Well, this makes Tommy sorer even than he was. He cries to Diddy about it, and Diddy is with him. Diddy knows his bread and butter. He knows Little Joe never will

THE sport of kings and Kentucky here provides a specially lively and engaging story—by the author of "Tails We Win," "Horse-tracks," "Double-gaited" and other good ones.

"Curlpapers! Doyle! Doyle!" shrieks the crowd. And Little Joe rides Papers home these last few yards for a win!

make him a dime. So they go to Kenyon's trainer, Ikie Berman, and they tell him Little Joe's terrible, and oughtn't to be put up on anything but dray-horses, and not only that, but some of the horses Joe's worked haven't been fit or ready for Tommy when he's took them out for races.

IKE yesses them along, because he thinks maybe Little Joe will come through some day, he don't know how or why. But he only makes Tommy hotter'n before, which he don't want to do, because you do not quarrel with the best jock at the track. Then there's another row in the jockey quarters before the third race, which is one for maiden two-year-olds, a poor bunch because it's September and they'd have won races before if they were any account at all. Anyway, Tommy's picking up a fee, since Kenyon hasn't anything in this race; and some boob gets Little Joe to ride his pup.

It was terrible. Tommy rides Little Joe harder than he rides his dog, all over the track, and makes life miserable for the little freckle-faced kid. And then he beats him out at the wire, whipping like an old Hoosier schoolmaster.

"Still think I can't use the bat, hey?" sneers Tommy, when they go up the track.

"All you do with that whip is slow up your horse," says Little Joe. "My dog died on me, or we'd have beaten you again. Then I'd have needed only one more winner."

"Is that so?" Tommy demands. And when they get in the house again, he slaps Joe. This time the kid smacks back quick,

and busts Tommy right in the nose. But they're parted some more, see? And the first guy that horns in is Spikie Schulz, a tough, ornery little Dutchman that wants to help keep Little Joe in his place.

Now, Little Joe Doyle is a good guy. He minds his own business most of the time, and it is not much trouble because he hasn't got much business. Gets up early and works the Kenyon bunch for Ikie. Goes home and sleeps. Hangs around the track, usually with a book in his hand, afternoons, even if he don't ride more'n twice a week. Reads at night, out at his mother's house, until early bedtime. Got freckles on his nose and a serious look in his eyes. Maybe he'll amount to something—but not on the race-track.

"What's this in the paper about you and Tommy?" asks his mother, that night. "You two been fighting again? I want you to leave Tommy alone, do you hear?"

"Aw, I never hurt him," says Little Joe. "Yesterday I win, hand-riding, and it made him sore, because he had the bat flying. And he swung on me, afterwards. Today he chased me all over the track, and I was trying for that thirty-ninth win, but he took me. And afterwards when he slapped me, I got mad and hit him."

"Joe Doyle, I wont have it!" exclaimed his mother. "You must let Tommy alone. He's older than you are, and a crack jockey, and he makes big money—"

"A lot *we* know about how much he makes," says Joe. "I don't see him helping any with the rent or the groceries."

"I'd be ashamed," chided his mother. "Tommy's a man grown, and he does not *have* to help out here if he don't want to. He's got fine friends among big people, and he can't afford—"

"Yeah, and a lot Hilda Kenyon will think of him if she ever finds out how he treats you," says little Joe.

"Joe Doyle, take shame!" flared his mother. "Tommy's a fine boy, and I'm proud of him. He's made good, he has! Which is more than I can say for some other boys. And if he needs his money for something else, I guess we'll get along."

JOE went to sleep over that, trying to figure out why mothers are the way they are. He knew she wasn't slapping at Diddy over his head, but at himself. Two years and still an apprentice—only thirty-eight winners. All he could make, it took to keep the little home together and a roof over his mother's head. He wanted to save a little and study at the law school, over in Cincinnati, but he couldn't, in all conscience, with the house to keep. He might fly the coop, only what would become of Mother? And here she was, sticking up for Tommy, who never gave her a dime, only once in a while brought her a box of candy or a bunch of flowers!

So the next morning early Little Joe Doyle was out at the track galloping this one and that one according to the way Ike told him, and still wondering what kind of a world it was that didn't give him a chance but coddled Tommy and kidded their mother so that she couldn't see—but, well, you don't quite criticise your mother. And after while here come Tommy in his roadster and there's another car with a party of swells in it. Tommy gets out and takes off his coat, and the swells, including a couple of pretty girls, stroll over to the fence.

Ike calls Joe and tells him to get up on a nag and work along easy beside and behind Tommy on Curlycue. That's the Kenyon star three-year-old, and nobody but Tommy Doyle rides him. So they go out on the track, past the gate where the swells are watching. The girls give Tommy a hand.

"Stay back there, kid," growls Tommy, showing off.

Little Joe knows how to handle a company pony, and he does. The idea is to remind Curlycue that he always gets home first. So then when that's done, they go out again, this time with Tommy aboard Curlpapers, the second best three-year-old, and Joe on another scrub. And once more Tommy shows off. That's that.

But when they're through, Joe sits down on a bench against the barn and picks up a book he's laid down there. Thinks he'll just look at it awhile until Ike rousts him up again or chases him home for his nap.

"Oh, there's the boy that rode the other horses," Little Joe hears a girl saying. Of course, he looks up, because it is a pretty voice; and then he sees it is a pretty girl. Yeah. *Pretty* don't tell more than half of one per cent of it. She's a lot more intoxicating than that. "My goodness," the girl says next, with a laugh, "do all the jockeys wear black eyes?"

Joe blushes, and tries to look back at his book, but he can't take his eyes off this girl. He sees it's the party of swells, and Tommy is showing them the stables and telling them all about horse-racing.

"Aw, he's no jockey, only a 'prentice," says Tommy. "They get black eyes when they monkey with jocks, Miss Kenyon."

So that was the way it was. Hilda Kenyon, old man Kenyon's girl. No wonder Tommy was nuts about her. She sure was a peach. Little, with blue eyes and red hair.

"And who is the boy? Introduce him," she says. "I should know all Father's people."

"Aw, yuh don't introduce 'prentices," scowled Tommy.

"Nor brothers," Little Joe speaks up, all of a sudden. He's sore, clear through, at Tommy. And why not? There's plenty of people to swell up on, without picking your own family.

"Oh, this is the little hand-rider?" laughs Hilda Kenyon. Joe blushes, hard, and then gets redder still when Tommy puts in his quarter's worth.

"Hand-rider? *No* rider," Tommy scoffs. "He only uses his hands and feet to hold on with."

Little Joe's so mad he's sick, and he hurts so that it shows in his face and his eyes. He looks at Hilda Kenyon and she looks at him, and she stops laughing.

"Are you reading between times?" she says, to Little Joe.

"Yeah, I got a book," says Joe, sort of dumb. He never was much of a one to talk. He's standing up now, and wishing he could sit down again. You get kind of weak in the knees, talking to a girl like Hilda Kenyon.

"Novel?" she says.

"No, just a book," Joe tells her. "Kind of a text-book. I got a course in extension, over at the University."

"Wants to be a lawyer," jeered Tommy. "I expect he'd better be, because he's too dumb to be a jock. Two years and on'y thirty-eight winners; still a 'prentice. Now down here is Curlycue's stall, and let's—"

THAT'S the last Little Joe hears, because Tommy drags the early-morning society slummers on down the line. And besides, Ike yells at him just then that he's got another one he wants worked. So Little Joe climbs up, without his book, and does his stuff some more, thinking all the time. Too dumb to be a jock. Gotta stay at home and take care of Mother. She thinks he's a boob. So does Tommy, and so does Diddy, who lives off of Tommy. And Tommy makes a monkey out of him before this girl!

"Ike," he says, when he brings this bones back, "think I'll ever make a jock?"

"Well, yes, if yuh wanta be one," Ike says. "Y've learned to ride without a bat; that's something. I think yuh use y'r head, and that's something else. And yuh been two years now, gettin' 'sperience. Long-time 'prentice, long-time jock, I say. Don't care for these overnight sensations; they only last over another night, usually. Why? D'yuh wanta *be* a jock?"

"No, only to show 'em I *can*," says Joe. "I want to go to school, what I want to do."

"Well, why don't you?" Ike demanded. "With Tommy and Diddy to take care of yer mother—"

"Hmph," grunted Little Joe, scornfully. So he took his book and went off home, and when his mother asked him if he'd seen Tommy, he only grunted again.

"Or Diddy?" she asked. "They always stick together."

"Sure, they stick together," Little Joe flared. "Why not? They gyp together, too. But not early in the mornings. Diddy sleeps. And Tommy comes out late after I've done most of the work. I know 'em." And with that, he slams off to lay down and take a little nap. Only he can't sleep. What he wants to do is cry, but then a grown guy can't do that. Fellow almost twenty, and through high school!

So early around noon he goes back to the track and he gets hold of Ike and he says: "Ike, I got a proposition!"—just like that.

"Shoot, Bug," says Ike.

"Old man going to start Curlycue and Curlpapers both in the Handicap Saturday?"

"Yeah."

"Tommy on Curlycue? Who's gonna take Papers?"

"Best kid we can get, because the old man wants to win that race, or run one-two, if he can."

"Listen, Ike, I gotta mount 'safternoon, see? Old Vinegar Jug, in the sixth. You watch me handle him. You ask the old man to watch. And if I put up a ride, will yuh go to bat for me to ride Papers Saturday?"

"That old mule-head? Kid, you can't ride him!"

"But if I do, Ike, will you? Anyway, will you watch? And ask the old man to give me a look?" Little Joe insists.

"Aw, now—"

"You do that for me, Ike, please," Little Joe begs. So Ike says he will, and he does.

WELL, this old Vinegar Jug is a tough, heavy-headed skate that goes nuts and wins a race about once a year. He's notional, stubborn, tough to handle. But Little Joe kids him and cuddles him along in the bunch for most of the mile and sixteenth, and then in the stretch he coaxes him out to the outside and brings him down boilin'. Too smart to go inside and get pinched off. No sir, he wings him home outside, where he's safe, and he's up by his buck-teeth in front of—of a bones that Tommy Doyle was batting for all he was worth!

Tommy and Diddy, they jump him, over by the barn, when the seventh is being run.

"Smart guy, hey?" snarls Tommy. "Well, I'll tear your ear off—"

"And we stood to clean up if Tommy got that dog home on top," butts in Diddy. "Had the roll on him. At a price, too. Listen, kid—"

But Little Joe should worry, for he's hung up Number Thirty-nine. Only one to go! And he sure had fingered his old mule-head all the way. If only Ike, and the old man had seen it—

"Oh, here he is," he hears Hilda Kenyon's voice, and she's all excited. "Mr. Doyle, I certainly want—"

"*Mister?*" interrupts Tommy, grinning.

"But I don't know his name—"

"Joe Doyle, ma'am," says Little Joe.

"I had a bet on Vinegar Jug, Joe," she says, laughing, "because I saw you were to ride him. And I've collected, too. Big price. And I want to make you a present of some books—"

"Aw, now, Miss Kenyon—" begins Joe.

"Bug's got a following, and this is rich," jeered Diddy Doyle.

"Got 'at old mule home, didn't I—with just my hands?" Little Joe demanded, flaring up.

"Showin' off," muttered Tommy. "If y'd hit him a lick with the bat it wouldn't even been close. Grandstanding, for a close finish, I calls it."

"Anyway, you won," said Hilda Kenyon. "I don't know about the technique—"

"What?" gawped Tommy, who's dumb. Technique is ninety dollars beyond him.

"You see, Miss Kenyon," says Little Joe, "sometimes when you whip a horse you lose ground by it, because you lose your balance and throw him off his stride, and—"

"You tell 'em, kid; you'll be a jock in 1940," jeered Diddy.

"Yeah, you tell 'em," echoed Tommy with a sneer.

"And it takes an awful good jockey to whip without doing more damage than good," Little Joe finishes.

"Say, who you talkin' about?" Tommy demands.

"Now, now, no quarreling," laughs Miss Kenyon. "Thanks, Joe. And I'll talk to you some other time about those books. I really mean it. I mean, I really do."

"Much obliged, ma'm," says Little Joe, as she goes away. "I'm glad you had a bet down."

THEN both Tommy and Diddy leap down Little Joe's throat and will choke him to death unless Ike comes along—which he does, just in time. And Little Joe, he forgets all about his quarrel with the two older brothers, and he grabs Ike.

"Listen, Ike," he says. "Did you see it? Didn't I handle 'at old dude about right? Was the old man looking, Ike?"

"Yeah, we saw you," Ike says, sort of holding himself in, not to promise anything or commit himself.

"Then can't I have the leg up on Papers Saturday?" insists Joe.

"What?" yells Tommy. "Lemme laugh!"

"Big joke," says Diddy. "The boy's kiddin' you, Ike."

"No, he's not kiddin' me," Ike says, slow.

"Then he's kiddin' himself," Tommy snaps. "Listen, kid, be y'rself. Don't try to run this stable, or ride real horses in real races. You're a clown, all right, but this is no circus, see?"

"Aw, go smoke a halter-strap, you big cheese!" says Little Joe. "I can ride with you all day, and beat you in the evening, and you know it, you and your bat."

"Another laugh," jeers Tommy, getting red in the face. "Well, you stay outa that handicap Saturday, or I'll not ride, get me? I'll not be disgraced by a dumb kid 'at thinks he's jock, before all my following!"

He goes away, with Diddy right behind him, patting him on the back and yessing him along as usual. Before they've gone far, this dirty little Spikie Schulz, who's been ruled off two tracks, falls in with them. Joe saw him.

"You boys sure do love one another, hey?" grinned Ike. "But say, I'm thinkin' about Saturday, kid."

"You put it up to the old man, Ike, will you, Ike?"

"Think about it," was all Ike would say.

And all that night Little Joe dreamed about riding Curlpapers in the Handicap

Both Tommy and Diddy leap down Little Joe's throat, and will choke him to death unless Ike comes along —which he does, just in time.

and towing the field home by his tail. If only old man Kenyon would leave him up, see? And he'd show Hilda who was a jock, and who wasn't. Thirty-nine winners—make it forty! But then the next day, and it was on a Thursday, somebody give him the leg on a three-legged, tough-mouthed hophead, and he was a bad ninth in a field of nine. Down went the elevator!

Poor little Joe Doyle was lower'n a coal bin in April, that night! He guessed they'd never look at him now, or call him out again. No use for him to go on trying to ride. Might as well look for a job, and take care of the old lady and the house, and forget all about studying law over at the University. Let Tommy go ahead and make the jack and the reputation. And let Diddy go ahead and grift. Maybe they'd give Mother a lift, sometime. Yeah, *maybe!*

And so he come pretty near not getting up to go out to the track at all the next morning, only his mother, she got him out. At that, she nearly had to shove the kid out the door, because he didn't have no stomach for riding no horses, nowhere. And when he got there he was still low, only Miss Kenyon and her dad, old man Jim Kenyon, proprietor of the Kenyon Stables, he was there, too.

"You're the boy Ike says wants a chance, hey?" says Mr. Kenyon.

"That's the boy, Dad," says Hilda.

"Oh, I did, but it's no use," Little Joe says. "Yesterday I thought I was a rider, and then in that third race—"

"Boy, you couldn't have got that dog in without a stick of dynamite and a box of matches," Mr. Kenyon laughs.

"And Tommy says I can't—" begins Little Joe.

"Tommy's smart, like a blister," said Ike, all of a sudden. He knew too many times when Tommy had tried to use his own judgment instead of sticking to orders, see? "And blisters swell up and bust."

"Girl says you want to be a lawyer," said old man Kenyon. "What's the idea hanging around a dirty race-track?"

"Got to work," says Little Joe. "And a lawyer gets in a lot dirtier places than a race-track, don't he?"

"Helps his mother, Dad," Hilda speaks up. "And he can ride—I know it."

"Well, as soon as our high-priced and high-powered Doyle gets here—"

"Comin' now, sir," says Ike. "Here's his car."

SO they put Little Joe up on Curlpapers, and Tommy, not liking it a bit, had the leg on Curlycue, and the pair of them went out on the track for a last real work before the big handicap. Tommy, the star jock,

on the crack three-year-old, and Joe, the bug, on the stable's second choice, see? So Tommy he lit right out to show up the dumb kid, and he'd rode Curlycue in all his races and knew what he could do and how to handle him. And Little Joe, the boob, this was the first time he'd ever been aboard Curlpapers and he had to sort of get hold of the colt. Well, they went three quarters so fast you had to hold your hat, and when they come home where was Little Joe? Well, this is where he was—he was right there or thereabouts, with Papers able to swing his head and grab a hunk of Tommy's leg if he got hungry. That's where he was. Which shows either Papers had more foot than what they thought he had, or else Little Joe had better hands and head than what they thought, see?

"Well?" said Mr. Kenyon, when they come back.

"He beat me," mutters Little Joe, all down in the jaw.

"Yeah, the kid can't ride a hobby-horse," sneers Tommy.

"So?" says Ike, who's noticed the way Tommy was riding, putting out all he had, when they went by him, there on the rail. "Joe, was you tryin' to win a race, just now?"

"No, but then the colt kind of felt like running, only I couldn't get him up in time," says Little Joe.

"I'll say you couldn't," says Tommy. "And that's about all for you, kid. Better go home and go to bed."

He high-hats around there like he owns the place, and Little Joe sort of sneaks away, sick all over. Here he's had his chance, and he muffed it. After Hilda says he could ride, too. What's the use? But the fact of the matter is he was too dumb, or sick, or something, to see that Mr. Kenyon and Ike were both darned well pleased with the way he had done what he had done, and with Curlpapers, too. They'd never dreamed Curlpapers was as good as he looked beside Curlycue, because blamed few colts were that good. And Tommy, he was so satisfied with himself that he didn't really see what was going on, either. He saw Ike and Mr. Kenyon talking, but he was too dumb to figure what they were talking about. So he looks around for Hilda, and she's gone.

WELL, now, Little Joe, he had started off for home, blue and discouraged. And Hilda, seeing her dad and Ike busy talking and not being especially anxious to talk to this big I-and-Me-man Tommy, she started off after Joe. Little Joe remembers, when he's halfway outa the grounds, that mebbe Ike has some more he wants worked so he turns around and starts back. That's when he meets Hilda, and if he hadn't cheered up some then, why he wasn't human, that's all.

"Joe, what did you run away for?" Hilda demands. She's a spoiled little dickens, what she is. "I wanted to talk to you."

"Oh, I was feeling too sunk, I guess," says Little Joe.

"Why—because you didn't beat Curlycue? Pooh, and pooh-pooh!" she laughs. "I'm telling you that you can beat Tommy, and Papers can beat Curlycue, if you ride him!"

"Who? Me?" asks Joe. "Say, listen, not a chance. Even if I could they wouldn't put me up on Papers tomorrow." He wouldn't believe a stroke of lightning even if it was to hit him, the way he felt.

"Don't argue with me." And Hilda stamps her little foot and frowns. "I like you, and I know what you can do! And I wanted to make you a proposition, Joe. Listen!"—and they've started back to the stables again. "Suppose you ride Curlpapers tomorrow. You don't want to be a jockey, but you can be. And you can be a lawyer, if you like, too! You ride, and I'll buy some tickets on Papers, and if you win, my tickets will buy all the law-books you have to study! What do you say to that?"

"Aw, now, listen, Hilda," says Joe. He forgets he hasn't any business calling her by her first name. But does she notice it? Not any. "That's certainly swell of you. But look, Tommy's a first-class jock, even if he can't use the bat without blame' near falling off and slowing down his horse. And Curlycue is good, I tell you."

"I would let my brother shove me back all the time," she protests; "why, I'd be ashamed. You're just as good as he is! And here's your chance to go to school if you want to as bad as you say you do!"

"But the books aren't everything," says Little Joe. "Got to have tuition. And then I got to help Mother, and keep on working, some way or other."

"You do what I tell you, and quit arguing with me, Joe Doyle," snaps Hilda Kenyon. "I never saw such a boy!"

She's getting mad, and no wonder. But then Joe was just naturally so low he didn't know what he was doing, that's all.

So they're almost back to the stables by this time, and here comes Tommy Doyle in his swell roadster.

"Hey, kid, Ike wants you to work some more," says Tommy. "Better get back to your leather. Hilda, can I take you home, or to town?"

"No, thanks, I'm going with Dad," she says, and walks right along with Little Joe. That makes Tommy sore, of course.

SO Little Joe works four or five more colts and then he goes home. Ike don't say anything to him, and neither does Mr. Kenyon. And that afternoon he hangs around the track and nobody has a word for him. Nobody has a dog for him to ride, either, even if he has put over two winners this week, and so he goes home again to supper lower'n a deep-sea diver's feet.

Then he's reading in one of his books and wishing he'd never saw a horse, when Mother gets all excited because she's got company. Not only Tommy, but Diddy—both boys—comes out to see her. And Tommy, he hands her a seventy-five-cent box of candy, and from the way she acts, you'd think he'd handed her a canceled mortgage on the old home place. Little Joe turns up his lip. Can you beat this? Mothers are queer, sometimes!

"Well, we're honored!" says Little Joe, looking up from his book.

"Oh, there's the 'prentice kid," sneers Tommy. "Say, kid, you're gonna ride Papers tomorrow and—"

"Who says so?" asks Joe, his heart where Al said, where his palate ought to be. "News to me."

"Well, I say so," Tommy says. "They told me, and I tried to talk 'em out of it. But they think you can handle him. Now then, you listen to me. You stick on that horse, and don't yuh fall off, see? And you look where I'm going, and try to stay with me, see? Old man wants us to run one-two, and that makes me sick, because I can't ride two horses! And I can't help you any, either. But you hold on to that colt, and try to stay right behind me, understand?"

"Yeah, your ridin' smells so bad I can follow it with my nose," says Little Joe, gettin' sore—and why not? "And if you go to the bat, I'll beat you home."

"That's a laugh," says Tommy.

"Don't you do it," speaks up Diddy, real worried. "Tommy's gonna take this race. We're putting heavy jack on Curlycue in the poolrooms—none of this *mutuel* entry price for *us!* Lost a big bunch when you win with Vinegar Jug. Wanta get it back! We gotta win, and don't you throw us down, either, d'you hear?"

"Yeah, one of you says I can't, and the other one says please don't," Little Joe grins.

"I'm on'y tellin' you," growls Tommy. "I'll smack you down if you pull any of your funny stuff."

"And why would you wanta beat your own brothers?" demands Diddy.

"That's what I want to know," speaks up Mother Doyle. "The idea of your even thinking about doing a thing like that—beating Tommy when he's got the best horse!"

"I never said I would," says Little Joe. "And I aint saying I wont, either."

"Look here, you little clown," says Tommy, making a move like he will crown Joe right there.

"Now, boys, boys!" begs their mother.

"I'm only saying that when I get my orders from Ike or the old man, why, I'll ride to 'em, that's all," says Joe. "I'm cert'n'y not takin' orders from *you.*" And he glares at Tommy. "Or you, either, you poor fish!" And he hands Diddy a dirty look.

"Orders, nothing," exclaims Diddy. "We're just tellin' you, for your own good. Are you dumb enough to think you gotta ride accordin' to Ike, or old man Kenyon?"

"Sure, he's even dumber," says Tommy. "C'mon, Diddy. No use talkin' to him. Let's go. Friend waitin' for us."

"Spike Schulz, I suppose," Joe says. "Lay away from that crook!"

"Mind your own business," snaps Diddy.

"If any," Tommy adds. And they beat it back downtown.

AND Mother Doyle had thought all the time they'd come home to see her, and maybe you think she didn't take Little Joe over the coals for a good tongue-lashing! Him tryin' to tell his elders what to do. Elders, and betters. . . . . Until he went off to bed with his book to get away from her. But he couldn't read. All he could do was think about riding Curlpapers tomorrow. Sounded funny, Diddy and Tommy talking about a killing on Curlycue. No odds in a favorite. Entry, too. Bet a cooky Hilda had told the old man to let him have Papers. Maybe she even asked Ike, too. She thinks he can—oh, well!

SO when he went out to the track early in the morning as usual, Ike chased him back home again, after telling him he's goin' to get up on Papers. Get some rest. Papers and Curlycue both to start. Big field. One of 'em might come through. Old man wants 'em to run one-two, if they can, and mebbe they can.

'Orders for me?" asks Little Joe.

"Only just that," says Ike. "Get away as good as you can, and get as far up front as you can, and stay there."

"And Curlycue?"

"Take him if you can," grins Ike. "But he's good. And Tommy will be out to win."

Little Joe didn't wait to hear any more. He's all excited now, for the news is official and he's got his orders. Chance for Number Forty. End this 'prentice stuff! Show Miss Hilda he can ride. And if she does get her some bets on Papers—well, that old law course might be just around the next turn of the track, see?

Well, he calls her up on the telephone from a pay-station for a nickel, and she's not up yet, because she's been out late the night before to some kind of a swell society party. But she comes to the phone, very sleepy, and sounds awful sweet and nice, and she's sure glad about him.

"I'm tickled to death, Joe," she says, "and you can do it, too. I've talked to Dad. See you after the race."

And if you think that old craft Zeppelin was walking on any more clouds than what Little Joe Doyle, the young brother, was, why, you're crazy. Listen, that kid—oh, well! He didn't even hear his mother when she was trying to tell him that Tommy and Diddy had been out again and told her to tell him so-and-so, and so-and-so. And he didn't nap any nap, either. How can a guy sleep? And what had she said to her dad, and why would she even see him, let alone pay any attention to him? Just a freckle-faced little kid with a fool idea he wanted to be a lawyer.

So he beats it away from the house when his mother is out back, and she don't get another rap at him on Tommy's account. Why will mothers sometimes go blind and play one son (usually the wrong one) against the field? And then when Little Joe gets to the jockey quarters, he runs into Tommy just outside, and Tommy tries to tell him some more.

"Kid, I'm only tellin' yuh for your own good," he says. "You lay off, 'safternoon. Papers aint got it. But don't you try to get up there, see? Because the old man's down heavy on Curlycue, and he aint got a nickel on Papers."

"I got my orders," says Little Joe.

"What are they?" Tommy demands to know.

"My business," says Joe. "Besides, you couldn't remember more'n your own, if them."

"I'll crown you," threatens Tommy, and then goes on up the steps, away from him, with this Schulz the Dutchman, who just comes along.

All the time Joe's thinking, and he can't make this lay at all. So he asks Ike again, when Ike gives him a leg up, down there in the paddock just when they start out. And Ike only says Tommy'll win, but—

"You get on top as soon as you can, and stay there as long as you can."

And if that aint an out-and-out order, what do you want? Joe thinks to himself. You get on top as soon as you can, and stay there as long as you can. Besides, Hilda is going to make a bet, and she thinks I can ride. Diddy is making a play for him and Tommy, but Diddy can go jump in the beautiful Ohio. He and Tommy are up to something. Tommy is sore. What did either one of them ever do for me, or the old lady? Why's Mother sold on Tom the way she is, when—but then Hilda says I can ride. She's got a bet. Old law school around the next turn, mebbe, with fifty thousand people here to see us. Why're they so thick with Schulz lately? Swell day to make it forty, and graduate from a bug. Jockey license too, Hilda says.

"THEY'RE off!"

If forty-nine of them fifty thousand hadn't yelled, Little Joe Doyle would still have been back there at the post trying to think. But the noise woke him up, just about the same time Curlpapers decided to take out after the field, already wedging into a V in front of them. Oh, he wasn't left—it wasn't *that* bad; but he broke a long way from in front, and he had to jerk Papers along right lively to get into the bunch before they passed the club-house.

Get one kid and one colt in among fourteen others and sometimes the folks in the club-house can't pick you out and see how bad you are. Gosh, but that was dumb! Counting the money or the chickens when you ought to have an eye on the old gate! Well, get away from here, on around this turn, now. . . . .

Maybe it is his narrow escape from being left at the post that makes this race a story. Little Joe Doyle is sick, and sorry, so sorry it hurts, and he's riding for all he's worth. And Curlpapers, maybe he felt bad about it, too, because he's ready to go up and get 'em.

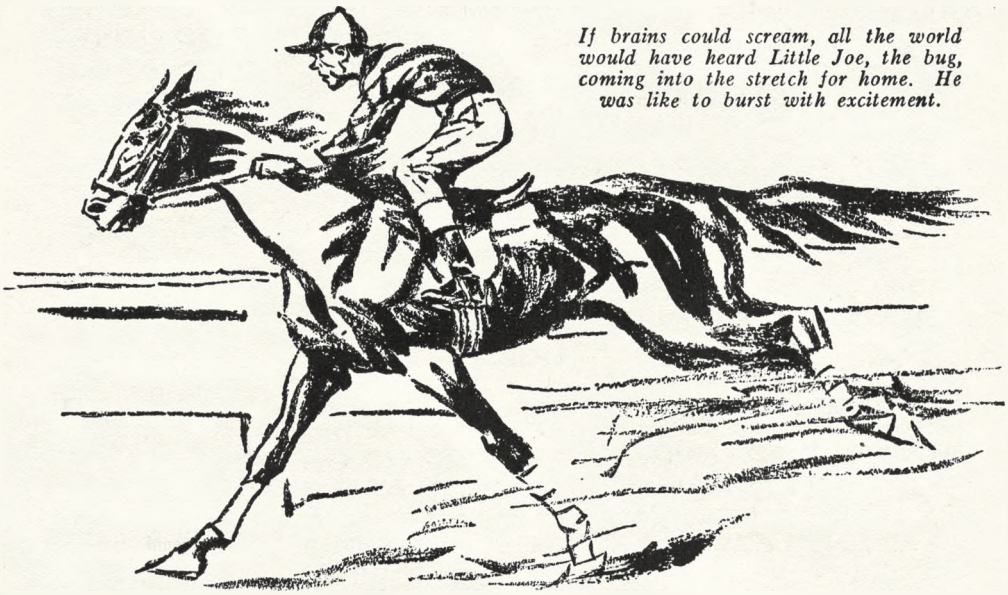
How this baby likes to run! Long-reaching, hard-driving stride, lift and roll—here, let's move! Kenyon entry must be a heavy favorite. A favorite's got to deliver, some way. Can't throw down the crowd, or old man Kenyon, or Hilda! Anything happen to Tommy, we got to win. Got to win anyhow; Hilda says we can. And so Little Joe hunches tighter and Papers flattens out some more, and they pick up two more and another one down the back straightaway. That brings them fourth. See where we're going, now. Tommy? Yeah, there's Tom.

Up front, on the rail, another horse outside him. Running like a team. Behind him, another one on the rail,—why, yeah, it's that dirty little Spikie Schulz, the crook. Been ruled off two tracks. Now he's layin' in behind Tommy and Curlycue. Mebbe—say, let's get up there where we can see better.

And so they whirl on the turn, and because Papers is full of run, they close up the daylight with Schulz. Pattycake, that's his mount, a blame' fast colt that runs some good races and then some funny ones. Yeah, two teams of two horses apiece, leaning around that old curve for the run home. Like a four-horse bandwagon team, chariot race, or something.

But is it? Hilda says—hey, hey, take back! Curlycue's tryin' to bunt out on the turn. Bears wide, carryin' this other one outside him! Crack, hi—and that's Spikie driving for the hole! On the rail—let's go, too. No, no, easy, now.

Take back, take back! It's tough work, because Papers wants to run, fights for his head. What a pull! But we can't go. Tommy's in front of us, wide, and that other goat's bolted for the outer rail! Count him out. Funny, Curlycue bearing out. He never done that before, and Tommy—well, there was Spikie on the rail, goin' hellbent for breakfast! Tommy must have—Tommy—his own brother! Little Joe's heart sinks at the thought.



If brains could scream, all the world would have heard Little Joe, the bug, coming into the stretch for home. He was like to burst with excitement.

But Hilda says—impulsively freckle-faced Little Joe snatches his right hand off the wraps and slashes Papers one lash with his whip! Back to the reins. Hold his head—lift him, throw him—let him run—not there, not there—outside, outside!

If brains could scream without using the tongue and lips, all the world would have heard Little Joe Doyle, the bug, coming into the stretch for home. His head, his heart even, were like to burst with fury and excitement. His own brother trying to hand a race to Spikie Schulz! Curlycue never bore out before! Show him, now! But not inside—*not* in between Tommy and Spikie Schulz; they'd kill us! Out-

side, outside, for Tommy's swinging in again now, Curlycue's head and Pattycake's saddle, to make it look like a desperate effort to get up and win! Tommy Doyle, his own half-brother—

"Throw down Hilda, and the old man, hey?" Little Joe yelled, aloud.

But he's riding, his head almost flat with his colt's. He can whisper in Papers' ear. But his weight's back, on the shoulders. Papers is running. Good old Papers, with that long reach, that mighty drive! An eighth out, we've got to Tommy's leg. Tommy looks back, a cold, schemin' look, and see it's Little Joe. And almost before he's turned his head front again, he's pulling out again, just like he did on the turn.

"Let's go, Papers," screams Little Joe, loosing his last wrap, and kicking with both heels. He reads Tommy's move before, or just as soon as Tommy makes it, and the eager Curlpapers drives wild and free to head even with Curlycue and hold his place. They jam. Little Joe holds straight, and Tommy has to swerve back. The spurt has carried them up to Pattycake's nose, and they're coming like an airplane to a landing. Swoop! See?

"Where's your bat?" screams Little Joe, mad all through. His own brother! See it all now. No money if Kenyon's entry wins. Favorites' entries pay nothing. But Pattycake, a long price—

"Look out there," yells Tommy, and he makes a wild slash with his whip.

HE tries to cut Little Joe on the leg above the boot, but misses, and then flails away at Curlycue, unmercifully. That instant Little Joe is jerked ahead as Curlpapers, gone berserk, seems to bolt with more speed than a colt has ever shown before on this track. Curlycue drops back momentarily because Tommy's whipping unbalances him and makes him jerk the colt's head sideways. And back, back, slowly but surely, goes Pattycake's nose, though the desperate Spikie is whipping like mad!

"Curlpapers, Doyle, Doyle, Doyle!" shrieks the crowd, working hard for the money it's placed on the entry favorite.

And so, a blush already drowning the freckles on his nose, Little Joe sits tight and hand-rides this Papers home these last few yards for a win! Boy, the winner's circle! *Whooie!* That's Number Forty. Hilda said so. Law-books. You'd be delirious yourself. And you should worry about Tommy and Spike, in the jockey quarters. You're a jockey now, yourself, or will be, just as soon as you want to file your application!

THE shouting and the tumult dies as the crowd lines up at the *mutuel* windows to collect on Kenyon tickets that Tommy and Curlycue almost made 'em tear up, and Little Joe and Papers saved for them. Little Joe goes back to undress, and he meets Tommy, who only gives him a dirty look. And Spike Schulz, who gives him a dirtier one. They're both scared, now, afraid to say a word, for they know Little Joe was right there and seen what they tried to pull!

"Nice work, kid," says Ike, laughing, when Joe gets back to the barn. "You sure stopped murder by them two rats. And you rode a race to win, I'll say."

"Much obliged, Ike," Joe blushes. "Papers is a good colt, hand-rode."

"But I thought you'd have to go the whip," interrupts old man Kenyon, "there in the stretch!" —The old man and Hilda have come up behind Little Joe.

'But he's a hand-riding lawyer, Dad," laughs Hilda. And she looks like she could kiss Little Joe, only she knows, some way, he'll blame' near die if she does.

"I didn't have to," grins Little Joe. "Tommy, he's good with the bat! Honest, Ike, I thought Papers would jump out from under me when Tommy cut him, trying to hit me."

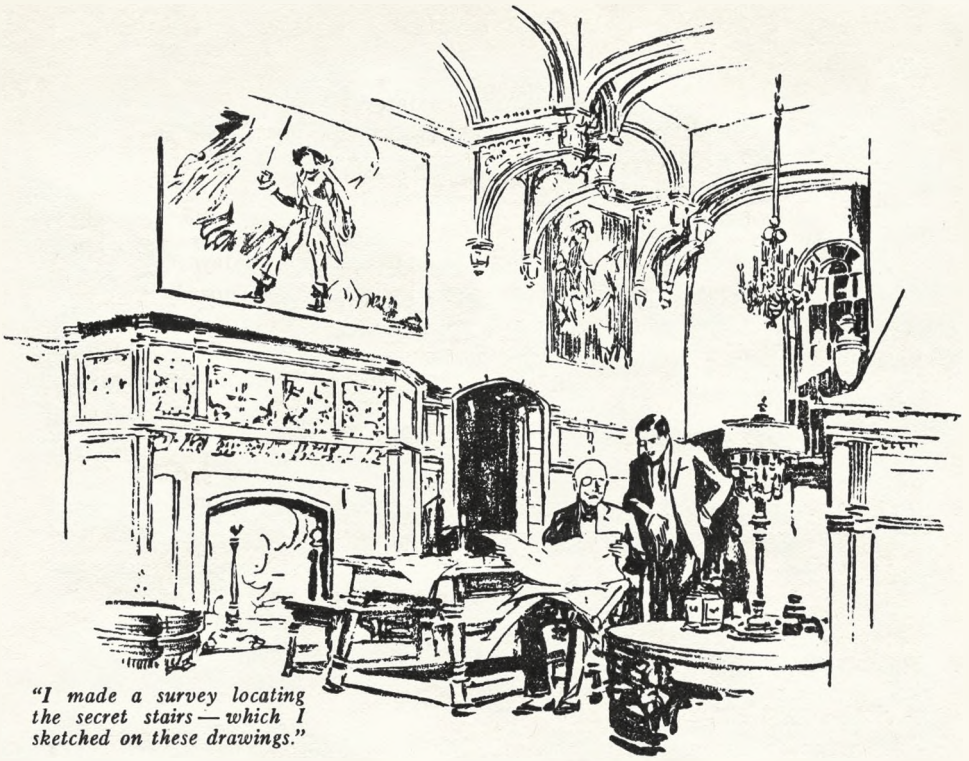
"We saw it all," says Ike.

"Tommy's through, but he stays under contract—*and* on the ground," growled the old man. "From now on, Jockey Joe Doyle works our string, mornings, and rides 'em afternoons when he can—"

"But I've won his law-books for him, Dad," complained Hilda, pouting.

"Without interfering with his study," the old man finished. "I hate to see a first-rate jockey spoiled to make nothing better'n a lawyer, but—well, this handicap purse can spare tuition, I guess."

AND that's about all there is to it, except that Little Joe and Hilda wandered off and stood by the fence to watch the next race swing by for the turn. Only they didn't see it. The only thing they saw—or rather, the only thing this Little Joe Doyle saw was Diddy Doyle, tearing up a big bunch of tickets on the big race. —And they couldn't have been Kenyon tickets or he'd have been cashing 'em!



"I made a survey locating the secret stairs — which I sketched on these drawings."

Free Lances in Diplomacy

By CLARENCE HERBERT NEW

In an old Italian palazzo transpire the exciting events which one of the Free Lances, and our old friend Scarpia encounter in this fine story.

Illustrated by William Molt

THE old Palazzo di Soltaverno in the Via Due Macelli, like the palaces of the Borghesi, Farnesi and other great families, has its secrets which the modern tourist would find of great interest were he permitted to make a thorough examination. This old building, for example, runs back into the center of a block which on the Due Macelli side is a good fifty feet lower than that which faces on the little Via Gregoriana on an upper shoulder of the Pincian Hill—and a concealed circular stairway in the rear part of a house on the Via Gregoriana descends to the upper floor in the *palazzo* on the Due Macelli. There have been both men and women who escaped sudden and brutal murder by means of that hidden stairway during the last four hundred years! Scarpia has told his friends the Trevors many stories of these—but there are others in the archives of his family which even he doesn't know.

Scarpia, as you may remember, was known for more than fifty years as the "old Bald Eagle of Italian diplomacy." His long Roman nose above his drooping white mustache, gave him in profile that aquiline contour which suggested the nickname. He has a theory that a three-months' sojourn each year with an Arab sheik, in a desert-oasis southwest of Tripoli, preserves his hold upon life indefinitely. During the warmer months, he lives in the old *palazzo* above described—which came into his possession some fifteen years ago when he succeeded to the title and estates as Marchese di Soltaverno.

During the week when this narrative properly begins, Scarpia's dearest friend, Earl Trevor of Dyvnaint, had been visiting him on the way home from an Oriental

trip, and they had been discussing the man then in control of Italy—a man whom Scarpia respected for his unquestioned organizing ability, but was inclined to consider an eventual menace to the country.

There was much discussion between the two old friends as to the man's probable secret ambitions and intentions—which led to Scarpia's inviting to dinner one evening a certain Deputy in the Camera whom he knew to possess more inside information than all the rest of his colleagues put together. Signor Fioletti took a casual part in the discussion of general topics—but when His Lordship asked a few pointed questions he replied frankly:

"You ask, Milor Trevor, whether the Leader trusts any man so far as to make of him a confidant. One after another will tell you no—he trusts nobody—least of all any woman. Yet I can assure you that there are one woman and one man—not particularly friendly to each other upon the rare occasions when they meet—who possess the Leader's entire confidence. At least, the woman does; she knows his secret ambitions. The man knows more of the wheels within wheels which are constantly turning to develop those same secret ambitions."

"There is presumably some truth, Signor, in the belief that he intends building up a modern Roman Empire even more powerful than that of the Cæsars, if he can bring about such a thing?" Scarpia inquired.

"Oh, yes! He is quite open about that, and desires the support of all Italians in working toward some such end; it has caught their imagination too. They suppose that he means to do it in a peaceful way by astute diplomacy—it is doubtful if today they would support anything like a war of conquest. But if he keeps working upon the popular mind along these lines, it is entirely possible that they may support him in even that, eventually—time alone will show."

"WHO is the woman you referred to?" asked Trevor.

"She is generally referred to by her *nom de plume* as a writer of political novels—Caterina Monsanto. In private life, she is La Contessa di Belora. The Dictator would like to abolish all titles here, but the old families disregard that, and address each other as usual. We have a large number of Communists and 'reds' in Italy, but very few among the aristocracy."

"'Countess of the Beautiful Hour', eh? Is there really any such title as that?" Trevor queried skeptically.

"Indeed yes, Milor! It is one of the oldest in Italy."

"One has read her books, of course. They're deuced clever, and, I suppose, possible enough—if one believes that modern life is as full of intrigue as the Italians make it. With such a name, she should be rather a handsome woman—eh?"

"She is rarely seen in public, Milor—but when she does appear one catches the breath! Her beauty is arresting. Between her and the Leader one infers an exquisite, self-sacrificing love-affair—almost of the *Paolo* and *Francesca* type. He has a family, of course, to whom he is reported very much attached. And one naturally assumes an interest in other women. But, look you, there is no jealousy exhibited on either side. The bond of attraction seems to be above and beyond all that—which is probably the reason for her possessing his confidence as she does, and discussing with him affairs of State which he does not discuss with anyone else."

"One begins to grasp the idea," remarked Trevor. "But if either one of them openly flaunted a mistress or a lover in public somebody would be killed just the same! Well—now, who's the man?"

"Luigi Santini—a Deputy in the Foreign Affairs. He is the man who is sent to London—and comes back with knowledge that would amaze you concerning what is being privately discussed in Downing Street. He goes to Paris and manages to pick up information about the French measures for national defense which they would consider it impossible for him to learn. He goes to Berlin and has confidential interviews with statesmen who would consider themselves compromised if they conferred with the Leader himself.

"One infers that the Dictator possibly has some secret hold upon Santini which prevents the man from being treacherous. And he is well adapted to carrying out the missions of political intrigue intrusted to him; undoubtedly he has organized a number of most efficient agents in various countries. A man of attractive appearance, well-bred, of charming manners and excellent education, an unusually capable linguist. Santini and Caterina Monsanto do not trust each other—but neither attempts injury to the other. It might mean severing all relations with the Dictator."

DURING this description, the three had gone from the big dining-room, with its rosewood-paneled walls and long curtains of ruby velvet to a somewhat larger room at the front. This room looked down into the narrow street, two floors below, from nine-foot windows. All of the windows facing the street were barred with twisted black iron an inch thick, with a ten-inch mesh through which no human body could wriggle its way—not to keep the occupants in, but to keep everyone else out. The ends of the bars were sunk three inches into the stone on all sides, and leaded there. Life had been earnest in the days when that palace was built!

Scarpia relaxed in his favorite high-backed arm-chair, his thin legs stretched out before him upon a low footrest. Presently he asked a question:

"La Contessa lives, of course, in her own *palazzo* over near the Quirinal, when in Rome?"

"Yes, Marchese. In the Palazzo Belora."

"But she does not receive the man there?"

"No, Marchese. She rents, through her bankers, a house in the Via Gregoriana, higher upon the Pincian. It is leased under another name, to be sure, but it is there she retires when writing one of her books—a place, look you, where none of her acquaintances are admitted—a place of quiet and seclusion. She is always heavily veiled when she comes and goes, presumably visiting the occupants of the house. It is supposed that there may be some means of communication from the fourth house beyond—all of the present houses being upon the site of an old *palazzo* which formerly stood upon that street but was burned about the middle of the eighteenth century. As to such communication between the two houses, one can only surmise. The other one is frequently used by the Leader for secret conferences—so one considers this and that, arriving at the conclusion. He never has been seen entering the house she leases—nor have any other men with whom she is on friendly terms. They call at her *palazzo*—never in the Via Gregoriana."

"One infers that you are not of the fascisti, Fioletti? No?"

"One enrolls with the fascisti, Marchese—but reserves a few of the beliefs which preceded them. My father, as a young fellow of twenty, was with Garibaldi. We have always been patriots, as contrasted with the reds and communists—so it serves our purpose to join with the fascisti as long as their objects are much the same. If at any time it seems to us that they are becoming a menace, there is still enough left of the old Garibaldian element to make its weight felt in politics—it is for that reason that I have made a point of keeping this man under the closest possible espionage. If he knew the extent of my information concerning him, I do not think I would live ten hours. But it is necessary for the safety of Italy that the old conservative element I represent should have that information up to the last minute. We are organized with a thoroughness which might surprise you—though much smaller in numbers than we hope to be in a few years more. You will infer, of course, that as matters stand today we consider the man the best who can be found to head the Government. Will he remain so? That is the question."

AFTER Signor Fioletti had left them, Scarpia adjusted another cigarette in his long jade holder. Presently a faint smile wrinkled the vellum skin around the corners of his mouth, and he slowly got out of his chair and walked over to one of the bookshelves which lined three sides of the big room. Selecting a folio volume with parchment covers from a shelf which was barred and padlocked, he took it back to his chair and opened it upon his knees.

Most of the pages were beautiful scale-drawings of floor-plans in fine and faded ink-lines, together with a number of sectional drawings and elevations. In between these were pages of copper-plate script done by hand—describing the drawings, and filled with explanatory notes. Upon one of the floor-plans which unfolded from the book and stretched out to the width of four pages, a more modern hand had very lightly sketched in another plan of ten Eighteenth-century houses, each having a frontage of twenty-six feet on the street. It was so faintly traced that it did not obscure the earlier drawing—yet showed exactly where the eighteenth-century foundations had been superimposed upon those of an old *palazzo*, and certain points where a connection had been left with old passages in the former walls, or underground.

"Eet ees mos' strange, my good Giorgio—'ow ze 'and of long dead an' gone architec' reach down through ze centuries,"

drawled Scarpia. In moments of leisure with his old friend, Scarpia enjoyed airing his quite understandable English.

"*Ecco!*" he continued. "We 'ave discuss' weeth ze so good Fioletti 'ow la Contessa di Belora rent for herself ze *pied-a-terra* in ze Via Gregoriana through her banker—who also 'appen to be one of ze banking 'ouse w'ich 'andle for me soch building as I 'ave in Rome. Ze ol' *palazzo* of ze thirteen-'undred w'ich stand where now ze ten 'ouses stan' was also of ze Soltaverni—my own *famiglia*. Zose ten 'ouses of ze eighteen-'undreds still belong to ze estate. *Si!* La Contessa do not connec' ze name weeth ze man she 'ave know', since she was *bambino,* as Il Cavaliere Scarpia. Ze lease ees not in Contessa's name. My attenzione ees not attrac' until ze so good Fioletti spik of 'ow she rent t'at 'ouse— an' 'ow ze fourth one ees rented for Government purpose. Then I remember thees ol' book of drawing of ze ol' *palazzo*—also thees *palazzo* below, on othaire street—drawings w'ich show' all rooms, doors, windows, secret panels, secret passages."

The nonagenarian was now tiring of the effort required to concentrate in another language, and continued more fluently in his own:

"You comprehend, my friend, that this book came down to me with thousands of others in the Soltaverno library. When I saw what it was, my valet and I made a survey of the lower walls and passages, locating the secret panels, galleries and stairs —which I then sketched as you see, on these drawings, so as to show exactly where communications already existed with certain houses and where they can be made at any time by the mere cutting of an opening through a brick wall. Excepting Niccolo and myself, I am positive there is no person now living who knows the secret of those passages—though I have taken up a few whom I could trust by that circular stairway and out upon the Via Gregoriana, when there was need of escaping espionage.

"Now let us suppose a contingency which might arise some time—a contingency which this chance-accident has put us in position to handle with considerable advantage. You follow me, I think?"

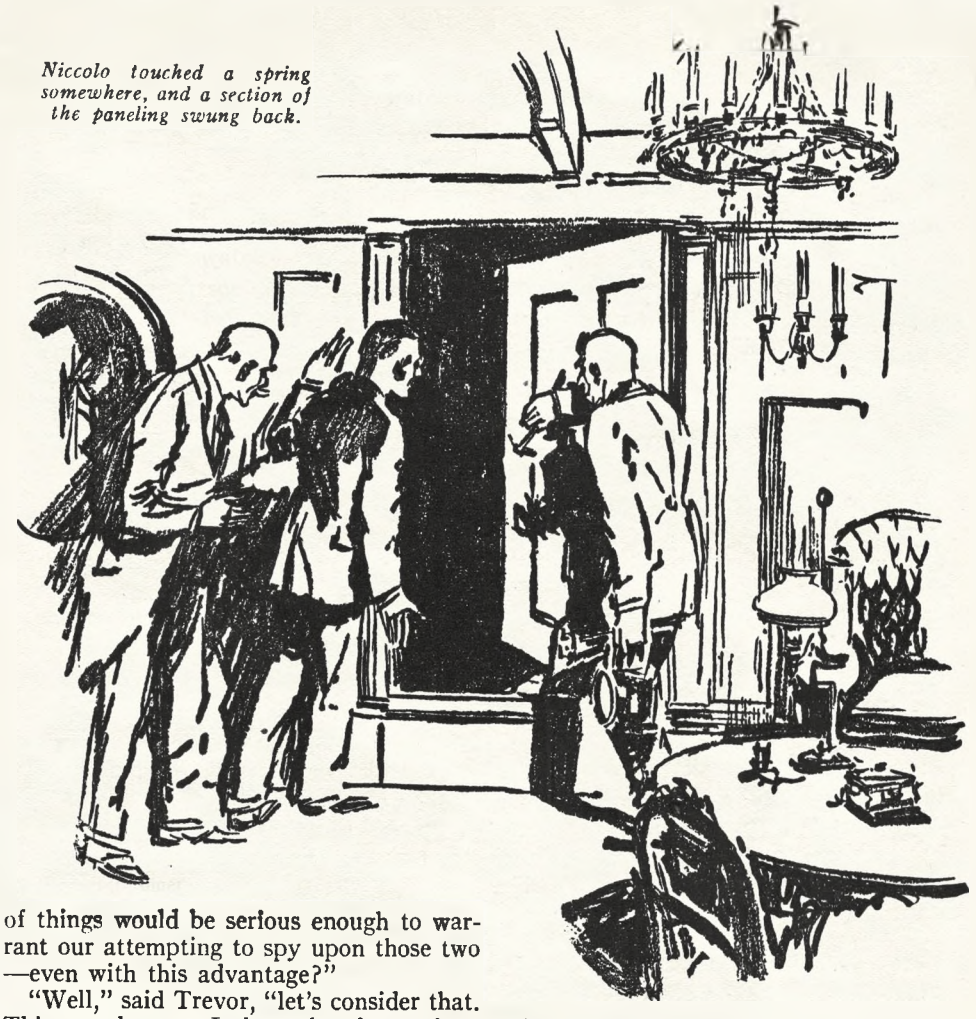
"PERFECTLY!" Trevor assured him.

"The thing is, as you say, absurd! That an architect among your ancestors' retainers should have made these drawings which have come down to you and put you in possession of all the secrets connected with the older buildings, is not surprising or remarkable at all—inherited possessions coming down from one generation to another as they do. The mere coincidence of Caterina Monsanto's renting for her own professional use a house which was your property and could be entered by a secret passage known only to you and your valet, is not so much out of the way either. Nor is it so remarkable that, when she stumbled upon an additional secret passage communicating with another house in the block, it should promptly occur to her as an ideal arrangement for secret trysts with this particular man. But the part of it which really *is* so unusual is that it should place both of them so easily under the espionage of diplomats like you and me if we have at any time good reason for watching them at close quarters! Still, a third of all the older buildings in Rome have secret passages in them—that's mere historic fact; I suppose that most anywhere in this city one could rent a modern house which might be entered from some old underground passage if it seemed worth the trouble. . . . . Perhaps the thing isn't so improbable as it seemed at first glance. Of course, if we had any reason for shadowing this man and woman, we'd manage it somehow—just as Fioletti must have done to obtain the information he has about them."

"*Si—si!*" agreed Scarpia. "Given the reason for keeping them under close espionage, it somehow would be done, of a certainty. But look you, my friend—I am of a certain age—no longer in the adventurous days. You yourself are no longer at a time where a struggle for life would give you an even chance. Here, then, would be an old man and one but relatively less old—considering the playing of a game which is that of younger, more active men. Let us reflect a little upon whether any object really would be worth the risk."

"Faith—I don't believe the man would have either one of us killed if he once saw our faces—and we should be able to make any of his bodyguard take us before him if we should be caught," Trevor argued.

"True. There is also the fact that we have both discounted death long ago—that it is merely another experience for which we are ready at any time. But what I'm trying to ascertain is whether any object we can imagine from the present condition



Niccolo touched a spring somewhere, and a section of the paneling swung back.

of things would be serious enough to warrant our attempting to spy upon those two —even with this advantage?"

"Well," said Trevor, "let's consider that. This man has put Italy on her feet—given her a balanced budget for the first time in history—reorganized her government and finances until the country is making rapid strides ahead. He is recognized the world over as a constructive statesman—one of the great forces in world-politics. But—he is also a Dictator who seized the Government in an unconstitutional way, and certainly has a serious proportion of the people against him for his high-handed way of running things. Give him all due credit for what he has accomplished and what there is remaining to be done in the program he has laid out. What comes after that? What will he do next? What's in the man's mind—for himself—for Italy? And which comes first with him? Julius Cæsar put the Roman Republic at the top of the world—and then crossed the Rubicon to accept an imperial crown. Rienzi was sent on a mission to the Popes at Avignon; he came back with his head full of ambitious plans—headed an insurrection—defeated the Roman aristocracy—was elected Tribune by the people—recognized by Pope Clement—and then began to scheme for the reëstablishment of Rome as the chief power of the world. He had the Roman people overwhelmingly back of him at one time. But he started in to high-hat 'em, and gave himself imperial airs. That cost him his popular support—and certain members of the old families ran their swords through him!"

"Two of my ancestors—with the others," said Scarpia, nodding.

"I figured they'd be in that little party —naturally," Trevor chuckled. "Well—it seems to be one of the inescapable weaknesses of human nature that when any man gets about so far in the lust for power he loses all sense of proportion and common-sense, gets arrogant and dictatorial, and tries to corner the world; and just as surely loses his head or his liberty about

that time! So the point which intrigues every chancellery in Europe just at the moment, is: How far will this man try to push Italy? How long will he consider Italy greater than himself? Of all the ambitions which most unquestionably are seething in his brain at this moment—which are possible? What will be his next move on the chess-board? Will he move from one assured position to another assured one—holding what he gets? Or will he take a chance and plunge—stake a great possible gain against an alternate disastrous loss? Actually—making allowances for all conceivable pressure which may be brought to bear—he is in a stronger position than any State in Europe likes. There is a tendency among the chancelleries to conclude secret treaties with him if it can be done without disadvantage—or hastily to cement other alliances of defense against him. And the worst problem of this European muddle always has been to find out in advance which States are double-crossing other States!"

Scarpia's grim smile was still visible under his eagle's beak.

"My friend, I am a Roman—I love my country," he said slowly. "I also love and respect both England and France. So, though these old joints creak when they move and the heart must go slowly up the stair—it is necessary that those whose veins are filled with the life-blood of Rome find out this man's intentions before he has opportunity for an irrevocable step which plunges us into war and disaster. In the morning, my friend, you and I will make the little preliminary exploration—to see what we may see, or hear. *Buôna nôtte, mi Giôrgio!*"

AFTER a leisurely breakfast, the two friends went to the top floor of the *palazzo,* accompanied by the valet Niccolo —who carried a small pot of grease, a can of lubricating oil, an electric lantern with a large reflector and a pocketful of small tools. At the rear of the upper floor was a room fitted up as a study, with bookshelves, broad table-desk and heavy brass-bound chests of oak and teak. The ceiling was of matched walnut between heavy rafters—the walls paneled all the way up.

Scarpia told his valet to tap the wainscoting of the rear wall, all over, with the handle of a putty-knife, and motioned for his friend to listen—but the Earl could detect no hollowness in sound at any point.

"In the fourteenth century, my friend, they did not intend that the secret passage should be discovered in so simple a way as that—it would have cost too many lives! Now—*ecco!*"

Niccolo touched a spring somewhere, so unobtrusively that Trevor didn't see just where he did it. A section of the paneling swung back to let them step through into a small chamber with walls of solid stone—then closed behind them with a muffled click. Winding upward from this little cubicle was a circular stair of stone, three feet wide. At intervals in the walls of this and the various passages, there were six-inch slits communicating, around one or more bends, with the outer air, so the ventilation was good.

After the stair had wound upward to a height of twenty feet, close examination of the stone wall in the bright light of the electric lantern showed the faint outline of joints between the stones which had been so laid that the courses stopped at two perpendicular lines which indicated a former opening, subsequently walled up. With a candle, or a less powerful oil lantern, it would have been difficult to discover this outline at all unless one knew exactly where to look for it. Placing one foot upon the narrow end of a stone step next to the core of the stairway, Niccolo bore his whole weight upon it, and the section of wall swung back on a counterbalance, leaving an opening through which they passed into a stone-walled passage four feet wide by a trifle over six feet high. When the counterbalance was released, the section of stair-wall swung back into place—and nobody going on up to the top, in the second floor of the Via Gregoriana house, would have suspected an opening there.

In the passage, while Niccolo held the lantern up, Scarpia showed the Earl a rough outline drawing he had made of the house foundations, with the passages underneath them indicated by dotted lines.

"This passage we are now in, as you see, ran the full length of the old *palazzo* on the upper street. From it, there is communication with every house—but not through the cellars, which the police would naturally search if they suspected anything unusual about the houses. They were erected under the supervision of the twelfth Marchese—about 1765—and he did not permit his builders any further knowledge of passages which they constructed in one wall of each, than that they de-

scended by a narrow stair from a study on the second floor to a small brick closet presumably a few feet below the level of their cellars. Subsequently—when his architect and builders had been paid off—he superintended the work of two servants who opened a short passage between those little brick closets and this tunnel we are now in—one of the servants being a skilled mechanic who constructed the concealed and counterbalanced doors in each of them. As soon as this work was completed, both of those servants disappeared."

"Which left him the only person in Italy who knew where the communications led in those houses—the architect and builders knowing only that they had constructed blind passages leading nowhere," Trevor commented.

"Precisely! And they knew nothing of the mechanism which worked the secret panels in each house, either—that having been installed by the servant-mechanic after their work was completed and they were out of the buildings."

"When you found that old book, did you make an examination of each house?"

"No. I preferred to let most of the springs and hinges rust so that it would be difficult to open the panels even if one discovered the secret. The house at this end—yes. My major-domo and his wife occupy that and it offers, as you know from experience, an excellent way of getting out when my *palazzo* in the Due Macelli is under espionage. My major-domo never has been down the winding stairway; he knows nothing of the underground communications."

"Which of the houses did the Contessa lease?"

"The one adjoining Tomaso's. That, and the fourth beyond, are the only ones which have communications from their cellars—and they're hardly secret ones, either. There is a trapdoor in each cellar-floor at the rear—usually having barrels or chests stacked upon it or piled across in front so that it cannot be seen. The trapdoors are barred and bolted, of course—on both sides—but when one is expecting a visit, they are left unfastened. In the event that any search is made by police or Government agents, there would be a lot of rubbish piled over them and they would very likely escape observation. Caterina Monsanto evidently had a curiosity most surprising, and a thoroughness in her investigations, to discover that passage—which does not communicate with any other house—and succeed in opening it up. But of course it was almost impossible for her to discover the secret panel in the wainscoting of the study on the second floor, which she uses when writing. We shall have to be sure that neither she nor any servant of hers is within hearing when we open it. Doubtless there is considerable rust and stiffening of the mechanism to be loosened and lubricated."

WHILE they were ascending the narrow stair in the wall of the Contessa's house, they were careful to avoid making any noise—though Scarpia thought the thickness of the wall would have prevented it from being overheard. When they reached the small landing behind the secret panel, the Marchese looked through a series of little peepholes behind the moldings around the panel in the wall. There was nobody in the room. Taking from a case a small but intensely powerful microphone which the Earl had sent him from the laboratories in South Devon the year before, he adjusted the head-frame over his ears and placed the transmitter against one of the peepholes. In the case at his feet were dry batteries, with amplifying coils and tubes, which magnified every sound in the old house until the gnawing of a mouse under one of the floors sounded like an intermittent buzz-saw going through knots in a log. A footstep anywhere in the house would have jarred like a five-ton truck on the stone pavement outside. There was an adjusting screw by which the volume of sound could be toned down, or the noises would have almost split his ear-drums.

After listening a couple of minutes, Scarpia passed over the head-frame to the Earl who, from long practice, was much more expert in using the appliance. In less than a minute, he said there was nobody in the building. Niccolo then tried the springs and secret catch, which were rusty from years of disuse, yet not so much so they couldn't be worked, with some effort. Rather sluggishly, the catch moved back under pressure from the spring—and a slight prying with a screwdriver worked the panel loose on its hinges.

Stepping through into the study, Earl Trevor and Scarpia rested for awhile in the Contessa's chairs. Meanwhile Niccolo scraped and cleaned the mechanism of the panel. From where they sat, they could

hear the slightest noise made by the opening of the street-door and would be able to get back behind the panel before anyone could reach that floor.

The valet lubricated the springs, bolts, catch and hinges, so that the panel swung open at a touch upon the hidden spring without the slightest creaking or any noise whatever. It had been a beautiful piece of craftsmanship, as carefully made as those old clocks which run for centuries.

When they were sure of escaping noiselessly at any moment, they decided to make a thorough examination of the house in order to get some idea as to how many servants were usually employed there, if any, and what the Contessa's habits might be. In what were usually servants' quarters in the basement, they found no clothing, trunks or boxes to indicate that retainers of any sort spent the night. But the pantry was well supplied with tinned food and package groceries. Presumably, when the man visited the Contessa, servants would be fetched in to provide an elaborate meal—but they certainly didn't stay all night in the house.

Aside from the study at the rear of the second floor, there was a large bedroom, a dressing-room and bath—with closets in which hung twenty or thirty expensive costumes. In old *cinquocento* chests of drawers, there was a bewildering choice of dainty lingerie. The large Florentine bed, with a canopy over it, had a cover of rare Venetian lace. In the study, Trevor's eye fell upon a spot at the left side of a wall-panel near the Contessa's desk which seemed to him to have a slightly higher polish than the rest of the panel—as if human fingers or something equally soft were frequently touching it there and wearing the wood just a trifle smoother. Calling Niccolo over to examine it with him, the two began looking around the moldings for a spring—and presently touched something which slid the panel to one side, behind the adjoining one. This revealed a modern safe three feet wide and four feet high—with a combination-knob which the Earl recognized as fairly up-to-date, but which gave him the impression that he could open it with the aid of Scarpia's microphone. He placed the transmitter against the steel around the dials, and slowly turned the knob until he heard one of the tumblers click; then he made a memorandum of the number, and tried it again. After repeated trials, he found that he obtained four numbers altogether and that any of them repeated itself if he turned the knob in the wrong direction. When he got these without any repeating, he turned the handle of the safe, and opened it without further trouble. Inside there were two small cupboards and four drawers with individual locks—also a number of pigeonholes and other drawers filled with neatly strapped documents. Not disturbing any of these, the Earl contented himself with taking impressions of the six lock-slits with sealing-wax from the Contessa's desk—being careful to clean up every drop of the wax and replace the stick on its tray as he had found it. Scarpia suggested making a thorough examination of the papers in the safe while there was opportunity—but his friend shook his head. When they were safely back in the old *palazzo* below, he explained:

"Any papers of real value to us would be in one of those locked drawers or cupboards. Niccolo will get in the morning, from some locksmith, a hundred different keys of that type and thinness. But before we tackle that safe, we must know more of her habits in that house—and the man's habits in the one he visits—what servants or retainers accompany them. We must overhear some of the talk—know what sort of documents or information will be of most value to us. The secret panel in the man's house must be cleaned and oiled like hers. I was intending to fly to Paris in the morning, old friend—but it looks to me as if I'd best stay the week and have Nan keep those appointm'nts for me. This is too intriguing a mouse-hole to leave unwatched just at present!"

"What do you expect to learn?"

"Well, what do *you*—for example? We may find the man a good deal more of a patriot than we think—seems to me it's worth the prying into his affairs if we establish that fact alone! *Au contraire*—we may turn up something which will make the chancelleries of Europe sweat blood in blocking it. What do you say? Shall we pass up this amazing opportunity?"

"Hmph! Even at *my* age, I could not do that! The thing is too intriguing! The secret thoughts and ambitions of a Dictator? *Dio!*"

IN the afternoon, the three of them went back up the winding stairway and into the wall-passage of the house leased by the Government (which knew nothing of such

a lease, though it stood in that name). The sensitive microphone revealed the presence of two men in the basement and even made fragments of their talk distinguishable. Inferentially, the Dictator would spend the night in that house—for the purpose of holding a private conference with Santini, who was expected to reach the city by plane in the late afternoon. The men in the basement were two of his bodyguard, sent on ahead to see that the house was thoroughly swept and dusted, that no outsider was concealed anywhere in it, that the chef and waiters, arriving about five-thirty, did not indulge their curiosity by prowling about the cellars or upper floors.

The Marchese placed the transmitter of a powerful microphone against a peephole.

By piecing together odd words and remarks, the listeners got the impression that when the Leader visited the place, he arrived either in the afternoon—working at his desk with a secretary until dinner-time or just before dinner, with a conference afterward which seldom lasted after ten-thirty. Chef and waiters left after dinner —there was nothing said about their returning for breakfast, which the Leader seemed to obtain elsewhere. Three guards remained in the house all night to see that nobody else got in—it being inferred that their master felt perfectly safe within its walls and even in the cellars, where he frequently went after the house was closed for the night. The guards, of course, put the obvious construction upon his spending the night in the cellar. They had seen him going through a trapdoor in its floor but had never dared follow him.

After having satisfied themselves that nobody had got into the house and that everything was in order, the two in the basement went out—the listeners inferring that there would be nobody returning for at least three hours.

Niccolo had less trouble with the mechanism of the panel in this house. There was enough rust to show that the panel hadn't been opened for a good many years; but one of the later marchesi might have used it for his own purposes—that was entirely possible. In an hour, the panel worked smoothly and noiselessly—also the steel door in the brick closet far below. They made a careful but somewhat hurried examination of the house which indicated that the Dictator left no papers in it which his secretary didn't fetch and carry away with him. There was an ornate bedroom on the second floor with a plentiful supply of clothing, and a modern bathroom. The man might, indeed, have spent the night there as he was supposed to—but his valet and a couple of guards were the only others who remained in the house with him. To any of the man's subordinates who had ever accompanied him there, the proposition seemed merely a clever arrangement of a not unusual *liaison*. The

overshadowing and immensely serious political intrigue not one of them suspected.

AT ten that evening, Earl Trevor finished connecting up an extra set of head-phones, which Niccolo had purchased in one of the shops along the Corso, with Scarpia's powerful microphone outfit—enabling both of them to listen at the same time. Niccolo had not been permitted to accompany them, as they didn't know whether they could return the same way or might be compelled to escape through the street-door of the house.

Santini evidently had been dismissed after his conference. He had a vague suspicion that there might be some communication with the Contessa's house but had never seen any evidence of it, though he had once got in with skeleton-keys and searched it from attic to cellar. As he passed the place, there was no light in any of the windows—no evidence of occupancy. He was tempted to hang about the neighborhood until morning—but knew he'd be spotted by the fascisti secret service, and thought better of it. A few moments before eleven, two of the Contessa's servants laid a table for two in her study, including a "hot-cover" containing carefully broiled squabs, with little alcohol wicks burning underneath the silver bottom, and other appetizing dishes for a late supper. Then they put on their coats and went home to the *palazzo* near the Quirinal—leaving the house empty except for the Contessa herself, who went down to the cellar as soon as they had gone and returned with a man whose face and figure are well known.

He stood for a moment in the study drinking in the witchery of her beauty in the soft light of the desk- and table-lamps—then they were in each other's arms in a clinging embrace. It was her cold and brilliant mentality which held him in spite of all the other women he knew, but—*Dio*—what an intensely feminine woman she was also!

Then she withdrew from his arms and smilingly shook her head.

"There is much to go over before we put serious matters aside. . . . . Santini has been with you this evening? *Si?*"

"Yes. Came over the mountains by plane from Munich; he was in Berlin yesterday."

"And Gundelmann? Does he commit himself at last?"

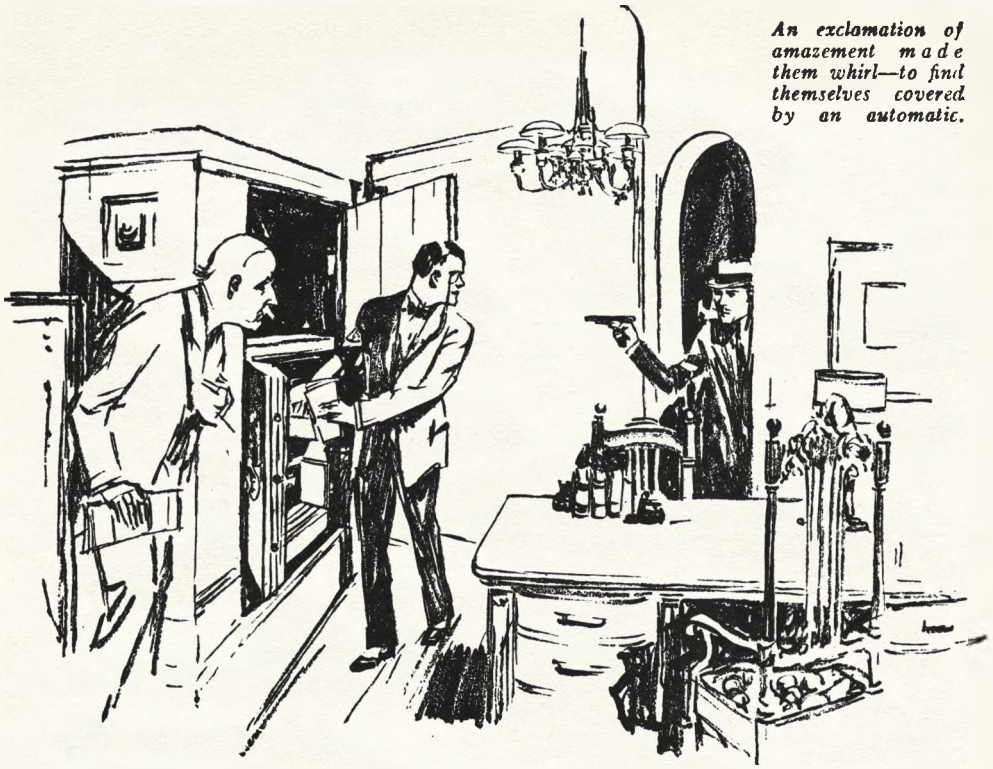
"Provisionally—yes. How he got the figures, the devil only knows, but Santini did get them—had the nerve to tell Gundelmann and Von Mecklin exactly how many large planes they had which could become serviceable bombing-planes in forty-eight hours—how many *gasfabriks* they had in isolated places producing 'cyano-phosgene 10'—the minimum time in which they could deliver an aërial attack upon London or Paris—or upon the American cities, by way of the Mexican mountain valleys."

"Doubtless Von Mecklin would have asked him something as to our own condition?"

"Of course. And I think he surprised them. He didn't give the location of our big chemical plant in Calabria, even approximately—but he did hint something about our experiments there and what we can produce in quantity at any time—also the extent to which our railway system is being reorganized."

"And would they commit themselves to any sort of tentative understanding?"

"Far more than ever I dreamed they would, Caterina *mia!* It came, do you see, to a recognition of mutual objectives before any definite accord could be reached. Santini is of the opinion that they were not as much surprised at the scope of our objectives as we supposed they would be. They asked if our planes contemplated early action, or whether they would be in process of maturing for a possible five or ten years yet. He told them our next five years would be devoted to building up our public utilities and defenses on land and sea—development of merchant-marine and a strong air-service—intense cultivation—industrial expansion, utilizing such German methods as we found adaptable. He pointed out that these conversations were tentative ones looking toward a period eight or ten years from now. This seemed to strike them most favorably—they said that would work in perfectly with their own plans and there was practically no doubt as to our being in perfect accord at any time between now and then—upon some such basis as this: They would actively support us in any overt action against England or France provided they could depend upon our support in any disagreement between them and Angora. If we conclude a similar pact with Rumania and Jugo-Slavia, they would support us to a still further extent."



An exclamation of amazement made them whirl—to find themselves covered by an automatic.

"Did they put any of this on paper?" the woman inquired.

"A typewritten page covering these conversations and initialed by three of them in pencil. Not officially binding, of course—but quite good enough for our purpose. It's not the sort of thing I should be carrying about in my pocket in case of an accident to me. I think I'll turn it over to you for safe-keeping—together with these memoranda from Santini—"

"What are they?"

"Lists of the bombing-planes Berlin can put into the air in forty-eight hours—the amount of 'cyano-phosgene 10' they have on hand ready for use—number of machine-guns and large howitzers—number of men actually undergoing military drill and the number of drilled men in reserve. All way beyond anything the Allied Commission knows anything about. There are also data concerning plans under consideration in Downing Street, the Quai d'Orsay and Washington—with a few significant items from Tokio. I don't see how the man gets it, unless at imminent risk of his life! I've distrusted his information time after time—only to check up from other directions and find that he told me the absolute truth as far as he could obtain it."

"I don't trust Santini, myself—and yet I think him the sort of man who could be held by fear or self-interest. Of gratitude and the more decent virtues, he simply has none. Have you placed him under heavy obligations of any sort?"

"I've enabled him to make three or four million *lire* and put it away in good securities—he will double that if he follows my advice. Also—he admired a certain handsome baroness who was contemptuous when he even spoke to her, though Santini is handsome enough. Well—I brought some influence to bear through her family. I think he now has no cause for complaint."

"So you are really worth more to him alive than dead?"

"Oh, infinitely more!"

"He couldn't possibly think of stepping into your shoes—wielding the power you do in case of your sudden death? Eh?"

"H-m-m—that's an idea! One had not thought of that! He has the type of mind which might be insane enough to consider something of the sort—*si.* He sees himself conducting diplomatic negotiations—most successfully—given respectful consideration from the big men in Berlin—Paris—London—sees the diplomatic end, but is too far in the air to consider the foundation at all—which from first to last is the *people,* who support him—or destroy him. And judgment in sudden emergencies—

where a wrong decision means chaos—annihilation. . . . . We must watch this errand-boy Santini—you and I! He must be shadowed by one of my fascisti. A serviceable tool—but razor-sharp."

"*Caro mio*, what is it that you see in the future? I follow these negotiations of yours with Berlin, Bucharest, or Belgrade, believing that you mean to hold such alliances, if you get them, as a sort of diplomatic club adding force to your arguments for exchange or augmentation of territory. But, tonight, there is something in what you say which indicates that you would not be averse to starting another horrible war if you seemed reasonably certain of obtaining your objectives that way! The Italian people will not follow you that far, my dear—they hate the name of war!"

"Suppose that Berlin starts another conflict in the near future—which is something more than a possibility?" the man argued. "France and England will defend themselves for sheer preservation. If we remain neutral in any such struggle as the next war must be, the the victor overruns and destroys us. We simply couldn't keep out of it with any chance for saving ourselves! Which, then, is the better course—to stay neutral and await annihilation in fear and trembling? Or to safeguard ourselves by previous defensive treaties which bring us into the struggle on the strongest—the presumably winning side? Can you not see, Caterina, that we have no choice? It is either establish our alliances now with Berlin and the Balkan States—or with England, France, and the United States if they can be forced into it. In the German War, we stood to gain the most by joining the Entente—which secured for us the Trentine, Dalmatia and other territory.

"In the next war, conditions will be different—the alignment changed owing to the position of Russia today. Germany and her allies could, if necessary, retreat through the whole length and breadth of Russia, living on the country as they went. They can draw unlimited resources from her, anyhow."

"I hadn't thought of that—of our being forced into another war without much choice in the matter. Suppose, then—that what you foresee actually happens? Beyond that—what are your plans for Italy? What are the objectives for which you are willing to trade?"

"Vittore Emmanuele, when Garibaldi and Cavour made him King of Italy in '61 (excepting Rome, which he didn't get from the Papal States until 1870) calmly handed over his own Savoy, and Nice, to France. In Julius Cæsar's day, all Gaul, and Britain too, belonged to Rome—Iberia also—Carthage, after Hannibal's defeat—and Egypt. Now the sun of another, more modern, day is rising upon Rome. Her destiny may be again 'Mistress of the World'—who knows? Shoving the boundaries of Tripoli farther into the desert—making it blooming and productive by modern irrigation. Same development in Eritrea—with the absorption of Abyssinia; the wresting of Asia-Minor from Angora; extending Italy westward to the Pyrenees and Bordeaux. These are but progressive steps which may take more than one war to accomplish."

"But that is the dream of an emperor—a Cæsar!"

"Well—if the need arises, I will be the Cæsar. This is the day of strong men, who attain objectives—and override obstacles!"

During a silence of several minutes—while he drained another glass of wine and lighted a long black cigar, his eyes fixed staringly upon vacancy—she drew from inside her waist a fine gold chain upon which were six flat little keys. Shoving back the wainscot-panel and opening her safe, she unlocked one of the drawers in it and shoved the papers he had given her into the back part—then closed everything as it was before.

He rose, and the two left the room.

THE two men behind the paneled wall stretched their cramped limbs and cautiously descended the narrow steps until they reached the underground tunnel and the winding stairway down to the old *palazzo*. In Scarpia's library, the Earl took sheets of paper from a drawer of the desk and motioned the Marchese into his own chair.

"While it is fresh in our minds, old one, write out a verbatim transcript of that conversation as accurately as you can remember it. I will do the same. We will then compare the two. If you have anything I overlooked, I'll add it to mine—and you do the same thing. If I have something you can't recall having heard at all, we'll consider it and see whether it was my imagination or your forgetfulness. After we are sure we have verbatim accounts, I'll make typewritten copies tomorrow on your machine. Meanwhile, I suggest Niccolo's

getting some friend he can absolutely trust, early in the morning, and have him shadow both those houses from the street. We want to know when the Contessa leaves and where she goes—when our potential Cæsar goes out and whether he takes everybody in that house with him. Also—whether Santini attempts to enter either house."

The Earl's hunch about Santini proved well-founded. As they took the documents out of the drawer in the Contessa's safe, next afternoon, an exclamation of amazement at the door—when they supposed nobody else to be in the house—made them whirl about to find themselves covered by an automatic in the hands of a man whose impulse was to kill them both—but who hesitated because of the scandal in which that would involve the Dictator, who was still valuable to him.

That hesitation cost him his life. A terrific blow under his ear knocked him senseless—after which Niccolo, who had stolen up behind him, poured out a glass of the *lachrymæ-christi,* dropped a pinch of white powder in it unobserved by the others, and was kneeling with Santini's head upon his knee when that good-looking scoundrel recovered consciousness. The glass of wine was being held against his lips. Naturally, he drank it off at one gulp.

For just a second, his eyes seemed to be starting from their sockets—a screech of horror died in his throat before it got out—froth bubbled from between his lips—and he sank back upon the floor with only a slight tremor. The two men looked down at him in amazement—and then at the valet, who was calmly wiping his hands with his handkerchief.

"The devil, Niccolo! You— *Si?"*

"Si, Marchese. The situation was otherwise impossible! He would have decided in another moment to shoot you both—because he himself had no excuse for being in this house—and you knew too much. Had he lived, he would have killed you later. One could not use pistol or knife upon him for, you comprehend, there must be no bloodstains here—no evidence of any outsider getting in. My suggestion would be to take him into the other house and place him upon the Great One's bed—just as he is."

"Oh—I say! My word! What a frightful joke upon poor Cæsar! But—really, you know—it's not such a bad suggestion! Puts the explanations up to Cæsar—and removes every possibility of scandal against his beautiful friend. He should feel under obligations to us for eliminating a treacherous tool and keeping the lady out of it!"

WHEN they had made duplicate negatives of each document, they returned them to the exact position in which they had found them in the safe-drawer.

Then Earl Trevor regretfully left his old friend and flew to Paris where, after a tense interview with the Premier, he took one of his own planes for London.

At a specially called meeting of the Cabinet in Downing Street, that evening, he passed around the photographs of the lists and memoranda in the Contessa's safe, together with the typewritten report of what he and Scarpia had overheard. There was no explanation as to how they had gotten into the houses—but the statement and photographs left no doubt whatever that they had been in both and had garnered information which might block many changes in the map of Europe.

Presently the Ministers became impressed with another fact, as the photographs passed from hand to hand; a tense silence succeeded the discussion—broken finally by the Premier:

"One outstanding fact in this evidence, gentlemen, is the certainty that matters only discussed in this Cabinet Room—not supposed to be even referred to outside of it—are known in at least two of the European chancelleries—are being talked over in Berlin and Rome! This is a very serious matter. Has my Lord of Dyvnaint any suggestion as to how this possibly could have occurred?"

"There can be no suggestion at present, Your Excellency, of anything but carelessness upon the part of some colleague among us—a few references in his home or club where he supposed himself entirely safe," Trevor replied gravely. "But the leak should be checked up until we find the one who was careless, as a warning to be more careful in future. Still, what this will cost us in one direction is offset ten times over by our knowledge concerning the secret information in other chancelleries. If a modern Cæsar does appear, we certainly can't claim ignorance of his intention. A modern Rienzi will undoubtedly lose his game by personal inflation, much the same as his predecessor did. Our brief glimpse into a mind of that type was most interesting, gentlemen, I assure you!"

TANAR of Pellucidar

By EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

The Story So Far:

THIS Pellucidar in which Tanar and his primeval companions lived was a world of the cave-bear and the saber-toothed tiger; of the Buried People, a strange half-blind savage folk who dwelt in caves; of those able intrepid seamen the Korsarians, who sailed far and harried many a distant coast; of the Place of Awful Shadow, and of many another strange region.

To this world of Pellucidar in the hollow center of this our earth had penetrated two men of our own external world and time—David Innes and Abner Perry; while experimenting with a tremendously powerful "iron mole," a boring device designed to prospect in the earth's crust for valuable minerals, David and Abner lost control and presently, after terrific adventures, found themselves in this strange, primitive, reversed cosmos of Pellucidar.

There their adventures had been no less terrific. They had aided the Pellucidarians in their war with the terrible Mahars, vicious winged prehistoric monsters; and contriving to manufacture gunpowder and crude firearms, they had all but exterminated the enemy. But now a new menace threatened:

A powerful raiding armada of a strange semi-civilized white race, the Korsarians, had landed on the coast of Pellucidar and sacked many towns. Retreating at last in their high-decked Elizabethan ships, the Korsarians—a picturesque red-sashed gang armed with medieval arquebuses and led by a burly buccaneer called the Cid—carried off with them the young chieftain Tanar as hostage. And David Innes, giving instructions to the Pellucidarians to build a fleet and sail in pursuit when it was ready, himself set out in a small boat with one companion and a captive Korsarian as guide in a forlorn hope of effecting rescue.

Meanwhile on the Korsarian ship Tanar met the lovely Stellara, supposed to be a daughter of the Cid, but in reality a captive stolen in childhood from the beautiful island

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"Emperor—King—Prince!" sneered the Cid. "And here you are in the clutches of the Cid!"

This greatest romance of our time here comes to its most exciting episodes.

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

of Amiocap. And Tanar won at least the gratitude of Stellara when he rescued her from the attentions of the brutal Korsarian sub-chief Bohar.

Shortly thereafter a violent tempest scattered the Korsarian armada. The ship of the Cid was all but foundering, and the Korsarians took to the boats while Tanar and Stellara, unobserved, remained with the ship; and drifting unguided, the vessel was washed up on the shores of Stellara's native Amiocap.

The people of Amiocap, however, refused to accept Stellara's claim to kinship with them, and they were about to be burned alive as a warning to intruders, when the village was attacked by a troop of mastodons, and in the confusion Tanar and Stellara made their escape into the forest.

There, coming upon a lone hunter about to be overtaken by a tandor he had crippled but not killed, Tanar went to his aid and rescued him. And what was the joyful surprise of all three when Fedol the stranger recognized Stellara as his long-lost daughter.

For a short, happy time Stellara and Tanar dwelt in Fedol's village. Then one day when Tanar was out hunting, the Korsarians under Bohar, who had likewise been cast away upon Amiocap, raided the village and carried off Stellara. Tanar went valiantly in pursuit and came up with the Korsarians, but to escape their firearms he had to take refuge in a cave, and there was made captive by a band of the hideous Coripis, weird sightless hardly human folk who dwelt underground.

From these, after a savage struggle, Tanar contrived to escape along with a fellow-captive named Jude. Then, overtaking Bohar before he had embarked in the boat the Korsarians were building, Tanar managed to kill him in single combat. But his joy and triumph were short; for the treacherous Jude, a native of the neighboring island of Hime, carried off Stellara while Tanar slept, and placing her in a canoe, embarked with her for his native island of Hime.

Awakening, Tanar discovered his loss, set out in pursuit and after many perilous encounters with wild beasts at last attained the island of Hime. The Himeans proved a brutal, savage folk—all save one girl named Gura, who aided Tanar, so that finally he came up with Jude and Stellara, and recaptured her. And then—the pursuing Korsarians overtook them in overpowering numbers, and with Stellara and Gura they were placed on board a ship bound for Korsar. Danger enough, and grief was added; for Stellara had looked askance at Gura, and now in response to Tanar's advances Stellara turned upon him. "In Amiocap you were well enough," she said, "but in Korsar you would be only a naked barbarian!" And, turning, she walked away without another word. *(The story continues in detail:)*

THE voyage to Korsar was uneventful, and during its entire extent Tanar saw nothing of either Stellara or Gura, for although he was not confined in the dark hold, he was not permitted above the first

deck, and although he often looked up at the higher deck at the stern of the ship he never caught a glimpse of either of the girls, from which he concluded that Gura was confined in one of the cabins and that Stellara deliberately avoided him or any sight of him.

As they approached the coast of Korsar, Tanar saw a level country curving upward into the mist of the distance. He thought that far away he discerned the outlines of hills, but of that he could not be certain. He saw cultivated fields and patches of forest land and a river running down to the sea—a broad, winding river upon the shore of which a city lay inland a little from the ocean. There was no harbor at this point upon the coast, but the ship made directly for the mouth of the river, up which it sailed toward the city, which, as he approached it, he saw far surpassed in size and the pretentiousness of its buildings any habitation of man that he had ever seen upon the surface of Pellucidar, not even excepting the new capital of the confederated kingdoms of Pellucidar which the Emperor David was building.

MOST of the buildings which Tanar could see were white with red-tiled roofs, and there were some with lofty minarets and domes of various colors—blue and red and gold—the last shining in the sunlight like the jewels in the diadem of Dian the Empress.

Where the river widened, the town had been built; and here there rode at anchor a great fleet of ships of war and many lesser craft—fishing boats and river boats and barges. The street along the river-front was lined with shops and alive with people.

As their ship approached, cannon boomed from the deck of the anchored warships, and the salute was returned by their own craft, which finally came to anchor in mid-stream, opposite the city.

Small boats put out from the shore and were paddled rapidly toward the warship, which also lowered some of her own boats. Into one of these Tanar was ordered under charge of an officer and a couple of sailors. As he was taken to shore and marched along the street he excited considerable attention among the crowds through which they passed, for he was immediately recognized as a barbarian captive from some uncivilized quarter of Pellucidar.

DURING the debarkation Tanar had seen nothing of either Stellara or Gura and now he wondered if he was ever to see them again. His mind was filled with the same sad thoughts that had been his companions during the entire course of the long journey from Hime to Korsar and which had finally convinced him that he had never known the true Stellara until she had avowed herself upon the deck of the ship in the harbor of Carn. Yes, he was all right upon Amiocap, but in Korsar he was only a naked savage—and this fact was borne in upon him now by the convincing evidence of the haughty contempt with which the natives of Korsar stared at him or exchanged rude jokes at his expense.

It hurt the Sarian's pride to think that he had been so deceived by the woman to whom he had given all his love. He would have staked his life upon his belief that hers was the sweetest and purest and most loyal of characters, and to learn at last that she was shallow and insincere cut him to the quick. His suffering was lightened by but a single thought—his unquestioning belief in the sweet and enduring friendship of Gura.

It was with such thoughts that his mind was occupied as he was led into a building along the waterfront, which seemed to be in the nature of a guardhouse.

Here he was turned over to an officer in charge, and after a few brief questions two soldiers conducted him into another room, raised a heavy trapdoor in the floor and bade him descend a rude ladder that led downward into darkness below.

NO sooner had his head descended below the floor-joists than the door was slammed down above him. He heard the grating of a heavy bolt as the soldiers shot it, and then the thud of their footsteps as they left the room above.

Descending slowly for about ten feet Tanar came at last to the surface of a stone floor. His eyes becoming accustomed to the change, he realized that the apartment into which he had descended was not in total darkness, but that daylight filtered into it from a small, barred window near the ceiling. Looking about him he saw that he was the only occupant of the room.

In the wall, opposite the window, he discerned a doorway, and crossing to it he saw that it opened into a narrow corridor, running parallel with the length of the

room. Looking up and down the corridor he discerned faint patches of light, as though other open doorways lined one side of the hallway.

He was about to enter upon a tour of investigation when the noise of something scurrying along the floor of the corridor attracted his attention, and looking back to his left he saw a dark form creeping toward him. It stood about a foot in height and was, perhaps, three feet long, but in the shadows of the corridor it loomed too indistinctly for him to recognize its details. But presently he saw that it had two shining eyes that seemed to be directed upon him.

With the agility of a tiger, the man leaped for the rodent; his fingers closed upon the creature's neck.

As it came boldly forward, Tanar stepped back into the room he was about to quit, preferring to meet the thing in the lesser darkness of the apartment rather in the gloomy corridor, if it was the creature's intent to attack him.

On the thing came, and turning into the doorway it stopped and surveyed the Sarian. In his native country Tanar had been familiar with a species of wood rat, which the Sarian considered large, but never in all his life had he dreamed that a rat could grow to the enormous proportions of the hideous animal now confronting him with its bold, gleaming, beady eyes.

Tanar had been disarmed when he had been taken aboard the Korsar ship, but though unarmed, he had no fear of a rodent, even if it should elect to attack him, which he doubted. But the ferocious appearance of the rat gave him pause as he thought what the result might be, should a number of them attack a man simultaneously.

Presently the rat, still standing facing him, squealed. For a time there was silence, and then the thing squealed again. As from a great distance, Tanar heard an answering squeal, and then another and another, and presently they grew louder and greater in volume, and he knew that the rat of the Korsar dungeon was calling its fellows to the attack and the feast.

HE looked about him for some weapon of defense, but there was nothing but the bare stone of the floor and the walls. He heard the rat pack coming, and still the scout that had discovered him stood in the doorway, waiting.

But why should he, a man, wait? If he must die, he would die fighting and if he could take the rats as they came, one by one, he might make them pay for their meal and pay dearly. And so, with the agility of a tiger, the man leaped for the rodent, and so sudden and unexpected was his spring that one hand fell upon the solitary sentinel before it could escape. With loud squeals it sought to fasten its fangs in his flesh, but the Sarian was too quick and too powerful. His fingers closed once upon the creature's neck and he swung its body around several times until the neck broke. Then he hurled the corpse toward the advancing pack which he could

already see in the distance through the dim light in the corridor. In the center of this corridor Tanar now stood awaiting his inevitable doom, though he was determined to fight until he was dragged down by the loathsome creatures.

As he waited he heard a noise behind him and thought another pack was attacking him in the rear—but as he glanced over his shoulder he saw the figure of a man, standing in front of the doorway farther down the corridor.

"Come," shouted the stranger. "You will find safety here." Nor did Tanar lose any time in racing down the corridor to where the man stood.

The rats were close at his heels.

"Quick, in here," cried his savior, and seizing Tanar by the arm he dragged him through the doorway into a large room in which there were a dozen or more men.

At the doorway the rat pack stopped, glaring in, but not one of them crossed the threshold.

The room in which he found himself was lighted by two larger windows than that in the room which he had just quitted and in the better light he had an opportunity to examine the man who had rescued him. The fellow was a copper-colored giant with fine features.

AS the man turned his face more toward the light of the windows, Tanar gave an exclamation of surprise and delight. "Ja!" he cried, and before Ja could reply to the salutation, another man sprang forward from the far end of the room.

"Tanar!" exclaimed the second man. "Tanar the son of Ghak!" And as the Sarian wheeled, he found himself standing face to face with David Innes, Emperor of Pellucidar.

"Ja of Anoroc and the Emperor!" cried Tanar. "What has happened? What brought you here?"

"It is well that we were here," said Ja, "and that I heard the rat pack squealing just when I did. These other fellows," and he nodded toward the remaining prisoners, "haven't brains enough to try to save the newcomers that are incarcerated here. David and I have been trying to pound it into their stupid heads that the more of us there are here, the safer we shall be from the attacks of the rats—but all they think of is that they are safe now, and so they do not care what becomes of the other poor devils that are shoved down here; nor have they brains enough to look into the future and realize that when some of us are taken out or die there may not be enough left to repel the attacks of the hungry beasts. But tell us, Tanar, where you have been and how you came here at last."

"It is a long story," replied the Sarian, "and first I would hear the story of my Emperor."

"THERE is little of interest in the adventures that befell us," said David, "but there may be points of great value to us in what I have managed to learn from the Korsarians concerning a number of problems that have been puzzling me.

"When we saw the Korsarians' fleet sail away with you and others of our people, prisoners aboard them, we were filled with dismay and as we stood upon the shore of the great sea above the Land of Awful Shadow, we were depressed by the hopelessness of ever effecting your rescue. It was then that I determined to risk the venture which is responsible for our being here in the dungeon of the capital of Korsar.

"From all those who volunteered to accompany me I selected Ja, and we took with us to be our pilot a Korsarian prisoner named Fitt. Our boat was one of those abandoned by the Korsarians in their flight and in it we pursued our course toward Korsar without incident until we were overwhelmed by the most terrific storm that I have ever witnessed!"

"Doubtless the same storm that wrecked the Korsarians' fleet which was bearing us away," said Tanar.

"Unquestionably," said David, "as you will know in a moment. The storm carried away all our rigging, snapping the mast short off at the deck, and left us helpless except for two pairs of oars.

"As you may know these great sweeps are so heavy that, as a rule, two or three men handle a single oar, and as there were only three of us we could do little more than paddle slowly along with one man paddling on either side while the third relieved first one and then the other at intervals, and even this could be accomplished only after we had cut the great sweeps down to a size that one man might handle without undue fatigue.

"Fitt had laid a course which my compass showed me to be almost due north and this we followed with little or no deviation after the storm had subsided.

"We slept and ate many times before

Fitt announced that we were not far from the island of Amiocap, which he says is halfway between the point at which we had embarked and the land of Korsar. We still had ample water and provisions to last us the balance of our journey if we had been equipped with a sail, but the slow progress of paddling threatened to find us facing starvation, or death by thirst, long before we could hope to reach Korsar. With this fate staring us in the face we decided to land on Amiocap and refit our craft, but before we could do so we were overtaken by a Korsarian ship and being unable either to escape or defend ourselves, we were taken prisoners.

"The vessel was one of those that had formed the armada of the Cid and was, as far as they knew, the only one that had survived the storm. Shortly before they had found us they had picked up a boat load of the survivors of the Cid's ship, including the Cid himself, and from the Cid we learned that you and the other prisoners had doubtless been lost with his vessel, which he said was in a sinking condition at the time that he abandoned it. To my surprise I learned that the Cid had also abandoned his own daughter to her fate —and I believe that this cowardly act weighed heavily upon his mind, for he was always taciturn and moody, avoiding the companionship of even his own officers."

"SHE did not die," said Tanar. "We escaped together, the sole survivors, as far as we knew, of the Cid's ship, though later we were captured by the members of another boat crew that had also made the island of Amiocap and with them we were brought to Korsar."

"In my conversation with the Cid and also with officers and men of the Korsar ship I sought to sound their knowledge of the extent of this sea, which is known as the Korsar Az," said David. "Among other things I learned that they possess compasses and are conversant with their use and they told me that to the west they had never sailed to the extreme limits of the Korsar Az, which they say reaches on, a vast body of water for countless leagues beyond the knowledge of man. But to the east they have followed the shore line from Korsar southward almost to the shore upon which they landed to attack the empire of Pellucidar.

"Now this suggests, in fact it almost proves, that Korsar lies upon the same great continent as the empire of Pellucidar and if we can escape from prison, we may be able to make our way by land back to our own country."

"BUT there is that *if*," said Ja. "We have eaten and slept many times since they threw us into this dark hole, yet we are no nearer escape now than we were at the moment that they put us here; nor do we even know what fate lies in store for us."

"These other prisoners tell us," resumed David, "that the fact that we were not immediately killed, which is the customary fate of prisoners of war among the Korsarians, indicates that they are saving us for some purpose; but what that purpose is I cannot conceive."

"I can," said Tanar. "In fact I am quite sure that I know."

"And what is it?" demanded Ja.

"They wish us to teach them how to make firearms and powder such as ours," replied the Sarian. "But where do you suppose they ever got firearms and powder in the first place?"

"Or the great ships that they sail?" added Ja. "Ships that are even larger than those which we build! These things were unknown in Pellucidar before David and Perry came to us; yet the Korsarians appear to have known of them and used them always."

"I have an idea," said David; "yet it is such a mad idea that I have almost hesitated to entertain it, much less to express it."

"What is it?" asked Tanar.

"It was suggested to me in my conversations with the Korsarians themselves," replied the Emperor. "Without exception they have all assured me that their ancestors came from another world—a world above which the sun did not stand perpetually at zenith, but crossed the heavens regularly, leaving the world in darkness half the time. They say that a part of this world is very cold and that their ancestors, who were seafaring men, became caught with their ships in the frozen waters; that their compasses turned in all directions and became useless to them.

"Finally, when they broke through the ice and sailed away in the direction that they thought was south, they came into Pellucidar, which they found inhabited only by naked savages and wild beasts. And here they set up their city and built new ships, their numbers being augmented from time

to time by other seafaring men from this world from which they say they originally came.

"They intermarried with the natives, who in this part of Pellucidar seem to have been of a very low order."

David paused.

"Well," asked Tanar, "what does it all mean?"

"It means," said David, "that if their legend is true, or based upon fact, then their ancestors came from the same outer world from which Perry and I came. But by what avenue? That is the enigma."

MANY times during their incarceration the three men discussed this subject, but never were they able to arrive at any definite solution of the mystery. Food was brought them many times and several times they slept before Korsarian soldiers came and took them from the dungeon.

They were led to the palace of the Cid, the architecture of which but tended to increase, in the mind of David Innes, the mystery of the origin of this strange race, for the building seemed to show indisputable proof of Moorish influence.

Within the palace they were conducted to a large room, comfortably filled with bewhiskered Korsarians decked out in their gaudiest raiment, which far surpassed in brilliancy of coloring and ornamentation the comparatively mean clothes they had worn aboard ship. Upon a dais, at one end of the room, a man was seated upon a large, ornately carved chair. It was the Cid, and as David's eyes fell upon him his mind suddenly grasped, for the first time, a significant suggestion in the title of the ruler of the Korsarians.

Previously the name had been only a name to David. He had not considered it as a title; nor had it by association awakened any particular train of thought, but now, coupled with the Moorish palace and the carved throne, it did.

The Cid! Rodrigo Diaz de Bivar—El Campeador—a national hero of Eleventh Century Spain. What did it mean? His thoughts reverted to the ships of the Korsarians—their motley crews with gay headhandkerchiefs and sashes, their pistols, arquebuses and cutlasses—and he recalled the thrilling stories he had read as a boy of the pirates of the Spanish Main. Could it be merely coincidence? Could a nation of people have grown up within the inner world, who so closely resembled the buccaneers of the Seventeenth Century, or had their forebears in truth found their way hither from the outer crust? David Innes did not know. He was frankly puzzled. But now he was being led to the foot of the Cid's throne and there was no further opportunity for the delightful speculation that had absorbed his mind momentarily.

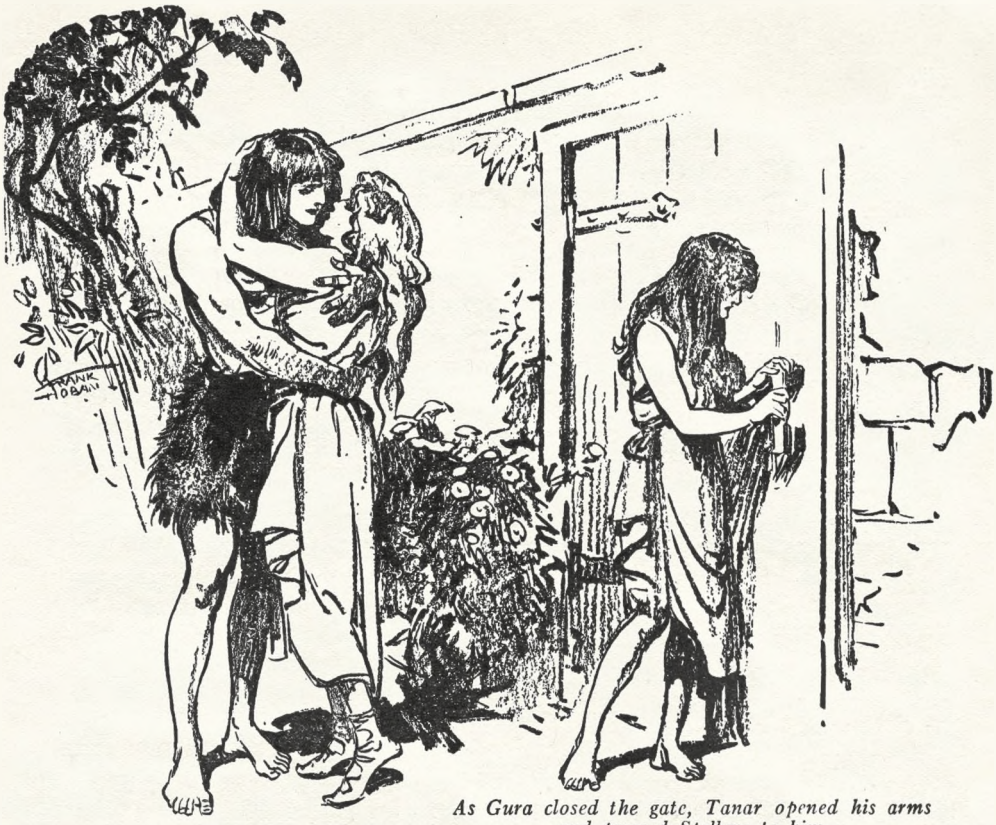
THE cruel, cunning eyes of the Cid looked down upon the three prisoners from out his brutal face. "The Emperor of Pellucidar!" he sneered. "The King of Anoroc! The son of the King of Sari!"

Then he laughed uproariously. He extended his hand, his fingers parted and curled in a clutching gesture. "Emperor! King! Prince!" he sneered again. "And yet here you all are in the clutches of the Cid. Emperor—bah! I, the Cid, am the Emperor of all Pellucidar! You and your naked savages!" He turned on David. "Who are you to take the title of Emperor? I could crush you all." And he closed his fingers in a gesture of rough cruelty. "But I shall not. The Cid is generous and he is grateful, too. You shall have your freedom for a small price that you may easily pay." He paused as though he expected them to question him, but no one of the three spoke. Suddenly he turned upon David. "Where did you get your firearms and your powder? Who made them for you?"

"We made them ourselves," replied David.

"Who taught you to make them?" insisted the Cid. "But never mind; it is enough that you know and we would know. You may win your liberty by teaching us."

DAVID could make gunpowder, but whether he could make any better gunpowder than the Korsarians he did not know. He had left that to Perry and his apprentices in the empire, and he knew perfectly well that he could not reconstruct a modern rifle such as were being turned out in the arsenals at Sari, for he had neither the drawings to make the rifles, nor the machinery, nor the drawings to make the machinery, nor the shops in which to make steel. But nevertheless here was one opportunity for possible freedom that might pave the way to escape and he could not throw it away, either for himself or his companions by admitting their inability to manufacture modern firearms or improve the powder of the Korsarians.



As Gura closed the gate, Tanar opened his arms and pressed Stellara to him.

"Well," demanded the Cid impatiently, "what is your answer?"

"We cannot make powder and rifles while a man eats," replied David; "nor can we make them from the air or from conversation. We must have materials; we must have factories; we must have trained men. You will sleep many times before we are able to accomplish all this. Are you willing to wait?"

"How many times shall we sleep before you have taught our people to make these things?" demanded the Cid.

David shrugged. "I do not know," he said. "In the first place I must find the proper materials."

"We have all the materials," said the Cid. "We have iron and we have the ingredients for making powder. All that you have to do is to put them together in a better way than we have been able to."

"You may have the materials, but it is possible that they are not of sufficiently good quality to make the things that will alone satisfy the subjects of the Emperor of Pellucidar. Perhaps your niter is low grade; there may be impurities in your sulphur; or even the charcoal may not be properly prepared; and there are even more important matters to consider in the selection of material and its manufacture into steel suitable for making the firearms of the Pellucidarians."

"You shall not be hurried," said the Cid. He turned to a man standing near him. "See that an officer accompanies these men always," he said. "Let them go where they please and do what they please in the prosecution of my orders. Furnish them with laborers if they desire them, but do not let them delay and do not let them escape, upon pain of death."

And thus ended their interview with the Cid of Korsar.

AS it chanced, the man to be detailed to watch them was Fitt, the fellow whom David had chosen to acompany him and Ja in their pursuit of the Korsar fleet, and Fitt, having become well acquainted with David and Ja and having experienced nothing but considerate treatment from them, was far from unfriendly, though, like the majority of all other Korsarians, he was by nature inclined to be savage and cruel.

As they were passing out of the palace they caught a glimpse of a girl in a chamber that opened onto the corridor in which

they were. Fitt, big with the importance of his new position and feeling somewhat like a showman revealing and explaining his wonders to the ignorant and uninitiated, had been describing the various objects of interest that they had passed as well as the personages of importance, and now he nodded in the direction of the room in which they had seen the girl, although they had gone along the corridor so far by this time that they could no longer see her.

"That," he said, "is Stellara, the Cid's daughter."

Tanar stopped in his tracks and turned to Fitt.

"May I speak to her?" he asked.

"You!" cried Fitt. "You speak to the daughter of the Cid!"

"I know her," said Tanar. "We two were left alone on the abandoned ship when it was deserted by its officers and crew. Go and ask her if she will speak to me."

Fitt hesitated. "The Cid might not approve," he said.

"He gave you no orders other than to accompany us," said David. "How are we to carry on our work if we are to be prevented from speaking to anyone whom we choose? At least you will be safe in leading us to the Cid's daughter. If she wishes to speak to Tanar the responsibility will not be yours."

"Perhaps you are right," said Fitt. "I will ask her." He stepped to the doorway of the apartment in which were Stellara and Gura and now, for the first time, he saw that a man was with them. It was Bulf. The three looked up as he entered.

"There is one here who wishes to speak to the Cid's daughter," Fitt said, addressing Stellara.

"Who is he?" demanded Bulf.

"He is Tanar, a prisoner of war from Sari."

"Tell him," said Stellara, "that the Cid's daughter does not recall him and cannot grant him an interview."

As Fitt turned to quit the chamber, Gura's ordinarily sad eyes flashed a look of angry surprise at Stellara.

CHAPTER XVI

Two Suns

DAVID, Ja and Tanar were quartered in barracks inside the palace wall and immediately set to work to carry out a plan that David had suggested and which included an inspection, not only of the Korsarians' powder factory and the arsenals in which their firearms were manufactured, but also visits to the niter beds, sulphur deposits, charcoal pits and iron mines.

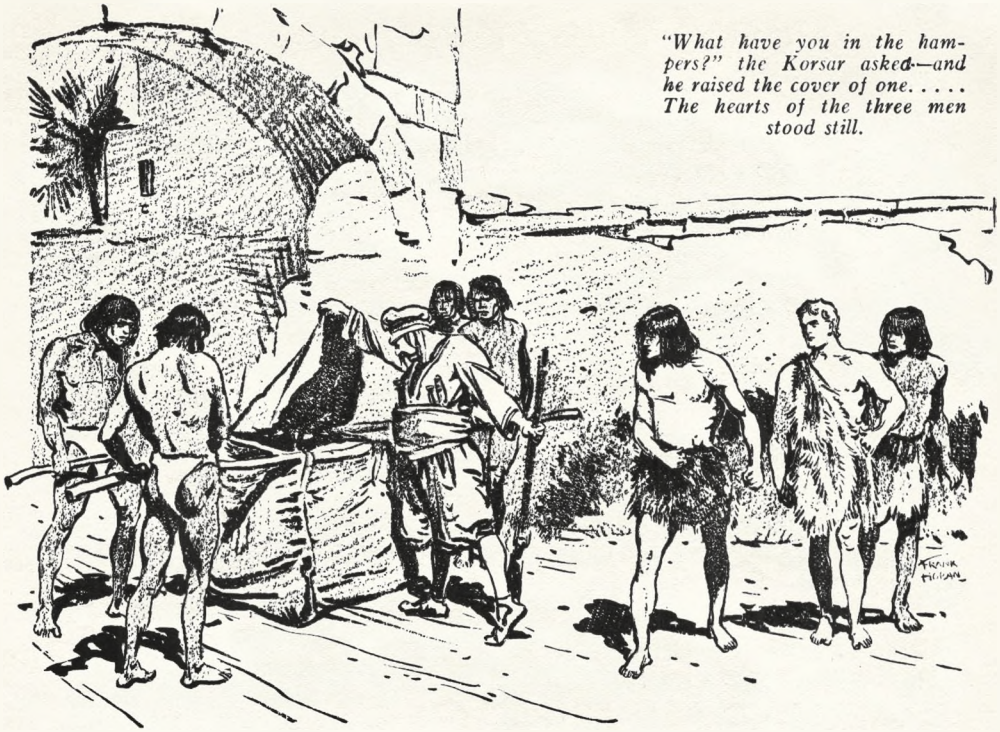
These various excursions for the purpose of inspecting the sources of supply and the methods of obtaining it aroused no suspicion in the minds of the Korsarians, though the captives' true purpose was anything other than it appeared to be.

IN the first place David had not the slightest intention of teaching the Korsarians how to improve their powder, thereby transforming them into a far greater menace to the peace of his empire than they could ever become while handicapped by an inferior grade of gunpowder that failed to explode quite as often as it exploded. These tours of inspection, however, which often took them considerable distances from the city of Korsar, afforded an excuse for delaying the lesson in powder-making, while David and his companions sought to concoct some plan of escape that might contain at least the seed of success. Also they gave the three men a better knowledge of the surrounding country, familiarized them with the various trails and acquainted them with the manners and customs of the primitive tribes who carried on the agriculture of Korsar and all of the labor of the mines, niter beds and charcoal burning.

It was not long before they had learned that all the Korsarians lived in the city of Korsar and that they numbered about five hundred thousand souls, and as all labor was performed by slaves every male Korsarian above the age of fifteen was free for military service, while those between ten and fifteen were virtually so since this included the period of their training, during which time they learned all that could be taught them of seamanship and the art of piracy and raiding.

David soon came to realize that the ferocity of Korsars, rather than their number, rendered them a menace to the peace of Pellucidar, but he was positive that with an equal number of ships and men he could overcome them and he was glad that he had taken upon himself this dangerous mission, for the longer the three reconnoitered the environs of Korsar the more convinced they became that escape was possible.

The primitive savages from whom the Korsars had wrested their country and



"What have you in the hampers?" the Korsar asked—and he raised the cover of one. . . . . The hearts of the three men stood still.

whom they had forced into virtual slavery were of such a low order of intelligence that David Innes felt confident they could never be successfully utilized as soldiers or fighting men by the Korsars, whom they outnumbered possibly ten to one; their villages, according to his Korsar informant, stretched away into the vast hinterland, to the farthest extremities of which no man had ever penetrated.

The natives themselves spoke of a cold country to the north, in the barren and desolate wastes of which no man could live, and of mountains and forests and plains stretching away into the east and southeast to, as they put it, "the very shores of Molop Az,"—the flaming sea of Pellucidarian legend upon which the land of Pellucidar floats.

This belief of the natives of the uninterrupted extent of the land mass to the south and southeast corroborated David's belief that Korsar lay upon the same continent as Sari, and this belief was further carried out by the distinct sense of perfect orientation which the three men experienced the moment they set foot upon the shores of Korsar; or rather which the born Pellucidarians, Ja and Tanar, experienced, since David did not possess this inborn homing instinct. Had there been an ocean of any considerable extent separating them from the land of their birth, the two Pellucidarians felt confident that they could not have been so certain of the direction of Sari as they now were.

AS their excursions to various points outside the city of Korsar increased in number the watchfulness of Fitt relaxed, so that the three men occasionally found themselves alone together in some remote part of the back country.

Tanar, wounded by repeated rebuffs of Stellara, sought to convince himself that he did not love her. He tried to make himself believe that she was cruel and hard and unfaithful, but all that he succeeded in accomplishing was to make himself more unhappy, though he hid this from his companions and devoted himself as assiduously as they to planning their escape. It filled his heart with agony to think of going away forever from the vicinity of the woman he loved, even though there was little or no hope that he might see her should he remain, for gossip of the approaching nuptials of Stellara and Bulf was current in the barracks where he was quartered.

The window of the room to which he had been assigned overlooked a portion of the garden of the Cid—a spot of great natural beauty in which trees and flowers and shrubs bordered graveled pathways and a

miniature lake and streamlet sparkled in the sunlight.

Tanar was seldom in his apartment and when he was he ordinarily gave no more than casual attention to the garden beyond the wall, but upon one occasion, after returning from an inspection of an iron mine, he had been left alone with his own sad thoughts, and seating himself upon the sill of the window he was gazing down upon the lovely scene below when his attention was attracted by the figure of a girl as she came into view almost directly before him along one of the graveled paths. She was looking up toward his window and their eyes met simultaneously. It was Gura.

Placing her finger to her lips, cautioning him to silence, she came quickly forward until she reached a point as close to his window as it was possible for her to come.

"There is a gate in the garden wall at the far end of your barracks," she said in a low whisper attuned to reach his ears. "Come to it at once."

Tanar stopped to ask no questions. The girl's tone had been peremptory. Her whole manner bespoke urgency. Descending the stairway to the ground floor Tanar left the building and walked slowly toward its far end. Korsarians were all about him, but they had been accustomed to seeing him, and now he held himself to a slow and careless pace that aroused no suspicion. Just beyond the end of the barracks he came to a small, heavily planked door set in the garden wall and as he arrived opposite this, it swung open and he stepped quickly within the garden, Gura instantly closing the gate behind him.

"AT last I have succeeded," cried the girl, "but I thought I never should! I have tried so hard to see you ever since Fitt took you from the Cid's palace. I learned from one of the slaves where your quarters were in the barracks and whenever I have been free I have been always beneath your window. Twice before I saw you, but I could not attract your attention and now that I have succeeded, perhaps it is too late."

"Too late! What do you mean? Too late for what?" demanded Tanar.

"Too late to save Stellara," said the girl.

"She is in danger?" asked Tanar.

"The preparations for her marriage to Bulf are complete. She cannot delay it much longer."

"Why should she wish to delay it?" demanded the Sarian. "Is she not content with the man she has chosen?"

"Like all men, you are a fool in matters pertaining to a woman's heart," cried Gura.

"I know what she told me," said Tanar.

"After all that you had been through together—after all that she had been to you, how could you have believed that she loved another?" demanded Gura.

"You mean that she does not love Bulf?" asked Tanar.

"Of course she does not love him. He is a horrid beast."

"And she still loves me?"

"She has never loved anyone else," replied the girl.

"Then why did she treat me as she did? Why did she say the things that she said?" Tanar demanded incredulously.

"She was jealous."

"Jealous! Jealous of whom?"

"Of me," said Gura, dropping her eyes.

THE Sarian stood looking dumbly at the dark-haired Himean girl standing before him. He noted her slim body, her drooping shoulders, her attitude of dejection. "Gura," he asked, "did I ever speak words of love to you? Did I ever give Stellara or another the right to believe that I loved you?"

She shook her head. "No," she said, "and I told Stellara that when I found out what she thought. I told her that you did not love me and finally she was convinced and asked me to find you and tell you that she still loves you. But I have another message for you from myself. I know you, Sarian. I know that you are not planning to remain here contentedly a prisoner of the Korsarians. I know that you will try to escape and I have come to beg you to take Stellara with you, for she will kill herself before she will become the mate of Bulf."

"Escape," mused Tanar. "How may it be accomplished from the heart of the Cid's palace?"

"That is the man's work," said Gura. "It is for you to plan the way."

"And you?" asked Tanar. "You wish to come away with us?"

"Do not think of me," said Gura. "If you and Stellara can escape, I do not matter."

"But you do matter," said the man, "and I am sure that you do not wish to stay in Korsar."

"No, I do not wish to remain in Korsar," replied the girl, "and particularly so now that the Cid seems to have taken a fancy to me."

"You wish to return to Hime?" asked Tanar.

"After the brief taste of happiness I have had," replied the girl, "I could not return to the quarrels, the hatred and the constant unhappiness that constitute life within the cave of Scurv and which would be but continued in some other cave were I to take a mate in Hime."

"Then come with us," said the Sarian.

"Oh, if I only might!" cried Gura.

"Then that is settled," exclaimed Tanar. "You shall come with us and if we reach Sari I know that you can find peace and happiness for yourself always."

"It sounds like a dream," said the girl wistfully, "from which I shall awaken in the cave of Scurv."

"We shall make the dream come true," said the Sarian, "and now let us plan on how best we can get you and Stellara out of the palace of the Cid."

"That will not be so easy," said Gura.

"No, it is the most difficult part of our escape," agreed the Sarian; "but it must be done, and I believe that the bolder the plan, the greater its assurance of success."

"And it must be done at once," said Gura, "for the wedding arrangements are entirely completed, and Bulf is impatient for his mate."

FOR a moment Tanar stood in thought, seeking to formulate some plan that might contain at least a semblance of feasibility. "Can you bring Stellara to this gate at once?" he asked Gura.

"If she is alone, yes," replied the girl.

"Then go and fetch her and wait here with her until I return. My signal will be a low whistle. When you hear it, unlatch the gate."

"I shall return as quickly as possible," said Gura, and as Tanar stepped through the doorway into the barrack yards he closed and latched the gate behind him.

The Sarian looked about him and was delighted to note that apparently no one had seen him emerge from the garden. Instead of returning along the front of the barracks the way he had come, he turned in the opposite direction and made his way directly to one of the main gates of the palace. And this strategy was prompted also by another motive—he wished to ascertain if he could pass the guard at the main gate without being challenged.

Tanar had not adopted the garments of his captors; he was still conspicuous by the scant attire and simple ornaments of a savage warrior and though his comings and goings had made him a familiar figure around the palace yard and in the Korsarian streets beyond, he had never passed through a palace gate alone before, nor without the ever-present Fitt.

As he neared the gate, he neither hastened nor loitered, but maintained a steady pace and an unconcerned demeanor. Others were passing in and out as the former naturally received much closer scrutiny by the guards than the latter, Tanar soon found himself in a Korsarian street outside the palace of the Cid.

Before him were the usual sights now grown familiar—the narrow, dusty street, the small open shops or bazaars lining the opposite side, the swaggering Korsarians in their brilliant kerchiefs and sashes, and the slaves bearing great burdens to and fro—garden truck and the fruits of the chase coming in from the back country, while bales of tanned hides, salt, and other commodities, craved by the simple tastes of the aborigines, were being borne out of the city toward the interior. Some of the bales were of considerable size and weight, requiring the services of four carriers, and were supported on two long poles, the ends of which rested on the shoulders of the men.

There were lines of slaves carrying provisions and ammunition to a fleet of ships that was outfitting for a new raid, and another line bearing plunder from the hold of another ship that had but recently come to anchor in the river before the city.

All this activity presented a scene of apparent confusion, which was increased by the voices of the merchants hawking their wares and the shrill bickering of prospective purchasers.

THROUGH the motley throng the Sarian shouldered his way back toward another gate that gave entrance to the palace ground close to the far end of the long, rambling barracks. As this was the gate through which he passed most often he was accorded no more than a glance as he passed through, and once within he hastened immediately to the quarters assigned to David. Here he found both David and Ja, to whom he immediately un-

folded a plan that he had been perfecting since he left the garden of the Cid.

"And now," he said, "before you have agreed upon my plan, let me make it plain that I do not expect you to accompany me if you feel that the chances of success are too slight. It is my duty, as well as my desire, to save Stellara and Gura. But I cannot ask you to place your plans for escape in jeopardy."

"Your plan is a good one," replied David, "and even if it were not it is the best that has been suggested yet. And as for our deserting either you or Stellara or Gura that, of course, is not even a question for discussion. We shall go with you and I know that I speak for Ja as well as myself."

"I knew that you would say that," said the Sarian, "and now let us start at once to put the plan to test."

"Good," said David. "You make your purchases and return to the garden and Ja and I will thereupon proceed at once to carry out our part."

THE three proceeded casually toward the palace gate at the far end of the barracks, and as they were passing through the Korsarian in charge stopped them.

"Where now?" he demanded.

"We are going into the city to make purchases for a long expedition that we are about to take in search of new iron-deposits in the back country, farther than we have ever been before."

"And where is Fitt?" demanded the captain of the gate.

"The Cid sent for him, and while he is gone, we are making the necessary preparations."

"All right," said the man, apparently satisfied. "You may pass."

"We shall return presently with porters," said David, "for some of our personal belongings, and then go out again to collect the balance of our outfit. Will you leave word that we are to be passed in the event that you are not here?"

"I shall be here," said the man. "But what are you going to carry into the back country?"

"We expect that we may have to travel even beyond the farthest boundaries of Korsar, where the natives know little or nothing of the Cid and his authority, and for this reason it is necessary for us to carry provisions and articles of trade that we may barter with them for what we want, since we shall not have sufficient numbers in our party to take these things by force."

"I see," said the man; "but it seems funny that the Cid does not send muskets and pistols to take what he wants rather than spoil these savages by trading with them."

"Yes," agreed David, calmly, "it does seem strange." And the three passed out into the street of Korsar.

BEYOND the gate, David and Ja turned to the right toward the marketplace, while Tanar crossed at once to one of the shops on the opposite side of the street. Here he purchased two large bags, made of well-tanned hide, with which he returned immediately to the palace grounds and presently he was before the garden gate where he voiced a low whistle that was to be the signal by which the girls would know he had arrived.

Almost immediately the gate swung open and Tanar stepped quickly within. As Gura closed the gate behind him, Tanar found himself standing face to face with Stellara. Her eyes were moist with tears, her lips were trembling with suppressed emotion as the Sarian opened his arms and pressed her to him. . . . .

The marketplace of the city of Korsar is a large, open square where the natives from the interior barter their agricultural produce, raw hides and the flesh of the animals they have taken in the chase, for the simple necessities which they wish to take back to their homes with them.

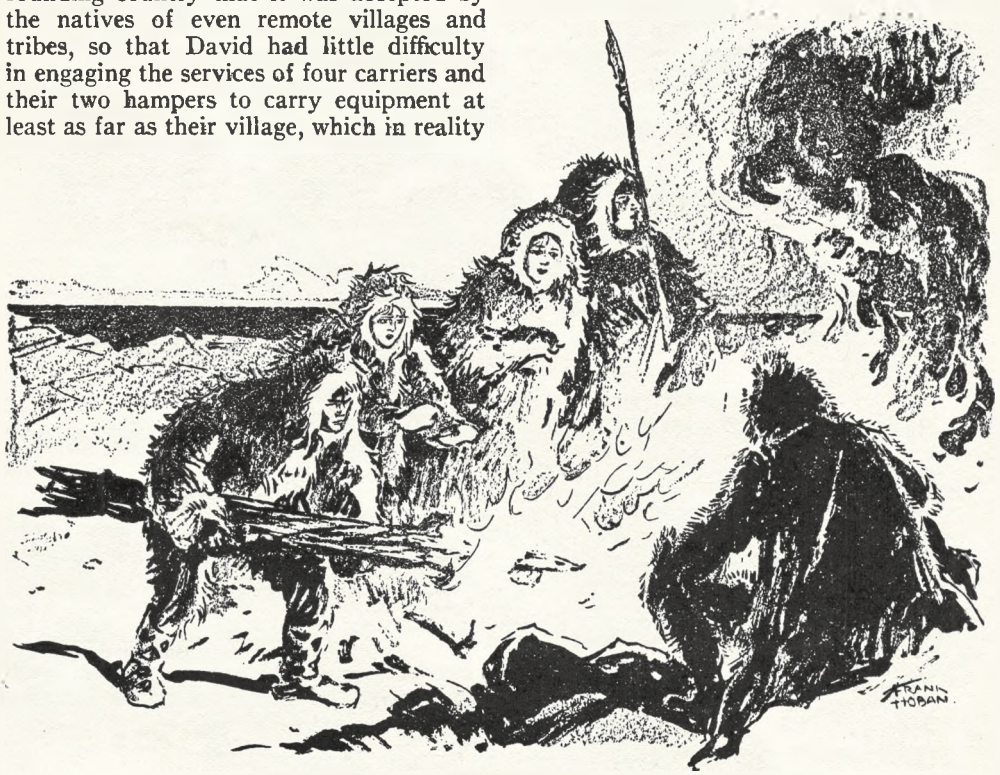
The farmers bring in their vegetables in large hampers made of reed bound together with grasses. These hampers are ordinarily about four feet in each dimension and are borne on a single pole by two men if lightly loaded, or upon two poles and by four carriers if the load is heavy.

David and Ja approached a group of men whose hampers were empty and who were evidently preparing to depart from the market, and after questioning several of the group they found two who were returning to the same village, which lay at a considerable distance almost due north of Korsar.

By the order of the Cid, Fitt had furnished his three prisoners with ample funds in the money of Korsar that they might make necessary purchases in the prosecution of their investigations and their experiments.

The money, which consisted of gold

coins of various sizes and weights, was crudely stamped upon one side with what purported to be a likeness of the Cid, and upon the other with a Korsar ship. For so long a time had gold coin been the medium of exchange in Korsar and the surrounding country that it was accepted by the natives of even remote villages and tribes, so that David had little difficulty in engaging the services of four carriers and their two hampers to carry equipment at least as far as their village, which in reality was much farther than David had any intention of utilizing the services of the natives.



The air was colder than they had ever known in their native land; when the wind blew they shivered around roaring fires.

Having concluded his arrangements with the men, David and Ja led the way back to the palace gate, where the officer passed them through with a nod.

As they proceeded along the front of the barracks toward its opposite end their only fear was that Fitt might have returned from his interview with the Cid. If he had and if he saw and questioned them, all was lost. They scarcely breathed as they approached the entrance to their quarters, which were also the quarters of Fitt. But they saw nothing of him as they passed the doorway and hastened on to the door in the garden wall. Here they halted, directing the bearers to place the baskets close to the doorway.

David whistled; the door swung in, and at a word from Tanar the carriers entered, picked up two bundles just inside the gate and deposited one of them in each of the hampers waiting beyond the wall. The lids were closed. The slaves resumed their burden, and the party turned about to retrace its steps to the palace gate through which the carriers had just entered with their empty hampers.

ONCE again apprehension had chilled the heart of David Innes for fear that Fitt might have returned, but they passed the barracks and reached the gate without seeing him. Here they were halted by the Korsar in charge.

"It did not take you long," he said. "What have you in the hampers?" And he raised the cover of one of them.

"Only our personal belongings," said David. "When we return again we shall have our full equipment. Would you like to inspect it all at the same time?"

The Korsar, looking down at the skin bag lying at the bottom of the hamper, hesitated for a moment before replying. "Very well," he said, "I will do it all at the

same time." And he let the cover drop back into place.

The hearts of the three men had stood still, but David Innes' voice betrayed no unwonted emotion as he addressed the captain of the gate. "When Fitt returns," he said, "tell him that I am anxious to see him and ask him if he will wait in our quarters until we return."

The Korsarian nodded a surly assent and motioned brusquely for them to pass on through the gate.

TURNING to the right, David led the party down the narrow street toward the marketplace. There he turned abruptly to the left, through a winding alleyway and doubled back to the north upon another street paralleling that upon which the palace fronted. Here were poorer shops and less traffic and the carriers were able to make good time until presently the party passed out of the city of Korsar into the open country beyond. And then, by dint of threats and promises of additional pieces of gold, the three men urged the carriers to accelerate their speed to a swinging trot, which they maintained until they were forced to stop from exhaustion. A brief rest with food and they were off again; nor did they slacken their pace until they reached the rolling, wooded country at the foothills of the mountains, far north of Korsar.

Here, well within the shelter of the woods, the carriers set down their burdens and threw themselves upon the ground to rest, while Tanar and David swung back the covers of the hampers and untying the stout thongs that closed the mouths of the bags, revealed their contents. Half-smothered and almost unable to move their cramped limbs, Stellara and Gura were lifted from the baskets and revealed to the gaze of the astounded carriers.

Tanar turned upon the men. "Do you know who this woman is?" he demanded.

"No," said one of their number.

"It is Stellara, the daughter of the Cid," said the Sarian. "You have helped to steal her from the palace of her father. Do you know what that will mean if you are caught?"

The men trembled in evident terror. "We did not know she was in the basket," said one of them. "We had nothing to do with it. It is you who stole her."

"Will the Korsarians believe you when we tell them of the great quantities of gold we paid you, if we are captured?" asked Tanar. "No, they will not believe you, and I do not have to tell you what your fate will be. But there is safety for you if you will do what I tell you to do."

"What is that?" demanded one of the natives.

"Take up your hampers and hasten on to your village and tell no one, as long as you live, what you have done—not even your mates. If you do not tell, no one will know, for we shall not tell."

"We will never tell," cried the men in chorus.

"Do not even talk about it among yourselves," cautioned David, "for even the trees have ears, and if the Korsarians come to your village and question you tell them that you saw three men and two women traveling toward the east just beyond the borders of the city of Korsar. Tell them that they were too far away for you to recognize them, but that they may have been the Cid's daughter and her companion with the three men who abducted them."

"We will do as you say," replied the carriers.

"Then be gone," directed David. And the eight men, hurriedly picking up their hampers, disappeared into the forest toward the north.

WHEN the two girls were sufficiently revived and rested to continue the journey, the party set out again, making their way to the east for a short distance and then turning north again, for it had been Tanar's plan to throw the Korsarians off the trail by traveling north, rather than east or south. Later they would turn to the east, far north of the area which the Korsars might be expected to comb in search of them, and then again, after many marches, they would change their direction once more to the south. It was a circuitous route, but it seemed the safest.

The forest changed to pine and cedar and there were windswept wastes dotted with gnarled and stunted trees. The air was colder than they had ever known it in their native land, and when the wind blew from the north they shivered around roaring camp-fires. The animals they met were scarcer and bore heavier fur, and nowhere was there sign of man.

Upon one occasion when they stopped to camp Tanar pointed at the ground before him. "Look!" he cried to David. "My shadow is no longer beneath me,"

"The poor devils!" mused David. "They made a greater discovery than they could have hoped for; I wonder if they lived to realize it!"

and then, looking up: "The sun is not above us."

"I have noticed that," replied David, "and I am trying to understand the reason for it. Perhaps I shall with the aid of the legends of the Korsarians."

As they proceeded their shadows grew longer and longer and the light and heat of the sun diminished until they traveled in a semi-twilight that was always cold.

Long since they had been forced to fashion warmer garments from the pelts of the beasts they had killed. Tanar and Ja wanted to turn back toward the southeast, for their strange homing instinct drew them in that direction toward their own country, but David asked them to accompany him a little farther, for his mind had evolved a strange and wonderful theory and he wished to press on for a short distance to obtain still stronger proof of its correctness.

When they slept they rested beside roaring fires; and once, when they awoke, they were covered by a light mantle of a cold, white substance that frightened the Pellucidarians, but which David knew was snow. And the air was full of whirling particles and the wind bit those portions of their faces that were exposed, for now they wore fur caps and hoods and their hands were covered with warm mittens.

"We cannot go much farther in this direction," said Ja, "or we shall all perish."

"Perhaps you are right," said David. "You four turn back to the southeast and I will go yet a little farther to the north and overtake you when I have satisfied myself of something I believe is true."

"No," cried Tanar, "we shall remain together. Where you go we shall go."

"Yes," said Ja, "we shall not abandon you."

"Just a little farther north, then," said David, "and I shall be ready to turn back with you." And so they forged ahead over snow-covered ground into a deepening gloom that filled the souls of the Pellucidarians with terror.

AFTER a while, however, the wind changed and blew from the south and the snow melted and the air became balmy again, and still farther on the twilight slowly lifted and the light increased, though the mid-day sun of Pellucidar was now scarcely visible behind them.

"I cannot understand it," said Ja. "Why should it become lighter again, although the sun is ever farther away behind us?"

"I do not know," said Tanar. "Ask David."

"I can only guess," said David, "and my guess seems so preposterous that I dare not voice it."

"Look!" cried Stellara, pointing ahead. "It is the sea."

"Yes," said Gura, "a gray sea; it does not look like water."

"And what is that?" cried Tanar. "There is a great fire upon the sea."

"And the sea does not curve upward in the distance," cried Stellara. "Everything is wrong in this country and I am afraid."

David had stopped in his tracks and was staring at the deep red glow ahead. The others gathered around him and watched it too. "What is it?" demanded Ja.

"As there is a God in heaven it can be but one thing," replied David; "and yet I know that it cannot be that thing. The very idea is ridiculous. It is impossible and outlandish."

"But what might it be?" demanded Stellara.

"The sun," replied David.

"But the sun is almost out of sight behind us," Gura reminded him.

"I do not mean the sun of Pellucidar," replied David; "but the sun of the outer world, the world from which I came."

The others stood in silent awe, watching the edge of a blood-red disk that seemed to be floating upon a gray ocean across whose reddened surface a brilliant pathway of red and gold led from the shoreline to the blazing orb, where the sea and sky seemed to meet.

CHAPTER XVII

MADNESS!

"NOW," said Stellara, "we can go no farther." Nor indeed could they, for east and west and north stretched a great sullen sea and along the shoreline at their feet great ice-cakes rose and fell with sullen roars and loud reports as the sea ground the churning mass.

For a long time David Innes, Emperor of Pellucidar, stood staring out across that vast and desolate waste of water. "What lies beyond?" he murmured to himself, and then, shaking his head, he turned away. "Come," he said, "let us strike back for Sari."

His companions received his words with shouts of joy. Smiles replaced the half-troubled expressions that had marked their drawn faces since the moment that they had discovered their beloved noonday sun was being left behind them.

With light steps, with laughter and joking, they faced the long, arduous journey that lay ahead of them.

During the second march, after they had turned back from the northern sea, Gura discovered a strange object to the left of their line of march. "It looks as though it may be some queer sort of native hut," she said.

"We shall have to investigate it," said David, and the five made their way to the side of the strange object.

It was a large, heavy, wicker basket that lay inverted upon the barren ground. All about it were the rotted remnants of cordage.

At David's suggestion the men turned the basket over upon its side. Beneath it they found well-preserved remnants of oiled silk and a network of fine cord.

"What is it?" asked Stellara.

"It is the basket and all that remains of the gas-bag of a balloon," said David.

"What is a balloon," asked the girl, "and how did it get here?"

"I can explain what a balloon is," said David; "but if I were positive that I was correct in my conjecture as to how it came here I would hold the answer to a thousand questions that have puzzled the men of the outer crust for ages." For a long time he stood silently contemplating the weather-worn basket. His mind, submerged in thought, was oblivious to all else. "If I only knew!" he mused. "If I only knew; and yet how else could it have come here? What else could that red disk upon the horizon of the sea have been, other than the midnight sun of the Arctic regions?"

"What in the world are you talking about?" demanded Gura.

"The poor devils," mused David, apparently oblivious of the girl's presence. "They made a greater discovery than they could have hoped for in their wildest dreams. I wonder if they lived to realize it." Slowly he removed his fur cap and stood facing the basket with bowed head; and for some unaccountable reason, which they could not explain, his companions bared their heads and followed his example. And after they had resumed their journey it was a long time before David Innes could shake off the effects of that desolate reminder of one of the world's most pathetic tragedies.

SO anxious were the members of the party to reach the cheering warmth of the beloved Pellucidar they knew, that they pressed on toward the south with the briefest of rests; nor were they wholly content until once more their shadows lay directly beneath them.

As Sari lay slightly east of south, their return from the north took them over a

Tanar and Stellara found their way blocked, nor was there any place in which they might hide; thus they fell again into the hands of the Korsarians.

different route from that which they had followed up from Korsar. Of course the Pellucidarians did not know these points of compass as north or south, and even David Innes carried them in his mind more in accordance with the Pellucidarian scheme than that with which he had been familiar upon the outer crust.

Naturally, with the sun always at zenith and with no stars and no moon and no planets, the Pellucidarians have been compelled to evolve a different system of indicating direction than that with which we are familiar. By instinct they know the direction in which their own country lies and each Pellucidarian reckons all direction from this base line—and he indicates other directions in a simple and ingenuous manner.

Suppose you were from Sari and were traveling from the ice-girt sea above Korsar to any point upon Pellucidar, you would set and maintain your course in this manner. Extend the fingers of your right hand and hold it in a horizontal position, palm down, directly in front of your body, your little finger pointing in the direction of Sari—a direction which you know by instinct—and your thumb pointing to the left directly at right angles to the line in which your little finger is pointing. Now spread your left hand in the same way and lower it on top of your right hand, so that the little finger of your left hand exactly covers the little finger of your right hand.

You will now see that the fingers and thumbs of your two hands cover an arc of one hundred and eighty degrees.

Sari lies southeast of Korsar, while the Land of Awful Shadow lies due south. Therefore a Sarian pointing in the direction toward the Land of Awful Shadow would say that he was traveling two left fingers from Sari, since the middle finger of the left hand would be pointing about due south toward the Land of Awful Shadow.

If he were going in the opposite direction, or north, he would merely add the word "back," saying that he was traveling two left fingers back from Sari, so that by this plan every point of compass is roughly covered, and with sufficient accuracy for all the requirements of the primitive Pellucidarians. The fact that when one is traveling to the right of his established base-line he indicates it by mentioning the fingers of his left hand might at first be deemed confusing, but of course, having followed this system for ages, it is perfectly intelligible to the Pellucidarians.

So, when they reached a point at which the city of Korsar lay three right fingers back from Sari they were, in reality, due east of the Korsarian city. They were now in fertile, semi-tropical land teeming with animal life. The men were armed with pistols as well as spears, bows and arrows and knives; while Stellara and Gura carried light spears and knives, and seldom was there a march that did not witness an encounter with one or more of the savage beasts of the primeval forests, verdure-clad hills or rolling plains across which their journey led them.

LONG since, they had abandoned any apprehension of pursuit or capture by the Korsarians, and while they had skirted the distant hinterland claimed by Korsar and had encountered some of the natives upon one or two occasions, they had seen no member of the ruling class, with the result that for the first time since they had fallen into the clutches of the enemy they felt a sense of unquestioned freedom. And though the other dangers that beset their way might appear appalling to one of the outer world, they had no such effect upon any one of the five, whose experiences of life had tended to make them wholly self-reliant and, while constantly alert and watchful, unoppressed by the possibility of future calamity. When danger suddenly confronted them they were ready to meet it. After it had passed they did not depress their spirits by anticipating the next encounter.

Ja and David were anxious to return to their mates, but Tanar and Stellara were supremely happy because they were together, and Gura was content merely to be near Tanar. Sometimes she recalled Balal, her brother, for he had been kind to her, but Scurv and Sloo and Dack she tried to forget.

Thus they were proceeding, a happy and contented party, when with the suddenness and unexpectedness of lightning out of a clear sky, disaster overwhelmed them.

THEY had been passing through a range of low, rocky hills and were descending a narrow gorge on the Sari side of the range when, turning the shoulder of a hill, they came face to face with a large party of Korsarians, fully a hundred strong. The leaders saw and recognized them instantly, and a shout of savage triumph that broke from their lips was taken up by all their fellows.

David, who was in the lead, saw that resistance would be futile, and in the instant his plan was formed.

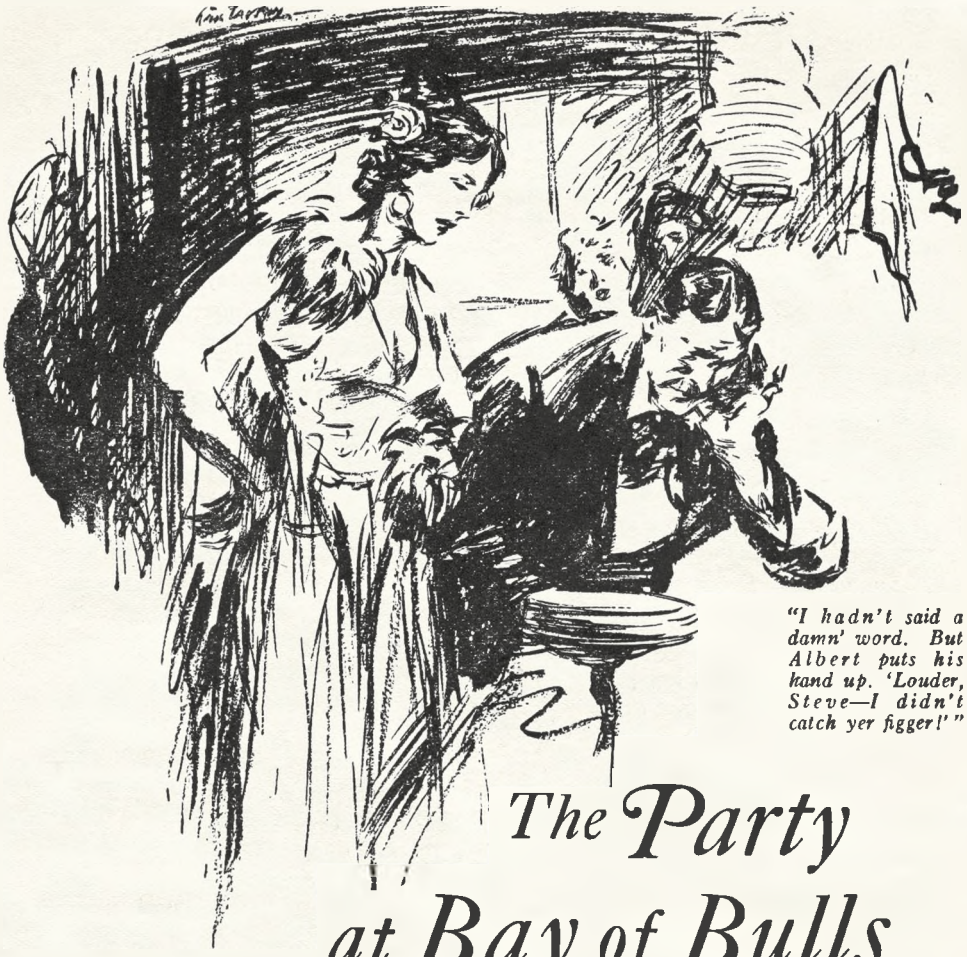
"We cannot remain united; we must separate," he said. "Tanar, you and Stellara go together. Ja, take Gura with you, and I shall go in a different direction, for we must not all be captured. One, at least, must escape to return to Sari. If it is not I, then let the one who wins through take this message to Ghak and Abner Perry. Tell Perry that I am positive I have discovered that there is a polar opening in the outer crust leading into Pellucidar, and if he ever gets in radio communication with the outer world he must inform them of this fact. Tell Ghak to rush his forces by sea on Korsar, as well as by land. And now good-by, and each for himself!"

Turning in their tracks, the five fled up the gorge, and being far more active and agile than the Korsarians, they outdistanced them; and though the rattle of musketry followed them and bits of iron and stone fell about them, or whizzed past them, no one was struck.

STELLARA and Tanar found and followed a steep ravine that led upward to the right; almost at the same time Ja and Gura diverged to the left up the course of a dry waterway, while David continued on back up the main gorge.

Almost at the summit and within the reach of safety, Tanar and Stellara found their way blocked by a sheer cliff, which while not more than fifteen feet in height, was absolutely unscalable; nor could they find footing upon the steep ravine sides to the right or left, and as they stood there in this *cul-de-sac,* their backs to the wall, a party of twenty or thirty Korsarians, toiling laboriously up the ravine, cut off their retreat; nor was there any place in which they might hide; instead they were compelled to stand there in full view of the first of the enemy that came within sight of them, and thus with freedom already within their grasp, they fell again into the hands of the Korsarians. Tanar was compelled to surrender without resistance because he did not dare risk Stellara's life by drawing the fire of the enemy.

The great climax of this fascinating novel occurs in the next installment—in our forthcoming August issue.



"I hadn't said a damn' word. But Albert puts his hand up. 'Louder, Steve—I didn't catch yer figger!'"

The Party at Bay of Bulls

By ARTHUR HUNT CHUTE

Wherein a Gloucester crew invade a Newfoundland pie social, and a pleasant little riot makes the occasion memorable.

Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson

THE skipper of the *Martha K. Haskins* makes no bones about the fact that things are getting disgustingly tame ashore.

"Why, s'help me, in the las' fishermen's race there warn't one decent honest-to-God fight staged durin' the whole series!" he observed scornfully. "But us fellers has done our best to make up fer it since.

"They say that's the trouble with a race that aint settled. Well, when I think o' the beautiful scraps we've had out o' it, I say, thank God it wasn't settled!

"Did I ever tell ye o' the time we mixed it up on this account, at Bay of Bulls?

"I kind o' felt in me bones that we was in fer rough stuff that trip. We was bound out o' Gloucester to Newfoundland fer capelin, and o' course we all allowed as how we'd likely run into a Bluenose gang. That's why I took on Bill Blade as dorymate, jus' before we sailed.

"There was several others wanted the berth. But I was lookin' fer a scrapper this time, an' the minute I seen Bill comin' along the stringer at the end of the wharf I says, 'There's me man.' The look o' him alone was enough to put terror into a grindstone.

"He was built right up like a keg o' nails, with a pair o' shoulders that would 'ave scared the Bull o' Bashan, an' he had a chin stickin' out like the Rock o' Gibraltar. He was one o' them fighters that was born great. He didn't need to put up no dukes; he didn't even need to say *'Peek-a-boo!'*

We was all steppin' back the minute we seen him steppin' forward!

"He asked if I'd take him on.

" 'Sure thing,' says I. 'But I don't want no mix-ups with the likes o' you. I'd sooner get a kick in the face from a horse's hoof than a love-tap from one o' them paws.'

"He just smiled, lofty-like, and as he stood beside me I seen he was hairy-lookin', like a beast. He had the blackest, thickest eyebrows I ever seen—they was more than eyebrows, they was whiskers.

"I says to myself: 'If Wild Archie, the terror o' Judique, ever claps an eye on that Rock-o'-Gibraltar chin they'll have to carry him out on a door!'

"ON the way down to Newfoundland one o' my dory-mates got sick, so I had to run into Canso an' put him ashore. I found a Boston chap there to take his place, named Randall Beaton. He told me he was good in a dory, but I wasn't any too keen on takin' him, he was such an apologetic-lookin' cuss. His hair and mustache might have been red, and yet they wasn't; his eyes might have been blue, and yet they wasn't. You couldn't tell nothin' definite about him. His hair, his eyes, an' everything else about him was colorless. He had the look o' one who was sayin': 'Excuse me for bein' on the earth!'

"He was a beauty, all right, to be takin' down to Newfoundland, where there was a real fight brewin'. But I allowed that Bill Blade could make up fer a regiment o' Beatons.

"Before we started runnin' in for capelin Bill had that there Randall Beaton dancin' around like his devoted slave. Though ye'd never think o' Randall as a scrapper, he seemed to love to hear Bill's fightin' stories.

"At night, when the boys was muggin' up by the shack locker, Bill'd get started. A cup o' hot coffee with a little rum in it was all that was needed.

"Judgin' by his yarns, Bill sure had seen some o' the world's best scrappin' in his day.

"He told how he left school because the teacher started to give him a lickin', which ended with him near killin' the teacher.

"Then he was on the Boston police force, an' done time fer makin' permanent invalids out o' the Captain an' a couple o' lieutenants.

"Sometimes his yarns went back a good many years, but no one never asked no questions! He claimed he'd knocked out John L. Sullivan in his prime. Seems he went into John L.'s saloon, in Boston, an' asked fer a drink. He paid a five-dollar bill, an' waited fer change.

"Says John L.: 'We don't give no change here, 'cept fer them what's able to take it.'

"Bill tells how with that he jumped over the bar and pinched a couple o' inches out o' the calf o' John L.'s leg. After that he couldn't tell whether it was a cyclone or an earthquake that had struck that there saloon.

"Bill didn't really say that he cleaned up John L.—he left that to the imagination. But he did say that the champ told him that he was the best catch-as-catch-can scrapper he'd ever met.

"All this sounded good to us fellers. Every time he told his fightin' yarns we'd wink at one another, thinkin' o' what was comin' when this human hurricane blew in on the Lunenburg fleet.

"For all that Randall was such a milk-an'-water-lookin' guy, he hung on every word Bill uttered. I suppose it was the things he couldn't do himself he most admired in others.

"Or perhaps it was because he thought he'd be safe when the rough stuff started. That was Bill's idea of their friendship, anyway, fer he was always sayin', generous-like:

" 'Now then, Randall, you're a poor miserable-lookin' sinner—you'd show up better in a prayer-meetin' than ye would in a roughnecks' reunion. But never mind, brother, stick close to me, an' you'll be jus' as safe as if you was sittin' in the family pew back in the village meetin'-house.'

"WELL, one day along about the first o' June we slid into Cape Brayle, on the lookout fer bait.

"There was no bait to be had there, but accordin' to the information at the telegraph-station there was lots o' capelin on hand down at Bay of Bulls.

"As soon as I told the boys the news Bill tossed his hat into the air an' let out a whoop like a crazy man, because we was sure o' gettin' somethin' more than bait at Bay of Bulls.

"All hands was lookin' forward to a wonderful frolic—all except Randall Beaton, who appeared about as happy as the widower on the way to the funeral.

"Bill was always sayin', generous-like: 'Randall, you stick close to me an' you'll be safe!'"

"Ye don't know the Newfoundland coast, eh? Well, Bay of Bulls, like all the rest of it, is carved right out o' mountain granite.

"As ye come in from sea there's a couple o' high heads runnin' up to perhaps five hundred feet. Ye come in between them heads, on a nor'west course, with plenty o' deep water inside.

"The town is up at the far end of the Bay. There are several wharves, with a few shops, and joints just above; then the houses start trailin' along, till they get lost in the woods.

"There is one long dirt road leadin' right out into the back o' beyond. It's kind of a lonely-lookin' place, and some guys can develop a wonderful clean pair o' heels on that dirt road after dark.

"While we fellers was warpin' in, as luck would have it, right there at the next wharf was a Lunenburg vessel, one o' them able-lookin' semi-knockabouts out o' the Rhuland yards—same yards as built the Bluenose.

"Well, this vessel turned out to be the *Freda L. Slauzenhammer,* one o' the Sauerkraut's own.

"While we was makin' fast there was a big fellow sittin' on the after-house o' the *Slauzenhammer,* puffin' a pipe, and spittin' every now an' then.

"There was a kind o' tantalizin' note in the way he was spittin', as if he was too disgusted fer words. He didn't take the bother to even look at us fellers, but sat there with his back to us, as if we wasn't worthy of contempt.

"Well, sir, that there Lunenberg skipper got my goat fer fair. Even before I put my feet on the pier I was dyin' to smash him one.

"While we was still attendin' to our moorin's he goes down into his cabin, bangin' the slide behind him, as much as to say: 'I can't stomach the sight o' them Yanks out o' Gloucester!'

"He hadn't done nothin' but turn his back on us and spit—but by his very attitude he told us to go to hell, plainer'n if he'd yelled it out from one end o' Bay of Bulls to the other.

"Of course there wasn't no excuse fer startin' anythin' right there. But believe me, when us fellers finally went ashore we was lookin' fer somethin' more than capelin bait.

"Bill Blade got up on the wharf, lookin' down on the *Slauzenhammer,* an' let go with tobacco-juice all over her white-work, all the time keepin' up a runnin' fire o' comment:

" 'Call that one o' their good schooners? She's got a gait on her like a pair o' bars. Might 'a' known she was out o' Lunenburg.

Made by the yard an' sawed off by the mile. No wonder guys that makes scows like that wanted to steal the fishermen's trophy on a fluke!'

"At this last remark a couple of withy-lookin' fellers bolted out o' her fo'c's'le like somethin' comin' up from a volcano.

"It looked as if they was goin' to clean up everythin' in sight. But one glimpse of Bill Blade decoratin' the landscape on top o' the wharf an' them two roarin' lions was a couple o' cooin' doves.

"Just about the time that Bill was gettin' ready to jump down an' eat the pair o' 'em for breakfast, a cop appeared slidin' along the end o' the wharf, an' so of course us fellers beat it. But as we pushed off we told the *Slauzenhammer* crew we'd see 'em later.

"IN one o' the speak-easies, up the street, we found out that the big feller who'd got our goat so bad was Albert Dauphinee.

"Ye never heard o' Albert? Well, he's just about the finest guy that ever sailed out o' Lunenburg. He was lost last year off Bay of Islands—an' now he's gone I s'pose I can see what a fine man he was. But, believe me, at that time I wasn't losin' no love on him.

"If he didn't like ye he certainly knew how to get your goat. Ye couldn't ignore Albert. He was all man, an' no mistakin' it; he was the guy that went from Lunenburg to Bay of Islands one time on the edge of a hurricane, in forty-two hours, an' I guess, Mister, that's a record fer all time fer a two-sticker.

"Besides bein' fond o' fast sailin' Albert was also fond o' wimmin. That's where him an' me come to have it out so frequently an' often.

"There was plenty o' capelin in Bay of Bulls. We was busy all afternoon gettin' our bait aboard, which we stowed away mixed with ice.

"While we was workin' at stowin' the bait we seen Captain Albert come off the next schooner.

"I was standin' at the end o' the wharf as he passed, an' so naturally I said:

"'How's Trixy?' Trixy was one o' them Newfoundland queens that him and me was both sweet on, long ago.

"Well, when Albert come off I expected to see him sailin' in fer a fight first thing. I knowed he wouldn't forget about us fellers squirtin' tobacco-juice over his white-work.

"But the minute I says '*Trixy*' that little V-shaped twinkle comes in the corner o' his eye. Albert was a dog if ye got to weather o' him, but strike him on his right side an' ye couldn't help likin' him. He had a way o' throwin' back his head that just naturally won your heart; then when he let out that laugh o' his it was contagious as a dose o' smallpox.

"Before I knowed what was comin' he puts out that great big paw o' his, exclaimin':

"'Steve, how long is it since you an' me had our las' frolic up at Trixy's?'

"'Guess we aint been up there since before the war, Albert.'

"'That's right, it was the year before old Jerome MacDonald, the Grand Banks Horse, give ye the Centennial. He was a nasty boy, was Jerome—always wanted ye to be in port first to beat the market, but God help ye if ye parted a rope-yard, eh?'

"'You got his number, Albert,' I says.

"'Umph, I know 'im! We got the same breed occasionally among our managing owners down in Lunenburg. Want all the rewards, an' aint willin' to take none o' the risks. That's why I own me own vessel now.'

"'Is the *Slauzenhammer* yours?'

"'You bet yer sweet life she is. Ye know I made some good money out o' salvage, an' just put the whole thing into that there semi-knockabout. She's makin' money fer me too, Steve.'

"'Built on pretty able lines, Albert?'

"'You said a mouthful. They don't make anything down in your Essex yards as able as her.'

"'Who says they don't?'

"'Anyone that knows what he's talkin' about.'

"'I'll bet you that that Boston boat, the *Mayflower*, would sail circles round ye! Ye needn't tell me; that vessel o' yours is slow in stays, I can tell by the look o' her.'

"ALBERT'S eyes was blue, but they seemed to turn black when anyone said anything he didn't like. I seen that black look comin', an' then, before I had time even to put up my guard, he sent me sprawlin' over a bait-keg.

"I wouldn't say that he hit me; it was just one o' them back-handed shoves that takes ye off yer pins when it's unexpected.

"That kind o' made me mad, but I didn't want to start nothin' right then, so I says:

"'Ye needn't be so touchy, Albert!'

" 'Who wouldn't be with a bunch o' Yanks comin' up here, an' spittin' tobacco-juice all over his vessel? We're goin' to settle that up, Steve, an' don't you forget it! That vessel o' mine aint nobody's cuspidor; she's ready to lick the stuffin's out o' that slab-sided American knockabout called the *Haskins*, any time we meet her outside o' port. We aint takin' none o' yer star-spangled chin music up along this coast—we'll take ye on at anything from flirtin' to fightin', and what's more, the Bluenose kin clean up every two-sticker on the North Atlantic. Now get that, and get it hard!'

"The V-shaped twinkle had departed from Albert's eye, an' the black look was there instead. There was no mistakin' the fact that he was invitin' us to come on. An' we was comin', too. I seen my crew exchangin' the implements o' peace fer those o' war. Across the wharf the herrin'-chokers was doin' likewise.

"Well, God knows I wanted a fight as bad as any—a squarehead turnin' up his nose at the Essex yards was a bit too thick.

"But I called my fellers off. That Albert Dauphinee, when his eyes turn black, is just plain lunatic crazy—but no matter how mad I get I always keep a little sense.

" 'Boys, get back to yer work,' I ordered. 'Business first an' pleasure afterwards. We aint havin' no arguments right now, but by the great chin-whiskered cod, we'll accommodate 'em later!'

"Judgin' by the way our fellers cursed an' swore there wasn't no doubt about the accommodation. Even after all the rest was back at work Bill Blade was walkin' up an' down, like as if he couldn't quite contain hisself.

"An', believe me, the Lunenburg crowd, on the other side, didn't look one bit less lovely. I knowed then that there was goin' to be a beautiful night ahead o' us.

"Well, we finished our loadin' about six o'clock. Randall Beaton seemed real nervous. Finally, he come up to me an' wanted to know if we was goin' to put to sea that night.

" 'No, we aint goin' to put to sea this night,' I told him, while the fellers round the fo'c's'le table booed and hollered.

"They kind o' surmised Randall was scared o' the comin' scrap, an' so they began to guy him.

" 'How long d'ye want us to leave yer body in the morgue, Randall?' 'Have ye made yer will yet? Be sure to tell the Skip where ye want yer remains forwarded to!' 'The name "Randall Beaton" will look damn' good carved on a tombstone down here in Bay of Bulls, wont it? Aye, an' they want to carve a little lamb right over the top o' the name!' —And so on.

"Randall didn't eat no more supper. His face turned a kind o' pea-green color, an' he finally had to go up on deck to get his breath. As he left, Bill called after him:

" 'Never mind, Randall, you just stick by me an' I'll take care o' you all right!'

"After supper us fellers got dressed in our best an' sloped off up the street.

"NOW I want to tell you, Mister, when a Gloucester fisherman's dressed up he's just about as snappy-lookin' as you'll run into. The Gloucester crowd always was good dressers. None o' yer ready-made suits fer us!

"Ye ought to have seen Bill Blade when he got through primpin' in front o' his gol-darned little lookin'-glass. Bill spent a scand'lous long time on his fixin's. I'd kind o' suspicioned he was a ladies'-man, an' now I knowed fer sure, by the way he acted in front o' that glass.

"He had his hair greased down, with a regular heart-smashin' curl droopin' over his forehead, and was wearin' one o' them passion-colored ties, and with a 'love me an' the world is mine' expression lookin' out under them chin-whiskered eyebrows. I didn't know whether to laugh or cry, at the sight o' him.

"Besides bein' a good dresser, Bill was a fine singer—a great big husky son-of-a-gun with a tenor voice that sounded like as if it belonged to the angels.

"There was about half a dozen girls in the first joint we dropped into, up the street, an' Bill had the prettiest one in his lap in a couple o' shakes. I think it was his tenor that done the trick. It sure wasn't his looks, but fer all that he was the berries when it come to the ladies.

"We went into that joint fer a drink, but to tell the truth we didn't do much else but listen to Bill sing.

"I noticed all the girls seemed to have their party dresses on, so I says to one:

" 'What ye all dolled up fer, kid?'

" 'We're goin' to a pie social,' she says.

" 'Where?'

" 'Down at Trixy's.'

" 'Who's givin' it?'

" 'Why, the Lunenburg boys has hired Trixy's house fer the evenin'. Us girls is

all makin' pies an' bringin' 'em for the boys to bid on.'

"That settled it. We decided right there and then that we'd take in the show.

"You don't know what a pie social is, eh? Well, I'll tell ye; it's a stunt they have o' separatin' a man from his money, under the guise o' charity.

"This special pie social it turns out was to build a graveyard fence. As we've all got to get inside that fence some day there was a good reason fer us to patronize it. But ye kin guess we had other reasons.

"The whole gang o' us went down to Trixy's together, with Bill Blade singing 'Thora' at the head o' the procession, an' the rest of us trailin' in on the chorus.

"When we come in to Trixy's, it was pretty well jammed. Kitchen, woodhouse, an' front room was all opened up into one dance-hall.

"They had jack-o'-lanterns all over, an' I must allow it looked handsome. Everybody was feelin' fine when the Gloucester gang blew in. But ye could tell right off that we was kind o' castin' a chill on the meetin'.

"I'll admit most of us fellers was swearin' an' talkin' louder than what was necessary. We all knowed that we was about as welcome in Trixy's, that night, as a collection o' skunks at a garden-party.

"Albert Dauphinee was master o' ceremonies. He had a big black mainsail coat on him, like what the church deacons wear down along the Cape. I couldn't help snortin' at the sight o' that big devil standin' up there in that holiness jumper. The minute he seen me his eyes started turnin' black, but he had a kind of dignity to keep up at that moment.

"I never seen Albert's hair brushed down so slick. He was the best-dressed guy o' the whole crowd!

"I says to myself: 'That's a hell o' a rig to be fightin' in, Albert!'

"AFTER that first dark look in the eye, Albert kinda gathered himself together, an' goes on with his job as master o' ceremonies. He was engaged at auctioning off the pies.

"Ye see, the way one o' them socials goes is this: Each girl brings a pie, which is put up at auction. The feller that buys the pie gets the girl that made it as a partner, to help him eat it.

"I needn't tell ye some pies goes cheap, an' some goes expensive—depends on the

looks o' the girl, an' how popular she is with the fellers.

"I've seen pies knocked down fer ten cents, and then I seen one o' them little cutie kind get away with ten and fifteen dollars.

"Well, Albert thought he had to make a little speech to start things goin', so he opens up:

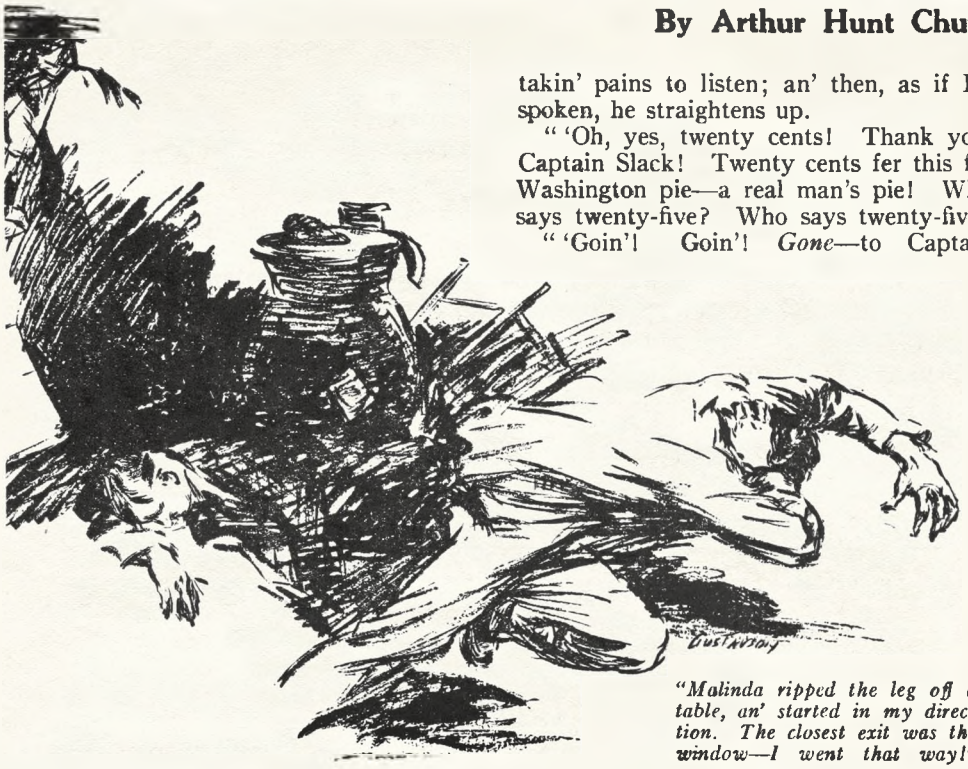
" 'Ladies and gentlemen! I'm glad to see so many fine-lookin' people here tonight. If it wasn't fer them bums what just blowed in here from Gloucester,' (loud interpolations of *"Sauerkraut! Herrin'-chokers! Bloody Canucks!"*) 'I repeat, if it wasn't fer them star-speckled Yanks' ("Yeh! We'll speckle you before we're through!") '—if it wasn't fer them, we could claim we was in decent society. But we aint responsible fer all the trash what comes down this way fer capelin bait!

" 'I aint goin' to make no long speech.' ("Yes, cut it short—ye sausage-eatin' wind-bag!") 'I'm up here really to start off sellin' these pies. Any guy that don't offer a big price fer pies like these don't know a good-lookin' girl when he sees her!'

"That kitchen was as big as a church. The girls was all settin' on sawhorses along one side, each girl holdin' onto her pie, while the fellers was givin' 'em the once-over.

"There was one strappin' big Amazon there, named Malinda Corkum, with one o' them wonderful cream layer cakes.

"Albert calls out fer a pie, and that huge dame, with *'Henpecker'* written all



"Malinda ripped the leg off a table, an' started in my direction. The closest exit was the window—I went that way!"

takin' pains to listen; an' then, as if I'd spoken, he straightens up.

" 'Oh, yes, twenty cents! Thank you, Captain Slack! Twenty cents fer this fat Washington pie—a real man's pie! Who says twenty-five? Who says twenty-five?

" 'Goin'! Goin'! *Gone*—to Captain Stephen Slack, o' Gloucester, fer twenty cents! Bring on the next!'

over her, walks up big as life an' hands in her donation.

"I see that V-shaped twinkle come into Albert's eye. He looked as if he was goin' to make some joke on the dame, but I guess the arms on her put the fear o' God in him, so without any funny stuff, he started right off to ask fer bids. At first nobody offered.

"THEN Albert pulled off the dirtiest trick I ever heard of! Says he, 'I see the Skipper o' that smart Yankee flyer the *Haskins* is here. He's always first in everything—except in sailin'. How much did you say you offered fer this pie, Captain Slack?'

"I hadn't said a damn' word. I wouldn't 'a' no more started in biddin' fer that female Samson than I'd 'a' flown. But Albert puts his hand up to his ear.

" 'A little louder, Steve! I didn't just catch yer figger.'

"At that, I started gettin' red in the face, an' everybody snickers, all except me an' Malinda.

"I was just goin' to tell Albert what I thought o' him when the fierceness o' her eye knocked me dumb. I'll tell ye, boy, she had me stumped, glarin' at me much as to say: 'Don't you dare throw me down!'

"Albert bends over toward me again,

"I wanted to kill Albert, right then an' there. The whole crowd was howlin', my lads worst of all. But I seen that Amazonian mountain swoopin' down on me, an' I knew my name was Dennis.

"Sidlin' up alongside, she says: 'Good evenin', Capting! Will ye have raspberry vinegar, or lime juice?'

" 'I'll take a little hundred-an'-twenty overproof, thank you,' I gasps out.

"With that she hooked on to my arm, snappin': 'Don't get smart now, Capting!' An' before I knew it, I was waltzed over into the far corner to help her eat up that Washington pie. I always was a self-respectin' man, but I was as helpless in her hands as a kitten.

"Seems she was a great temperance crank, an' my joke about the hundred-an'-twenty overproof put me in her bad books right from the start.

"As far as the pleasure o' the rest o' the evenin' went I was a goner. I got in worse with that old dragon every minute I spent in her company. Once she caught me makin' eyes at a little bit o' fluff, close by, an' with that she give me a box on the ear, croakin' out:

" 'You men are all the same! You're all the same.'

"Of course Albert was rubbin' it in on the side, takin' sly winks at me every time Malinda snuggled close.

"Well, there was nothin' fer me to do but to remember that verse in the Bible, 'Grin an' bear it.' But you can believe me I was sure gettin' some mad. When the time come fer me to soak one home at Albert Dauphinee, I knowed I'd be there with a wallop.

"There was I on the side lines, with a female as homely as a hedge-fence made by moonlight, while all the rest o' the boys was havin' the time o' their lives.

"Some o' the pies went low, an' some high. Mine was the cheapest sold that night. Some went fer fifty cents, some got into the dollar class. Two of 'em hit five bucks.

"Then, last of all, they brought on a meek little blueberry tart, not much to look at, but the kid that went with it was a knockout—French-Canadian stuff. 'Twas her I got scorched fer makin' eyes at. She was one o' them kind that cause men to leave home. If I'd 'a' been fancy-free, I'd 'a' staked my last cent to have got her.

" 'How much am I offered?' says Albert.

" 'Ten dollars,' says Bill Blade. (I'll say that was startin' her off, all right!)

" 'Fifteen,' says a Lunenburg guy, named Stew Kinley—a cool-lookin' young feller with the face of a poker-player.

" 'Sixteen,' says Bill.

" 'Eighteen,' says Kinley.

" 'Nineteen,' says Bill.

" 'Twenty-two,' says Kinley.

"There was a long pause; then Bill comes out, cautious-like:

" 'Twenty-two fifty!'

" 'Twenty-three,' says Kinley.

"There was a longer pause than ever. It was gettin' into too big figgers fer Bill. So I slipped him the word that I'd stand behind him; I wasn't goin' to have any o' them Canucks crowin' over us on how they walked off with the belle. So with some one to back him, Bill takes up the score again, just before Albert was knockin' the pie down to Kinley.

" 'Twenty-three fifty,' he bids.

" 'Twenty-four,' says Kinley.

" 'Twenty-four five,' says Bill.

"Well, they went ahead from that, five cents at a time, until, to cut a long story short, the pie was finally knocked to Bill Blade for thirty-one dollars and eighty-five cents.

"That Kinley was a game sport, all right; the only thing that fixed him was the end of his pocketbook.

"The fact that a Gloucester guy walked off with the belle meant that we scored the first big hit of the evening. Ye could tell Lunenburg was sore about it.

"WHEN all the auctioning of the pies was over, the decks was cleared fer dancin'.

"The fellers took off their coats an' vests an' went right to it. They had an old Irishman named Cleary fer fiddler. A couple o' Lunenburg kids, the throater an' the splitter on the *Slauzenhammer,* was wizards with the mouth-organ.

"There was jigs, reels, waltzes, an' quadrilles. Our fishermen is good dancers, an' they was all havin' a wonderful time—all except me an' Malinda. I couldn't no more shake her than I could fly. No matter if I did get other girls in the quadrilles, I'd always find her waitin' fer me at the end, like some old wharf that ye couldn't help bumpin' into.

"Every time she got her boat-hook onto me, I'd comfort myself by thinkin' what I'd do to Albert to pay up for it.

"The boys was dancin' fer all they was worth, but you could tell they was on thin ice. Once one of our fellers slipped in the dance, an' if he hadn't snapped right onto his feet again, that would have started things.

"The show had been on, I s'pose, fer a couple of hours, when without warning the fightin' began.

"The Lunenburg crowd was watchin' Bill Blade. They was scared o' him. An', believe me, Bill was lordin' it over the place in fine style! He had the prettiest girl, and sometimes in the dances he was singin' at the top of his lungs. Occasionally he'd shout out what he'd do when the rough stuff started.

"Talkin' about the freedom o' the city, Bill was sure helpin' hisself right to it! He was cock o' the walk, an' king o' the castle. As fer Randall Beaton, I never clapped an eye on him from the time the dancin' started.

"Along about midnight, Bill took his girl into one o' them little refreshment-rooms fer a drink o' raspberry vinegar. While he was in there, an' as I was passin' Albert, in one o' them ladies-forward-an'-gentlemen-back movements, some swine put out his foot an' sent me sprawlin'.

"I'd jus' been havin' a little spat with

Malinda. I was gettin' tired o' huggin' a tombstone, an' was startin' to say so, when that guy tripped me. Well, Malinda was mad enough at me to just take ahold and finish the job. While I was still sittin' on the air, she swung like lightnin' an' in the next minute I went halfway across the kitchen, cleanin' up everythin' in front o' me like a human mop.

"Before you could say '*Scat,*' there was forty couples steppin' it out on that floor, hammer an' tongs.

"The girls just naturally melted. In a trice the fightin' men had that floor to themselves. The only female that remained was that there Malinda Corkum—an' s'help me, she was as good as any half dozen! I ought to know; I got her marks on me yet.

"When I felt myself goin' through the air, I had only one idea, an' that was to get a strangle-hold on Albert. I got the grips all right, but then before I had a chance to get in a single wallop, I was buried beneath a human mountain. All Malinda did was to sit down in my direction, an' there I was sprawled out underneath, as helpless as if the Himalayas had caved in on top o' me!

"While I was in that mortifyin' position, I seen Bill Blade open the door of his little room. He didn't seem to have no idea what was up. While his mouth was hangin' open from sheer surprise, some one suddenly caught him fair in the head with a stove-cover, at which our holy terror folded up like a jack-knife, and passed out—dead to the world!

"AT first the gang seemed to be inclined to fight with Nature's weapons—until the herrin'-chokers started taking the stove apart. Then our fellers began to grab the furniture.

"Some good brother kindly rapped Malinda over the back of the head with a coal-scuttle, an' while she was recoverin' I seized a moment's respite to carry Bill out in the fresh air, as we didn't want no death-bed scenes inside to mar the fightin'.

"Another one o' my lads smashed down a door, an' between us we carted Bill out in the yard. I'll say he'd turned his toes up for fair. The guy what fired the stove-cover sure did the job up handsome.

"We left Bill in the grass, an' come back inside to help ourselves to the joys o' the evenin'.

"When we got back into that kitchen, the first thing that struck my eye was the sight o' Randall Beaton. There was our apologetic Johnnie, a-cleanin' up everything in sight! He was as quick on his feet as a wildcat.

"Randall, God bless him, was workin' his way to smash old Albert, an' then, just as he was on to him, one o' the Sauerkrauts, supposed to be laid out stiff, suddenly come to, an' pickin' up a chair, smashed Randall in his tracks. The guy what done this was put to sleep by me fer the rest o' the evenin'.

"Then I caught sight o' Malinda again. I thought she was comin' fer me. But no, she makes a charge, an' pickin' up Randall Beaton pitches him out o' the back door, like a sack o' potatoes.

"I thought that was the last we'd see o' him. But before you could have given him the count, he was comin' right back in the thick of it again.

"I never seen nothin' to beat that Randall fer takin' punishment. He was knocked cold three times, only to come back fer more—seemed as if there wasn't no such thing as keepin' him down! After his third knockout, when he was chargin' in again, I was right next to 'im, an' seein' the surprised look on my face he burst out:

" 'Why, I likes it!'

"Randall was the surprise o' the evenin', but his finish came in the shape o' one o' them rawboned Nova Scotian Highlanders, Alec MacDougall, a former iron-puddler from New Glasgow, weighing two hundred and fifty pounds, and all there. I seen Alec draw off one o' them old-fashioned barn-door swings, an' it landed Randall in dreamland fer the rest o' the night.

"In spite o' the personal attentions o' Malinda, I finally managed to get face to face with Albert. Catchin' him with his guard down, I made him kiss the door-mat, an' was wadin' in to kick in his slats, when Malinda ripped the leg off a table, an' started in my direction.

"Rememberin' what she was, unarmed, I didn't do no hesitatin'. The closest exit was the window. I went that way, carting sash an' pane along with me.

"Well, the sight o' my take-off fer that window, an' the sight o' her after me, was too much fer the boys.

"Albert laid there on the floor an' laughed till the tears rolled down his face. My own crowd laughed even worse. Naturally, with everybody laughin' fit to bust, there was no more chance fer slug-

gin'. So with everybody still givin' me the ha-ha, I sneaked back into the kitchen.

"After we'd shook hands all around, Albert come up an' called me an old son-of-a-dog. I called him the same, an' that proved we was friends.

"Most o' the fellers that had been knocked out had come to by this time, an' we piled in together an' helped clean up the mess. Trixy's place looked like his Majesty's dockyard in Halifax after the explosion. The stove had been reduced to hunks o' ammunition, the furniture was kindlin'-wood; windows was smashed, doors broken, an' the walls was smeared with mud and blood. It was a different-lookin' house than that what started out with the jack-o'-lanterns!

"When we'd set things to rights a bit, we paid the old woman fer the damage. She asked a hundred and twenty-five dollars—near enough to buy a place in the Bay of Bulls, if ye ask me! But we passed the hat, an' everybody chipped in.

"WE were startin' to go down to board our vessel, when one o' our fellers suddenly yells out:

" 'Where's Bill Blade?'

"Not one o' our crowd had remembered seein' a trace o' him after he was seen carried out on the door.

"Well, we went back into the house and hunted high an' low, but couldn't find no trace o' Bill.

"Some o' the boys was beginnin' to allow as how the Lunenburg gang had kidnaped him. I was kinda thinkin' it looked that way myself, when Malinda, who was still stickin' round, says to me private-like:

" 'Come upstairs, Capting. I'll show ye something.'

"You can imagine how much I wanted to go upstairs with that there feminine hyena. But seein' as there was a bunch o' stove-covers and table-legs lying handy, there was nothin' to do but to obey.

"Well, she takes me up the back way, an' into a little room, where she closed the door—while I stood there with my heart in my boots, wonderin' whether I was goin' to be loved to death, or beaten to death.

"Puttin' her back against the door, an' foldin' them giant arms o' hers, she says:

" 'Look there!'

"I looked—an' nearly fainted. There was Bill Blade, the feller with a face to scare a grindstone, a-hidin' underneath the bed!"

Discreet Rescue

Our old friends the Hell's Angels squad of the Foreign Legion come back to us in this first of a new group which Mr. Miller brings home from his winter in North Africa.

Illustrated by Paul Lehman

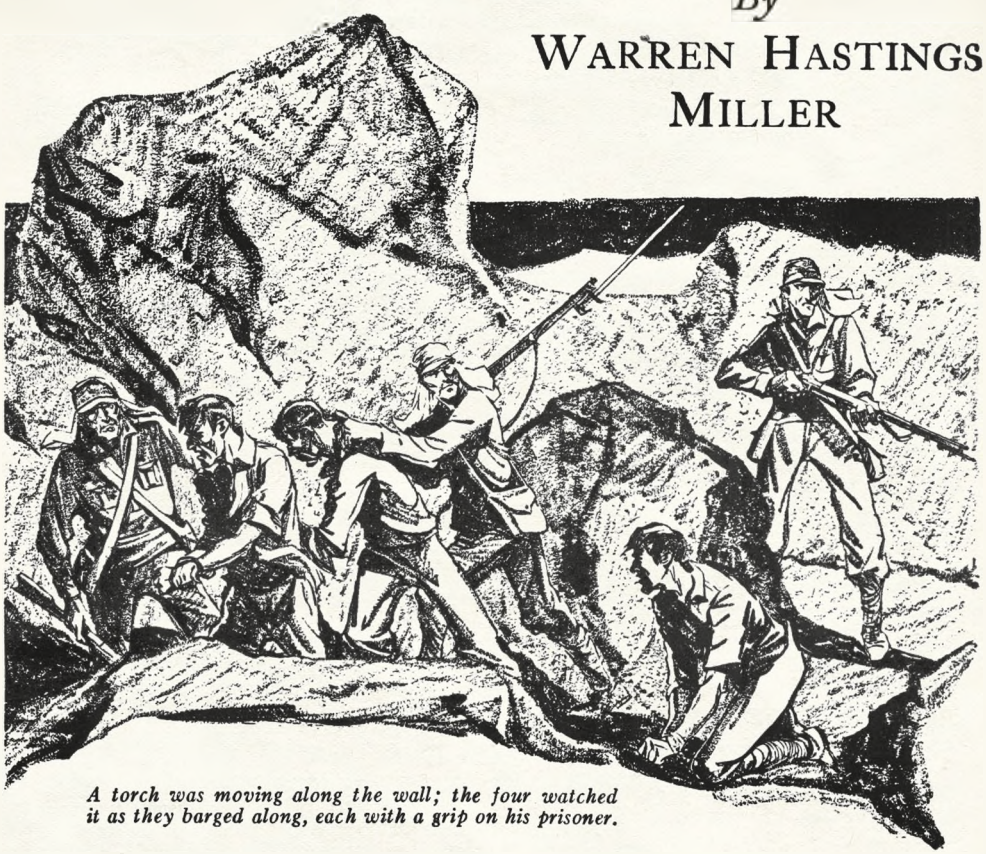
"'TAINT human, Commandant! Can't you git them pore deserters away from that Ay-rab *goum*, somehow, an' have 'em shot decently ag'inst a wall?"

Commandant Knecht looked somberly at his four Legionaries, who had called on him in a body at Headquarters about those wretched Maghzeni deserters. They had been captured during a raid of one of the *goums* on the Riff lines. These *goums* were irregular native cavalry under their own sheiks, carried on the French payroll, but under the orders of the Sultan of Morocco. And Army rumor had it that their prisoners were to undergo that hideous torture known as the Punishment of the Salt.

Knecht studied each of the four in turn. Anglo-Saxons, every one! There was An-

By

WARREN HASTINGS MILLER



A torch was moving along the wall; the four watched it as they barged along, each with a grip on his prisoner.

zac Bill, holder of the Gallipoli Medal, soldier of fortune with the scars of a hundred battles on him—Boer War, Bechuanaland Police, Queensland bush, Gallipoli, Flanders—a stocky and brick-red commodity of Australian beef and Queensland flint. There was the Honorable Geoffrey Royde-Austin, whom Ike insisted was "Jeff," short for good old Jeff Davis. That bony and iron-hard young English aristocrat was looking at the Commandant with troubled blue eyes and an expression which said: "It just isn't done, y' know, sir, what?" There was Corporal Criswell, the giant Michigander of Hell's Angels squad—about half a ton of Criswell, and all of it visibly disturbed over this horrible native business. He had military ideals that he lived up to rigidly, had Criswell, and humanity to a fallen enemy was one of them.

And finally there was Sar-Major Texas Ike, from the cow-country around Midlands, spokesman for the lot, who had gone right up on his rangy hind legs over this outrage. Ike was protesting:

" 'Taint military nor civilized, Commandant!" Yes, the Anglo-Saxons of Hell's Angels, and of course incurably sentimental, thought Knecht as he looked at them fondly. Natural for *them* to come to him about this! Where were Hortet, Mr. Dee, Mora, Rosskoff? Logical, like himself, they would do nothing about a thing that could not be helped. But these children of England—true to their breed! And it was a fine gesture, even if totally mad.

KNECHT shrugged his immense and burly shoulders as his brown eyes swept the group, ashamed but helpless. "My infants! It is not well to raise the veil too much on Africa! It is regrettable that you should have learned of it, but—*pardieu,* what can be done, I ask you? They are the Sultan's prisoners, not ours! This punishment was the usual thing for all brigands and rebellious chieftains only eleven years ago—when the Kaiser graciously permitted us to take over the protectorate of Morocco. It is fiendish, barbarous, any word you will—admitted! And one of the first things our Resident

did was to persuade the Sultan to abandon it, in the name of civilization and mercy. That, and slavery. But both go on in secret, under our very noses, right now. Men are sold in the streets of Fez; men are tortured in the dungeons of the Grand Caïds. It is a loose government, you understand. The Caïds are feudal lords and do about as they please. They have revived this punishment as the only way to deal with our desertion problem. You know how serious that is, Sergeant Ike."

Ike admitted that they owed quite as many casualties to French-trained Maghzenis who had deserted to the Riff, taking their good Lébels along, as to the tribesmen with their Mausers. But he and Hell's Angels knew only one recognized punishment for deserters.

"You tell us whar this Grand Kid is at, who owns that *goum,* Commandant, an' we'll show him, plenty!" Ike vociferated with indignation. "Think, sir, what they does to them pore devils!" he went on to plead. "How'd *you* like it, Commandant? And us guys aint goin' to stand for it, nohow. We's soldiers, not no devils!"

KNECHT looked furtively at his Anglo-Saxons. Each one of them had both fists clenched, so horrifying was the mere thought of thát torture. And a man was two weeks dying of it, the Commandant knew. He felt ashamed of his Moroccan protéges, indignant with them. Protest had already been made by the General Staff to the Sultan over this barbarous punishment, and the civil powers were moving heaven and earth to stop it. But the native government was a complicated thing to deal with. A request, a command even, from the Resident, stopped right there in the Sultan's palace at Rabat.

"Eh bien?" said Knecht. He looked long and fixedly at Ike. There was no doubt from the resolute and stern faces around him, that he had four men here who would dare almost anything to save those deserters. Also it was a way out of the French dilemma. The High Command might protest in vain; but if four unknown soldiers from the ranks stepped in and headed off that diabolical punishment by force—who was going to identify them? Not Knecht, nor any officer under him, nor anyone else in command. It might be a significant hint to Arabdom, that subtle indifference of everybody in authority over the doings of their plain soldiers in this matter. And he could trust Ike to carry the thing off discreetly.

"Eh bien!" went on Knecht with relief in his tones. "It is amusing, that thought of yours, my cowboy! You four will steal the prisoners, *hein?"* He grinned engagingly, a wrinkle of all his bushy black beard as he eyed them, man to man. They understood each other! Officially the Commandant could give no sanction to this outrage upon his Moorish allies; but as a man—

"Nawthin' like that, Commandant!" Ike assured him while Anzac Bill filled all the Headquarters office with his gurgly chuckles. "All *we* wants to know is, whar at mought be this here Grand Kid, sir?"

"Oui! The Grand Caïd!" agreed the Commandant cordially. "But yes. Sidi Aïssa is his name. Mr. Jesus, in Arabic. The irony of a black savage bearing such a Name! He commands all the *goums* of this district. The one that has those deserters will report to him tonight—at his citadel of Mouley Bou Chta—"

There was a vigorous stir of hobnailed boots from all the four. Ike saluted and asked officially: "Leave to go to Fes-el-Bali, sir? This outfit's plumb thirsty, sir! They's good beer in the canteen at Fes-el-Bali."

Knecht smiled. The gang knew where Mouley Bou Chta was, all right! And Fes-el-Bali was the nearest great military depot to it, about three miles east. He made out four passes and handed them over to Ike.

"Need I tell you to be quick about that beer, my cowboy?" Knecht's eyes twinkled as he shook hands cordially with each in turn. That grip told everything!

"Those maimed deserters will be led about through all the irregular camps—as an example—until they die!" said the Commandant, irrelevant of beer. "The ceremony takes place in the dungeons of Mouley Bou Chta tonight, rumor has it."

He had said all they needed to know. The four touched caps and shuffled out. The big man stood behind his desk beaming upon them as they left. Knecht's eyes were quizzical, but they were telegraphing Ike: "I can rely on you to be smooth, my sentimental cowboy? *Oui? Bien subtile!"*

"He's a good old egg!" exclaimed Criswell as they headed for where the grub camions were parked back of the lines, intent now on transportation.

"Yaas; but we gotta be right foxy about this, fellers," declared Ike. "None of that

dungeon stuff for us! We-all makes time; ketches that *goum* afore they reaches this Mouley Bou Chta place, see? We kin do it! It's twenty miles from hyar to Fes-el-Bali. That *goum* will be about three hours trottin' along the road with tired hosses. We gits to Fes-el-Bali fust, an' pinches 'em atween there an' Mouley Bou Chta."

It seemed a sound plan. They investigated the grub camions until they found a Senegalese driver who was leaving right off for the vast military base of Camp Mjara. From there they could take a military train on the narrow-gauge spur that had been built from Fes-el-Bali.

THEY were soon speeding over the bumpy and uncertain road that led back from the front to Camp Mjara. Once there, their leave passes were good on anything going to Fes-el-Bali, so they hopped a box-car already crowded with all the picturesque elements of the Army of Africa—soldiers from all its organizations, all on leave and happy. There were zou-zous in baggy trousers and red-embroidered blue vests; smart *tirailleurs* in khaki, with light blue insignia and red fezzes replacing their tin hats; Arab spahis in gorgeous black, white and scarlet robes; Batt'-Aff's and chasseurs in spurred boots representing the cavalry; *Génie* in dark green with red stripes; artillerists, conical-hatted little Annamites of the Corps du Train, ground-men from the aviation. Save for the grave Arabs, all was laughter and gayety in those jammed "40 Hommes —8 Cheveaux."

The great *poste* of Fes-el-Bali came in sight. Long stone walls in a V following the contour of the hill, the point of the V an immense curved bastion flanked by artillery towers. Ike and Hell's Angels knew it well, for they had saved it from the charging hosts of Abd-el-Krim at the opening of the Riff War, and it was here that Anzac Bill had distinguished himself on a camel—albeit soused to a happy ambiguity of purpose—when Knecht's first salient had been pushed up the opposite mountain.

Their train entered a fortified gate in the rear wall, and the mob of soldiers charged quickstep for the canteen. Ike led his party to the officers' café. As sergeant-major he had the right of entry there; also there were sheiks of the spahi and the various *goums,* who preferred their coffee in peace and quiet. They entered and ordered beer from one of the Arab waiters—then they nearly got up and left it in a hurry! For Anzac Bill had laid a hand on Ike's forearm and was whispering: "Eyes right, Sergeant! Three of our *goum* over at yonder table, if you don't mind! I'd know that squint-eyed devil in a million! They're here already!"

Ike switched his eyes. Bill was right! When that *goum* had passed through the Légion lines with their prisoners, they had all had a good look at them. And what were they doing here?

"Yaas; don't git excited, gang!" he told them. "Only, we gotta make time out'n hyar! Their sheik has to report at Headquarters here to git permission to go on to Mouley Bou Chta, hasn't he? That's what he's doin' now, I'm settin' hyar to tell ye! Look t'other way, Criswell! We don't want them birds rememb'rin' us, or Knecht'll skin us blue!"

They put down the beer as soon as they decently could. It was only three miles from here to Mouley Bou Chta, and that *goum* would make it within half an hour after their sheik got back with his permit. Also Fes-el-Bali was going to be a hard place to get out of—leave-men stopped right here. The Senegalese guard at the main gate had no other business than to head off stragglers going A.W.O.L. along the main road to Fez.

They found that out when stopped there by those tall and warlike negroes. Their passes were good for Fes-el-Bali and no farther, the grinning sergeant told Ike as he handed back their precious slips!

Ike scratched his head. The old man had not thought of that—or had he left it up to them? "Shore, outfit!" grinned Ike upon his squad as that idea took possession of him. "We's A.W.O.L. ourselves, the minute we gits outside that gate, see? We'd be pinched for deserters, fust M.P. that sees us! Knecht's idee is no Légion men a-tall proved to be up to anything t'other side of Fes-el-Bali. We gotta do it nice—sorta smooth an' cagey-like. . . . . Well, let's git movin'! Aint got all the time they is!"

Transportation, unknown to man or devil, was never any great difficulty for Légion soldiers. They spied an artillery camion in front of the canteen. They made for it across the parade ground with the purposeful march of soldiers in search of a drink. Its motor was purring idly, and nobody on its driving seat. That meant that it was going soon, also that the two Annamites who drove it were inside the canteen strengthening themselves for the trip back to Fez. Artillery ammunition came up in

bulk from there in these camions and was distributed along the Front by the narrow-gauge.

They paused discreetly behind it and had a look inside. Empty, save for some tarps lying on the floor. The gang looked around for officers—then drained inside and pulled the tarps over themselves. They would serve against a casual peek into the camion by one of those Senegalese gate-guards. Ike pulled up the rear board and hooked it. Better now; the guard would think it a load of straw shell-sleeves under those tarps.

PRESENTLY the Annamites came out wiping their lips and hopped aboard. The camion started up with a jerk, raced for the main gate, stopped a moment at the guard-post, rolled on. Ike breathed a sigh of relief. They were rumbling along the magnificent French highway to Fez. And down it a few miles led off the donkey trail to Mouley Bou Chta, a trail eloquent of the state of this country before the French protectorate, when there was not a road anywhere and everything was moved on donkeys, camels and mules. And anywhere they left this road half a mile, they would be back in the Middle Ages, in barbarous Arabdom, where fiendish things were done unchecked and the Grand Caïds were absolute despots.

"Waal," thought Ike, "this here Kid aint goin' to be so despotic as he useter be if us four gits a look-in! We has beat that *goum* to him, accordin' to my wrist-watch."

He was looking at it and counting the minutes. At the rate this camion was going, it would take it seven minutes to pass Ammergou, the next *poste* back of Fes-el-Bali on the Fez highway; three minutes more ought to about hit that donkey trail. Ammergou would not bother them with any search of the camion, for it was perched on the crown of a double peak a thousand feet above the road. But Ike was pondering on how they were going to get out of this camion unseen by the Annamites. Knecht —God bless him!—had not put his foot down on their scheme to rescue those deserters, but his eyes had warned Ike to be canny about it and cover up the Légion's tracks all he could. No one must ever know *which* four of the two thousand *2me Etrangère* had pulled off this rescue!

A broken board under him gave Ike his cue. Through the gap he could see their right rear wheel spinning like some huge fat black caterpillar. "Blow-out's the stuff!" resolved Ike silently. "Them niggers is goin' to enjoy a *panne!*"

He drew his automatic and poked its muzzle down through the hole. "They'll think they run over a cartridge or somethin'," he mused, eying his wrist-watch. "Stand by to drain out front, gang!" he whispered in Criswell's ear.

A nudge came from Criswell's elbow; then the ten minutes were up, and Ike pulled trigger.

A sharp report outside, followed by the immediate slump of the camion and a jolting rumble of its rear tire. Squalls of Asiatic curses; then both Annamites jumped out and were running back alongside the bus to look at the *panne*. And the four Legionnaires slithered out forward over the driving seat and dived into the bushes alongside the road opposite from the Annamites.

Those little Asiatics were swearing steadily and were busy at unscrewing rim-nuts as Ike looked about to get his bearings. It was nearing sunset, and the twin peaks of Ammergou rose behind them, still blistering in the heat, while down here there was already shade. He had timed the *panne* well, for in the Fez direction there was a ravine cut across by a bridge. That ravine held the donkey-trail back in to Mouley Bou Chta, or Ike had badly missed his guess!

It did. They waited not for the Annamites to fix on their spare and clear out, but oozed down through the bush and crossed under the bridge. That trail was well marked by centuries of pattering donkey hoofs and the spongy tread of camels. It led up and up the ravine, crossed through a gap and continued through pines. And then Mouley Bou Chta came in sight.

THE four stopped and held their breaths, looking at it. It was not a joyful prospect, by any stretch of the imagination! It rose on a low eminence down in the valley below, and was citadel, mosque and seraglio all in one. A story of the centuries was that present palace of the Grand Caïd Sidi Aïssa! A double octagonal tower of gray-plastered stone, immensely strong and formidable, told of an outpost here of the Spanish when they held all this country during the Middle Ages, from Tangier to Oran. Adjoining it on one side was the domed mosque and its minaret; and built to it on the side nearest them was the seraglio, a typical Moorish construction with airy galleries of colonnades forming two stories.

Fes-el-Bali was a hard place to get out of, they found out, when stopped at the gate by those warlike negroes.

But the columns that supported its ogival arches were Corinthian and had been taken from some Roman villa that once existed hereabouts. Enduring is architecture! The work of men of three different civilizations, of three great empires that had passed away and were but memories now, was represented in Mouley Bou Chta.

Perhaps Jeff was thinking those thoughts; but Criswell said: "Fat chance, fellers! Us four goin' to mix it with that tower?"

"Mebbe," said Ike, unhappily. Even that little firebrand zou-zou, Lieutenant Hortet, who was always marching his idiot legs into some death-trap, would know enough to lay off this, though!

Just then the Honorable Geoff touched him on the arm. "Dead heat, what?" he remarked cheerfully. "There's our bally *goum!*"

They could see it clattering down the long slopes of a bare valley that led over the hills toward Fes-el-Bali. A fluttering column of white burnouses, riding superbly their swift little Barbs. It bristled with rifles jutting over shoulder—except for a significant gap, where the doomed deserters rode lashed to the saddle with their arms secured behind them. Ike looked on them with pity. A naïve and pathetic story of human frailty; the childlike Maghzeni infantryman approached in the café Maure, the temptation, the glittering promises, the dreams of grandeur when Abd-el-Krim should become Sultan of Morocco. Then disillusionment in the Riff, once they had his rifle and cartridges, recapture, and now this hideous ending.

"By God, fellers!" yelped Ike. "What're you waitin' for? Come on!"

HE hadn't the least idea what they were going to do, but no man should suffer so—no matter what he did—in good old Ike's philosophy! And it was a dead heat, as Jeff had said, this race for Mouley Bou Chta. They were here, and so was the *goum*. Their objective was in sight; soon the four would be close at hand. Remained the Grand Caïd and his garrison—a third element that was going to require considerable management! Mouley Bou Chta, however, seemed uninhabited as they hurried toward it along that donkey-trail.

The *goum* was doing a fantasia of powder-play and swords as it neared the citadel; the Légion was doing a sneak. It had left the donkey-trail and was worming down through bushes into the ravine across which rode Mouley Bou Chta. On this side the citadel had a mud-walled garden with figs and orange trees showing over the top,

evidently the harem gardens. That gallery of Corinthian colonnades fronted on it, and there was a marble stairway with a great open door visible under the arcade of Moorish arches. Ike gained the ravine, crossed the runnel in it, and led the four up to the base of that mud wall. A cautious look around its outer corner showed him the *goum* arriving in front of the Spanish tower at the other end. The Grand Caïd and all his court had come out to look over their booty. The prisoners were being unstrapped from their saddles and turned over to a guard of gaudy janissaries that surrounded the Caïd.

Ike studied the situation for some moments. Bad mess for four men to get into! They would find themselves in dire danger also, if they weren't very careful! The Caïd stood, a white-robed figure of dignity, nodding occasionally as he received the *goum* sheik's report. And presently he waved his hand and the janissaries started the march toward the castle with those deserters under heavy guard.

Ike pulled perplexedly at his black forelock. Gosh-all-hemlock! What could a feller *do?* The janissaries were going up a great flight of steps that led to the entrance hall at the seraglio end of this Moorish building. Adjoining it was the Spanish tower, with its grim dungeons in its depths, and doubtless a door leading into it from the seraglio. Dignified and deliberate, the Arab was, yet court would be held on these deserters immediately, Ike felt. And that court was their one chance. Once judgment was pronounced and the deserters were taken to the dungeons, no four men could save them, get at them even!

"Any of you birds got any Army paper on him?" Ike turned to inquire. "We gotta hev somethin' that looks offeecial when we horns in on that Kid. I tells him it's a order to turn over them prisoners to us—what say?"

It was a feeble plan, a bluff that could easily be called by any Arab who could read French; and it might not even be honored by the Grand Caïd, anyhow. But it was at least an excuse to get into the same room with those prisoners. The other three decided that, swiftly, and were with Ike.

"I have!" said both Jeff and Criswell. They searched their tunic pockets. Jeff's letter bore the official heading, "QUARTIER GENERAL XIXME. CORPS D' ARMEE," but was a private letter from Knecht.

"Wont do, bozo!" said Ike. "Lookit the old man's signature! We gotta keep *him* out'n this!"

Criswell's was better. It was a general order issued to all non-coms. forbidding the looting of all allied property, such as goats, sheep and camels for the Légion stew-pot. Criswell happened to have kept his on him, and it bore no signature save the printed replica of the Adjutant-General's in Algiers.

"Come on, guys!" said Ike, and led the way with it. He was heading for a far corner of the garden wall where it joined the gallery of columns. Twilight had come; the valley was growing dim. A fig tree hung its branches over the wall there. The gang could climb through it unseen in the gathering dark and reach that gallery. They could hear the tinkling laughter of feminine voices on the other side of the wall. These were the harem gardens, they were reassured, and the ladies were out for the evening. It meant that they need fear no sentries on this side. Ike's plan was all right, so far as reaching the judgment-hall went, but the squad growled—particularly Anzac Bill. He knew more of native chieftains than any of them, and was telling Ike, earnestly, as they went along:

"It's a bloomin' piece of lunacy, Sergeant, if you don't mind! Of course this Grand Caïd reads French, damn him! They all do; part of their contact with the Protectorate officials. We'll just have to do a trick of body-snatching while he's reading your alleged order, then cut and run for it."

"Yaas. Somethin' like that, Bill," agreed Ike. "We pulls off a vanish with 'em, back through this harem. It's the only place what aint guarded."

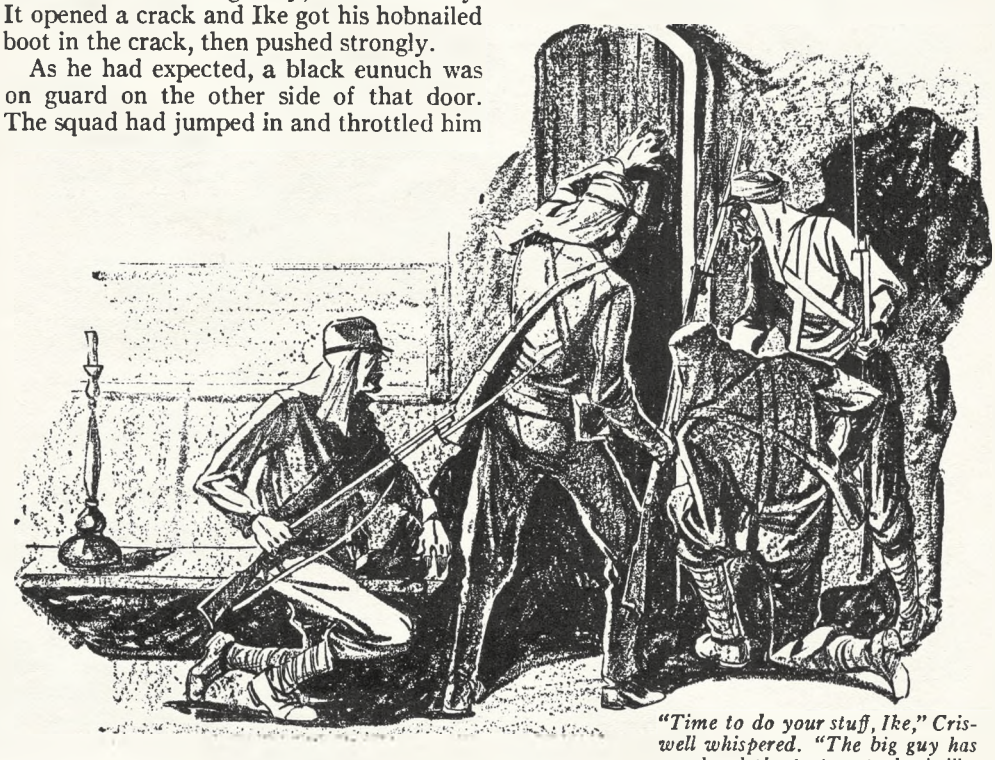
IT looked rather slender—no clear way out, —and what were they going to do with the Maghzenis afterwards? Ike climbed the wall with no definite answer to any of it. They would horn in on the Caïd's court and present his alleged order for the custody of those prisoners; then grab for what they could get if his bluff fell through. You never could tell what opportunities a rabbit-warren like this Moorish citadel might offer!

Up through the dark, leafy fig branches, Ike paused to whisper, hoarsely: "Plenty beauts down thar in the gyarden! You keep yore fuzzy haid down, Bill, or them gals will yell."

He dropped down behind the brick pediment that sustained the row of Roman columns. One by one the gang joined him:

and then they had made the rush up the gallery, humped low under the wall of the pediment. So far they had seen no one. The garden below was full of harem beauties but their quarters up here were deserted. Ike paused at an ornamented Turkish door at the far end of the gallery, knocked softly. It opened a crack and Ike got his hobnailed boot in the crack, then pushed strongly.

As he had expected, a black eunuch was on guard on the other side of that door. The squad had jumped in and throttled him before he could draw breath from astonishment to yell. They were in a little anteroom between the seraglio and the harem, a place where the slave sat—and was the go-between for various intrigues.



"Time to do your stuff, Ike," Criswell whispered. "The big guy has ordered the torture to begin!"

The four stood listening behind its opposite door. Voices in harsh Arabic beyond it, a steady rumble of question and answer. It gave on the main hall, without a doubt, the judgment-hall of the Caïd. Ike opened it cautiously a crack and ventured a peek. The rest were crowded behind him, bayoneted rifles grounded in one hand, all looking through that narrow vista into the Arab world beyond.

TYPICAL, that scene! One large kerosene lamp, from Waterbury, Connecticut, lit up the room high overhead. It was the sole object of Roumi manufacture. The rest was rich hangings and rugs of Moorish weave, divans, cushions, a great chair of walnut and mother-of-pearl in which sat the Grand Caïd in his snowy white robes.

Anzac Bill suppressed hoarse snorts of hostility as he eyed him through the crack. A burly native chieftain, black as any Soudanese, with curly black beard and thick lips and arrogant black eyes. How many like him Bill had dealt with when with the Bechuanaland Police! Tyrants having absolute powers of life and death over their wretched subjects—blasted black scoundrels, the lot of them, Bill's repressed snorts were saying. Ike kicked him, for he sounded like a walrus in this small room and some one might hear, even through the crack, and look this way. They were all squatting on cushions, the four deserters standing in a row near them with two janissary guards on each side, the young sheik of the *goum* and two of his men testifying. They were identifying the prisoners before the Caïd as goatherds, *suk* keepers, camel-drivers, known hereabouts in this district before they took military service.

The Caïd listened silently, then pronounced the brief and terrible Arab justice. *"En yed-houm ye-hott fi melh'!"* he said harshly.

Ike looked over-shoulder at Criswell for translation—the only one of them who had been seriously studying Arabic. Criswell's eyes were grim, and also doubtful. He had no faith in that fake order that Ike was going to produce. At best it would only give them a moment. They could seize the prisoners in that moment while the Caïd was reading it himself—but they would not get far with them! There were too many in there! Even with a real order, the Arabs would not tamely submit; with a fake one they would be lucky to escape with their lives out of this! Also they were in the harem precincts—a heinous offense in Arab eyes. They were completely in this Caïd's power, within his wall. Criswell shivered.

"Time to do your stuff, Ike," he whispered. "The big guy has ordered the torture to begin!"

"Git raidy to grab them birds an' beat it, fellers!" Ike whispered unhappily to the bunch. "He'll be kinder upset-like for a minute. Polite, too, me bein' a sar-major. Shove the prisoners in hyar, if ye kin, while he's readin' my order. I'll hand it to him strong!" Ike put his big paw on the door-handle while the rest trailed their weapons.

A BOLD and resourceful pirate was certainly lost to the world when Anzac Bill was born two centuries too late! Bill was too thick to bother much about orders, faked or otherwise—but Loot was his middle name. And those prisoners were the loot, to him, just now! The quickest and best way to carry them off was what appealed to Bill, particularly if it involved violence. All Bill could see in this was—that lamp!

He had shoved Ike roughly out of the way with a sudden: "Let *me* at it, Ike! Go get 'em when I shoot, men!" And his rifle had jutted through the crack, aiming upwards, and its stunning report crashed out. The lamp-chimney flew to bits and there was total darkness—a darkness filled with gasps of astonishment, of bodies moving swiftly, violently, of the uproar of men jumping to their feet bewilderedly. Then the slam of the anteroom door, closing on a hall that was filled with shouts of confusion, riot, fury.

"Hot stunt, Bill!" yelped Ike as they pushed out into the harem gallery. "Every man got his?"

They had! The four had grabbed in that blessed darkness at the one thing they wanted—they had pounced, each for his man, with fists that punched flat anything in the way, and had jumped back with him through the door. They hadn't need to be told a thing after Bill's shot at that lamp, not a thing!

They were hustling the loot down the gallery now, while shrieks of alarm came up from among the orange trees of the garden below. Shouted orders, tumult among the *goummiers* in front of the Spanish tower; sounds of a mob pouring out down the entrance-stairs of the great hall, roarings in the stentorian voice of that Grand Caïd. The squad bubbled ungodly laughter as they bundled their prisoners ungently through the fig tree and passed them down to Criswell below. Those were sure a bewildered lot of Arabs after that lamp went out! And they had not had even a glimpse of Anzac Bill before his rifle went off with that stunning detonation! Then pitch darkness, uproar, unknown enemies striking in the Stygian blackness—after which their deserters had vanished utterly! "I locks the harem door, last thing I did," wheezed Ike as he dropped down after their last man. " 'Twill hold 'em up a piece; but we gotta make time, gang! Shove for the donkey-trail!"

They plunged down into the ravine direct from the mud wall. Within it all the harem beauties were still yelling like loons; and that was a help, for the Caïd would look to his precious women first. They could hear the clattering of hoofs as the *goum* fanned out to scour the country, could see moving torches circling the rocky terrain about the citadel. The gang kept along down the ravine. It paralleled the donkey-trail above, but three torches were already bobbing along that. A fourth was moving slowly along the garden wall and would presently pass where they had just been. The four watched that torch with interest as they barged along through the bushes, each with a grip on his prisoner. A rasping growl came from them as they saw it stop, lower, then rise again, accompanied by a cry of discovery. There had been a whole shower of fig-leaves broken off that tree, and the ground underneath was all torn up with the stamp of hob-nailed boots! That *goummiers* could not fail to see them.

Furiously the torch rode back, gathered others; then they spread out and came advancing down the ravine.

"A bit thick, what?" commented Jeff cheerfully. "Shall I pick off that blighter nearest us, Sergeant?"

"Nope," said Ike. "Them's allies, you birds! Ol' Knecht'll be plumb disappointed if we couldn't do better'n that! Tell ye what we'll do!" He paused to enlighten the gang. "It's a cinch them three *goums* is blockin' the ravine ag'inst us reachin' the Fez highway. So we cuts up across this donkey-trail an' heads for Ammergou. She aint two miles back—if ye don't mind considerable climb—and thar we turns in our prisoners. We took 'em, didn't we?"

They all laughed. "Right-o! I wangled mine, directly Bill had shot out that lamp!" crowed Jeff. "He's done nothing but mutter *'Barik Allah!'* since! What does that mean, Criswell?"

"'God bless you!'" chuckled Criswell. "Let's shove along, boys!"

They were still a quarter of a mile ahead of those torches. They turned up the hill sharply to their left, crossed the donkey-trail, and were soon ascending through bushes that grew sparse as they labored up around the turn of the mountain; then Ammergou was in sight across a deep stony valley. A zigzag road climbed up to that *poste* opposite. Down into the bare region of rocks and thorns and camel-weed they plunged, toiled up the steep slopes, gained a corner of that zigzag road.

BACK across the valley they could see tiny points of light weaving uncertainly, *goum* riders who had ventured over here, but were hesitant about reporting to Ammergou the escape of their deserters *just* yet! Ike noted one lone torch moving steadily their way, heading in a bee-line for Ammergou. Quite all right; that *goummier* was coming to spread the alarm about escaped deserters being at large. Also he might have a wild tale to tell about an unknown rifle going off suddenly in the Grand Caïd's judgment court—after which there was total darkness and their prisoners had vanished!

Ike had him in mind when they reached the *poste* gate and the sergeant of the guard turned out. "See that torch down yander, bozo?" he said, taking the man by the arm and pointing. "Well, that's a *goum* who thinks he lost four Maghzeni deserters, see? But we guys found 'em, runnin 'round loose-like, an' we turns 'em in hyar an' no questions asked, see?" He handed the sergeant a prodigious wink.

"Bien!" snapped the officer of the guard, his eyes twinkling, though he could only guess what this Légionnaire was talking about. He understood better when Jeff translated it into good French.

"But yes!" he said. *"Je comprends tout! To save them from the torture, hein? Quelle barbarisme!* It shall be explained to Le Capitaine in the morning. You leave that *goum* to me, messieurs!"

He laughed assuringly, but his eyes said that they had better beat it while the beating was good. Non-coms can arrange many matters not permitted to the higher officers!

"Beer!" yelped Criswell, "Come on, fellers! I could drown a thirst a mile high! Us for the canteen at Fes-el-Bali."

THEY attended to that—by devious routes that avoided the main gate, and entered Fes-el-Bali under the box-cars of a crawling ammunition-train.

Next morning the four were in Commandant Knecht's office and that genial soul was eying them quizzically.

"Yessir," said Ike, "Bill, here, done it, Commandant! Lord, sir, what a pyarut he'd have made! You show Bill any loot, sir, an' he goes off center-shot every time! Us guys jest follers the cue he gives us. We snitches them deserters right out'n the Grand Kid's lap, so help me Gawd!" Ike declared. "You tell 'em, Bill!"

As Bill himself had a breath and was incapable of speech, the Commandant waited with a muttered, *"Par exemple!"* Ike's report being somewhat obscure. He had gathered, so far, that his sentimental Anglo-Saxons had rescued the deserters from their terrible fate somehow, and that Anzac Bill had distinguished himself by some unimaginable feat of derring-do, but was now drunk.

"You were discreet, my Sergeant?" he asked.

"Was we discreet, sir!" howled Ike. "Bill, here, pokes his rifle through a crack in a door an' shoots out the lamp what's illoominatin' the Grand Kid's co't over to Mouley Bou Chta. Then she's dark as a pocket, an' we guys busts in an' nabs them deserters. Them Ay-rabs was plumb frantic, I'm settin' hyar to tell ye!

"We moseys out'n thar with them prisoners. The *goums* they's a-fannin' an' a-foggin' all over the place with torches. But we gives 'em the slip an' turns in the deserters over to Ammergou. Sure, we was discreet, sir—except Bill, here, he put down four bottles of nigger-haid at Fes-el-Bali by way of claimin' his reward-like. Our only casualty."

The Anchor

A really unusual story of the sea by the real sailor-man who gave us "Shanghai Bill," "His Pedestal" and other memorable stories.

By

CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE

Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson

Joan slipped her hand through the ring, and knew their luck would hold. The anchor had told her.

FROM the womb of a tortured mountain the ore came. Its dross was left in the smelter. The strong, clean iron traveled over sooty rails through blistered iron country, green farmlands, and orderly coastwise towns to the forge.

In the forge, with savage heat and clangorous blows, the iron took shape. On a day when, in a near-by shipyard, a dainty schooner was launched with flags and whistles, the anchor was finished. It stood there by the forge door for men to admire. It stood there until the schooner was ready. It fitted the mood of the schooner's owner, for it was the emblem of hope.

On a day all brave and blustery, a proud day for a gray, stooped man and his young oak-sapling of a son, the anchor was hoisted to the deck of the schooner as she lay at the masting and rigging wharf. There was another anchor lying on the other side of the forecastle; but when the schooner floated out into the stream behind a launch and came to anchor, it was *the* anchor that held her against tide and blustery wind!

That was a day of trial. An untried anchor, shackled to an untried chain, dug sturdy flukes into the bed of the age-old river and held on like death. The strain was like tonic to the forged iron. A little tremor passed from ring to bill, and the first trial was over. Through summer gales the anchor gripped the ground, holding on against everything. The burden grew heavier as the schooner received her cargo; then came a deadly wrench as men tore up the anchor with the windlass. Strange, jubilant songs greeted the anchor as it left the water. The schooner glided to sea amid shouting and fluttering of kerchiefs. They laid the anchor down on deck, fastening it with chains, and unshackled the cable.

There was a period of passage. At times the anchor was buried for brief seconds under thundering seas that swept the schooner. Times there were when ice covered the glossy black tar sea-coat of the anchor and armored its chains. Then there was brassy sun, and warm breezes, and strange fish that flew. Soon a languorous scent of tropical verdure. White surf. Seas so blue that it throbbed. Then men talking as they talked at Babel: and white sails shaking, cable shackled to ring, a lift from the fettered bed-blocks—and down plunged the anchor to a new field of effort: Golden sand, sea fans, coral, and fishes that were like butterflies.

OTHER anchors lay among those golden sands. On a sullen day when the gleam was blotted from the gold by the gray

shadow of hurricane clouds above, those other anchors strove punily against the terrific stress of taut cables. One failed—broke: the heavy chain cable slipped along the bottom, dragging the ring and stock of the anchor to the general destruction of the ship that had depended upon it. Some anchors dragged through the ground until their cables were slipped and let fall in heaps around them, while the ships faced the terror of the storm under sparse sail. But *the* anchor held. The broad palm followed the sharp bill deep into the clay below the sand; clear to the crown it dug; and the wrenching of the chain, the tugging of the schooner only buried it deeper. It was holding on when the golden gleam crept over the sand again.

WHEN next the schooner hove her anchor to the deck, and shook out snowy sails, there was no other vessel in the haven. On the point, where the flags flew, two great ships lay heaped in wreckage. Their anchors had not proved stanch. Ten miles to seaward floated a stout brig, upside down. Her anchors had played her a trick. The mate of the schooner, seeing to the fastening down of *the* anchor for the long passage home, patted the sturdy flukes with the appreciative hand of a sailor. . . . .

One evening in the home port something strange interrupted the current of existence. Many a voyage had been completed since that day when the anchor sprang full fashioned from the fire of the forge. There had been voyages when the anchor had scarcely got well grounded in a distant harbor before the schooner was freighted and driven home again. Some passages had sped so fleetly that the anchor lashings had scarcely settled in place about the flukes and shank on the forecastle head before they were cast off and the anchor let go once more. There had been tranquil anchorages, soft beds, unruffled spells of duty. There had been bitter gales, rugged holding ground, foul berths. One end of the stock had been twisted in such a period of turmoil. The twist remained. When first the schooner flung her white cloths to the breeze, her master or mate would never have allowed that twisted blemish to stay one day; they would have beaten the crookedness out. Lately, too, there had been no sea-coat of glossy tar to protect the anchor while at sea. Rust was upon it. The ring was showing wear.

But the strange something that happened was of a nature to make rust and warp and worn ring of no account. Young Jack, son of old John, owner of the schooner, brought his pretty sweetheart aboard the vessel as she lay beside the wharf, deserted, and together they sat down on the shank of the anchor.

Human beings sometimes get sentimental and make poetry about anchors; the anchor is used in a poetic sense, denoting hope and security. In the grim business an anchor is fashioned for, however, the cold, hard iron attends strictly to its digging.

Yet there was something out of the common run of an anchor's business here, when those young lovers appeared. Jack ran his hand along the twisted stock, muttering disapproval. Joan thrust her round wrist through the ring, laughing at the effect of such a bracelet on such a wrist. But there was a catchy note in her laughter. Jack's muttering only partly hid the real uneasiness within him. And the reason was speedily made clear. The anchor heard a story that went to its iron heart.

The schooner must be sold. Old John was in trouble. Much more money was needed than the schooner was earning. The dainty schooner that had been the hope of young Jack and the pride of old John had to go. Cargoes had been poor for some time. Economy had been the rigid rule. And as old John got older, and trade poorer, young Jack had gone into bigger ships with wider horizons, to learn more thoroughly his profession. Of course he expected to come back and take command of the schooner. That was the day eagerly awaited by Joan; for when Jack took the schooner out, he was to take her too. And they had built up hopes of a cozy voyage through life. With Jack master of his own vessel, his bride could make the schooner a home indeed. In other employ he might wait for years for a command; and wait for a wife: for until he was master he might not take his wife to sea, and neither he nor Joan wanted to marry simply to part.

NOW there was nothing for it but to let the schooner go. It was doubtful whether old John would live long enough to see his debts paid as it was. The parting with the schooner would give him a shocking blow. Whoever bought the vessel would have to command her himself to make her pay. There was nothing for Jack to do but go back to other employ and make the best speed he could toward com-

mand. Joan was brave about it. She sent him away, keeping back the tears, making him believe that he would prove man enough to come back for her before she had her hope-chest stowed full.

All of which may not seem to matter much to an anchor. But there was something about the change that came with the new owner which made this anchor indifferent to worn ring, twisted stock, or rust. When the schooner anchored, the anchor dug in and hung on. The habit of a lifetime was not to be broken simply because times had changed. But there was a difference in the work now. Anchorages seemed more frequent than passages. And such anchorages! Cold, weedy, rocky little coast crannies. Never a golden gravel or a colorful angel-fish. Gray cod, flat skate, ugly sculpins, and crabs with horns and armor.

It was a poor trade. The men who had bought the schooner were a poor lot. They knew nothing of far horizons, or the romance of seeking. They freighted boxes of fish that stank with brine; bundles of barrel staves and shooks and hoops; potatoes, coal, brick. And the rust grew thick on the anchor. The ring wore thinner. The stock took on a sharper twist. But under the rust still lived the heart of iron.

Then came a time when the schooner lay at anchor so long that the cable was kinked into knots, and the anchor was studded with little barnacles. That was a sorry time. The schooner was in Rotten Row, that universally known creek where all "For Sale" ships eventually linger.

AGAIN the clank of windlass awoke the echoes and the voices of men greeted the mud-fouled anchor's rising. These were still different men. They cursed most heartily the kinked cable. In that they were no different from other sea-faring men. But they cursed as if they really had an animus against the cable; they cursed the anchor for getting foul. And it was a lubberly stow they gave the anchor when at last the kinks were out of the chain.

They never unshackled the cable. The schooner went to sea with all her deck gear adrift, as if she were not expected to keep the sea for long at a time. It wrung even the iron heart of the anchor to see how lubberly men could be, how paintless and loose-ended they could make a ship through sheer indifference. And the port where the anchor was next let go was full of such men, and such vessels. There were fine old craft looking as if they had just come out of a graveyard of ships. Anchors lay close together in a thick mud bed. Fluke to fluke they lay in places, and whispers crept down the taut chains.

It was a bad story that was whispered. This was a bad trade. Great warehouses disgorged square cases into the hungry holds; fat, slimy men with the eyes of politicians swaggered on the waterfront with great rolls of money. Crews comprised more tenderloin throw-offs than seamen; yet there were seamen too, for the vessels must go to sea, and find a spot in the ocean, and keep the sea in evil weather so that the fat men and the tenderloin wasters might wax fatter and bolder.

The anchor was the last to come up. Trade was brisk. As the schooner slipped out to sea on the heels of the fleet, other greater ships were entering, loaded with heavy cargoes for the warehouses.

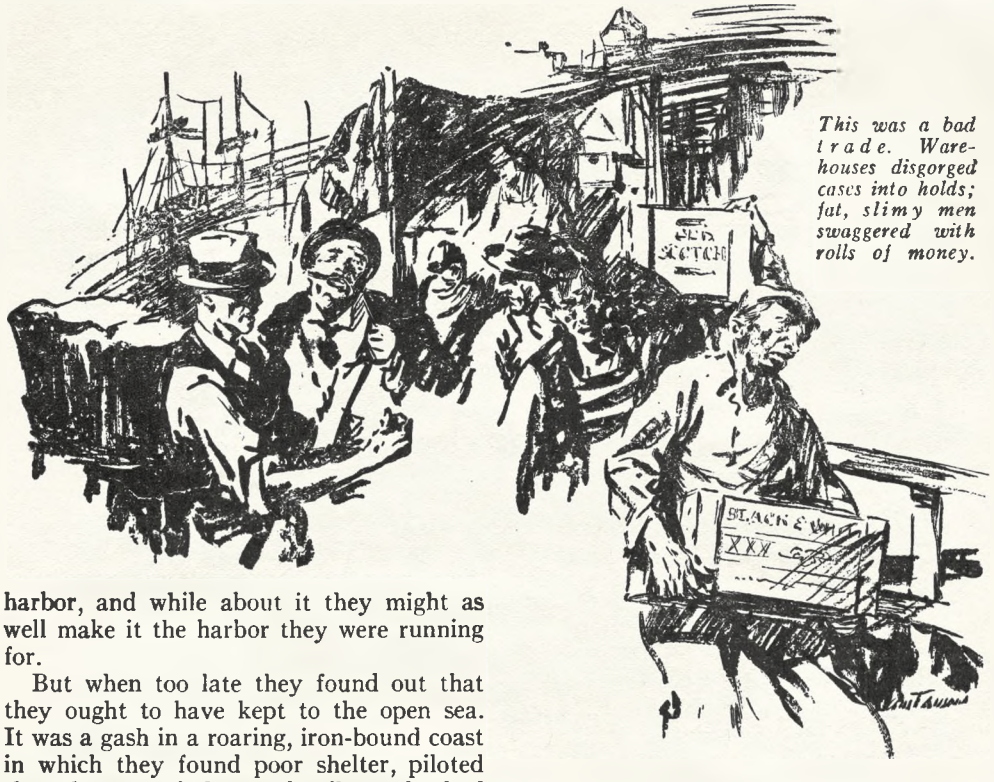
Fastened to a great rope hawser instead of the chain cable the anchor was sent tumbling down into a depth so great that no anchor was ever meant to plumb it. So deep was the sea where the schooner swung at her devious business that the weight of her was never put upon the anchor. Fathoms upon fathoms of hawser writhed upon the ocean floor as the schooner swayed and swung to the winds and tides. Even when fast motor-boats clung to the schooner's scarred sides by night, gaining weight as the square cases were transferred, their burden was not enough to put a strain on the anchor.

There were other trips. Money was turned over in the schooner's untidy cabin such as had never been dreamed of by her honest old owner whose death so closely followed her loss. Such money as would have bought the schooner twice over in one voyage; as would have kept old John hale and hearty into a mellow sunset of old age.

There was one trip, when men grew overbold, when there was no long hawser and no anchoring in the depths. Pride whispered in Greed's ear, and Greed said, "Sail the ship right into port! Why split profits with small fry?"

That was the trip of the great hurricane.

THE good sailors of the gang said: "Keep to the sea!" But the others laughed, as ignorant men laugh. They said it was just a storm, and in a storm the best place was in harbor. They would make



This was a bad trade. Warehouses disgorged cases into holds; fat, slimy men swaggered with rolls of money.

harbor, and while about it they might as well make it the harbor they were running for.

But when too late they found out that they ought to have kept to the open sea. It was a gash in a roaring, iron-bound coast in which they found poor shelter, piloted there by one of the good sailors who had been born near by. Through a leaping race of broken seas that beat at the schooner's flanks and snatched at her fighting head, they came into a barren haven and sent down the anchor to save them.

As soon as the vessel was anchored, and her sails lowered, the ignorant of the gang went below, to close out from their ears and eyes the thunder of the outer seas and the hideous scowl of the scudding skies. The few good seamen knew better. They made fast the sails, so that the wind might have no grip upon them. They got the second anchor over the bow and paid out more cable on the anchor. While the gang below filled the cabin with whisky-reek and tobacco-smoke, playing cards for extravagant stakes and cursing each other whether winning or losing, the men who knew stayed on deck in the driving rain and spray, uneasily watching the heave of the seas that rolled deeper and ever deeper into the gash.

The hurricane shrieked. There was broken water now inside the anchorage. They let go the other anchor. The wind shifted. It blew straight into the gash. The seas thundered in with scarcely a break to their sweep. Both cables were paid out to the bitter ends; and the watching seamen told the gang the schooner was dragging her anchors. Men crept up to look, ducked the spray and returned to the warmth of the cabin. The seamen saw to the boat gear. One, wiser than the rest, looked at the churning surf astern of the schooner and silently fastened on a lifebelt.

Down among the grass and thin mud of the harbor bed two anchors stubbornly fought against the terrific strain of the storm-bound ship. Inch by inch they tore through the indifferent holding-ground. Small boulders in which the flukes caught held on for awhile, then rolled from the mud which had perhaps imprisoned them for ages. Foot by foot they crept back, sturdy flukes digging only to be wrenched out. Fathom by fathom the schooner dragged nearer to the leeward shore, a shore all grinning with cruel teeth, slavering with stormy fury. . . . .

The watching sailors told the gang the ship was dragging. They must take the boat for it or it would be too late. The gang cursed them for rats, and returned to their cards. Down in the mud the second anchor caught hold of a rock which would not budge. The schooner stopped dragging. *The* anchor had dug deeply into the mud too, but it was too close to the second anchor. But as long as that rock held fast— The sailor who had put on the lifebelt watched the shore marks he had taken, and at last took time to light his pipe.

The rock held. The card-game waxed hot. All might have been well. But that second anchor had never, in all the schooner's life, been used to the full scope of its chain. The chain at the inboard end had laid in the chain locker for years, gathering rust. Now, in a fierce squall that tore trees from the headland and sent pebbles flying like hail, the schooner surged back, the chain snapped. The grinning fangs of rock to leeward suddenly leaped closer.

The anchor was almost torn in two by the wrench when the full weight came upon it. A tremor ran from thinning ring to quivering fluke. Buried to the crown, it hung on with bulldog tenacity. Again men told the gang they must quit or drown. The boss of the unseamanly gang gave another look. The anchor was holding then. The boss added a fighting word to his commonplace cursing and there was a fight afoot. The gang came tumbling out. It was a fight for the boat. The gang would never leave that valuable cargo as long as there was a fathom of room between the schooner's stern and the rocks. The sailors knew how short was the shrift they would get in that surf, once let the schooner touch.

The anchor felt the dismembering jerk as the buried fluke caught a spur of rock deep down. The cable twanged along its length; but the anchor held. The schooner stopped dragging in the thick of the fight. Then another tremor. She dragged again. The fluke broke off under the strain. The anchor slipped fast. But now the fight had reached a point of desperate ferocity. Men no longer saw the peril of the vessel. The hurricane reached its climax. The sea roared in and buried the schooner's bows. It swept the deck, hurling men in heaps before it. A sea beat the bows around, swept the quarter, and took the boat with it in a bundle of staves.

Down in the mud the broken fluke groped like a blind finger. As long as a molecule of that mountain iron was left it would fight the fight it was made for! Let men fight over filthy lucre, or the liquor that would bring it; down there among the swirling slime of the anchorage a heart of iron would fight simply because it was a duty impressed upon its core in the forge's fires.

And as fortune favors the heart of iron, the broken fluke groped and found the roots of that immovable rock. The iron arm settled around the grim boulder. In the instant that fighting men saw their boat hurled to destruction, and realized the imminence of their own doom, the schooner came to a definite stop right on the edge of the breakers. Seas flung aboard her; but she never budged another foot sternward. Her bows dipped deeply into clear brine. Her taut cable crunched and clanged. But her stern rose and fell in water deep enough to bear her, and the gang turned upon the beaten sailors with ridicule of their recent fears. They cemented the security of vessel and cargo, with some of that cargo.

The hurricane blew out, and the sea went down. The anchor was almost buried under the rim of the boulder. Bits of rock, ground off by the iron, lay in the settling mud. The chain lay loosely along the bottom. Then the windlass began to clank, and the slack chain crept back to the schooner's locker.

The chain was straight up and down. The strain was doubled. Men hove at the brakes and cursed. Never had anchor taken such a hold. They forgot that the hold had saved their lives, their ship, their whisky. They sweat for ten minutes. The boss saw only the sunshine, and the light scudding clouds that blew toward where he wanted to go. The whole gang bent over the windlass for a few profane minutes. The anchor would not break out. It held as if the hurricane still blew, as if it held within the curve of its arms the salvation of a world of sailors. Then men forgot all. They knew only the labor. Where they were bound, many anchors could be bought.

"To hell with it! Slip the chain," said the boss.

Down clattered the cable. It fell in heaps upon the maimed anchor; and the soft mud filled the links. The schooner flew seaward with her head high. She lacked the chastening weight of two anchors and two iron cables.

LITTLE of softness comes into the life of an anchor. Never to be in the sunlight except as a chained prisoner on a ship's bow; forever destined to pit heart and fiber against force in the depths—depths rarely lighted by more than a watery ray—that was a stern duty indeed. And after all, to be left there beside a sea-slimed boulder to rust slowly away, to gather decay, to nurse only a memory of usefulness was a harsh destiny even for iron forged in the fire.

Never a sound of ship or man reached the depths where the anchor lay. Eels

writhed among the chain links. The worn ring of the anchor grew thick with tiny crustaceans. Broad, slippery weed waved around the ragged fluke from which a palm had been broken in that memorable hurricane. And the mud crept through link and ring, covering all in a mound over which the flounders groveled.

The anchor had almost lost touch with the world above the sea-bottom when the murmur and scour of the current brought down warning of storm. This was a storm which made little difference to an anchor, lying there in the mud with all its cable atop of it. Yet there were voices, of tide, and wind, and moaning breakers outside, to revive memories of other storms which meant much. It was a bad storm, too. It required a great wind so to stir the waters of the rocky haven that the bottom mud was set awhirl. And the mud was stirred. Some of the cable-links were uncovered. The worn ring, resting against the rock, fell over and knocked much of the growth away that had fouled it.

And there suddenly came sounds of ships and men—sounds long absent from that anchorage. There was the sullen roar of a rushing hull, the swirling swish as she was brought to the wind; the clash and thunder of gear and canvas. Then voices of men. Sharp clang of metal, and the splash of an anchor, the rattling outpouring of chain.

The anchor that fell to the bottom was new, and slender. It took the mud not far from where the anchor lay. In a way anchors have, it imparted news. There was a fine vessel above. A good skipper, too. But this was no place to expect an anchor to hold when a gale blew.

The anchor knew at once that this newcomer was not of the right metal. There was no heart of iron there. A good anchor would dig in and say nothing, just hanging on until torn apart.

But then the storm really got its breath and blew. The new anchor dug deeply, but the arms were short, the palms narrow, the shank never designed by genius. The new chain tautened. The anchor slipped through the mud. More cable fell down. More, and yet more. It was no greenhorn who paid that cable out. The slack came down in seamanly fashion, not so fast that it piled up on the rest, nor so jerkily that it threatened to snatch out the windlass when the ship was brought up on it. But when all the chain was out, the new anchor still dragged.

"Edge over this way, mate, and I'll lend a hand!"

That was the message rattled across the mud by *the* anchor. And then the new anchor broke out, tripped, and began to roll fast, too fast for a bill to start digging again. One wildly floundering fluke reached out and was caught by the worn ring of the anchor. There came a terrific wrench. Heaps of rusty chain tumbled down flat. On the vessel above sparks flew from the windlass, and anxious eyes watched almost without hope. Close under the stern boiled the surf; black fangs of rock gleamed hungrily. A man whispered words of courage in a woman's ear as he put a life-belt around her. And she smiled.

Down in the mud the worn ring twisted in the pang of the rack. The fluke that was caught in it was turned by the stress until it got a fresh hold on the ground. And the ring was stretched out into a long link. But it held. The anchor's broken palm, gripping the rock, was all but torn in two. But it held. The new anchor and the new chain budged never an inch more. Up above, another vessel was saved from destruction when the rocky fangs almost had her.

ONCE more the clank of windlass echoed in the anchorage. The new chain crept upward. It was hove taut. Then men above sweat and muttered. They swore; but there was nothing evil or foul about their swearing. They swore because that is a sailor's way when doing two men's work. These men did four men's work, and when the cable refused to give another link, they still hove and sweat manfully.

"We wont lose an anchor!" the skipper vowed. "Show a bit of sail, and we'll try to sail the anchor clear."

There spoke a sailor! Clear down by the boulder the sound of rattling hanks and slatting sail was heard. And the chain fell slack, then altered its trend. The vessel swung from the wind, jibbed in the light breeze, and swept her cable in a circle. Then the broken fluke of *the* anchor slipped from the boulder that held it so long and so well. The windlass clanked again, and the new anchor rose up through the brightening sea, dragging behind it *the* anchor and all its rusty chain.

"Let's see what you've got," the skipper of the schooner said, leaning over the bows as his new anchor came up. The men at the windless grunted; the work was little lighter than when the anchor was foul.

"What is it, Jack?" a woman's clear voice asked, eagerly. "Oh, it's another anchor! What luck!"

"Luck? It saved our home, Joan."

"It's broke," growled a sailor who had sweat. "Shall I clear it and let it go?"

"Let go nothing!" said Jack. "It's nothing but a broken palm."

"We do need another anchor, don't we, Jack?" Joan cried. "We'd have had one if you hadn't spent so much money making the schooner comfortable for me. What's the matter, Jack?"

Jack laughed, hitching a stopper around the flattened ring.

"Here—remember this worn ring, Joan? Remember you put your arm through it for a bracelet once? Get this anchor aboard and clean it off, lads; they don't make anchors like this nowadays! We'll make it our bower anchor when we've put a new palm on it."

And in the evening, when the schooner slipped along the coast before a fresh fair breeze, Jack and Joan walked forward. They sat on the anchor. It fitted the schooner's bow as if it belonged there, as indeed it did. The new anchor would never fill a place like it.

"It'll be hard for a while, Joan," Jack was saying. He had his arm about her waist. "It took about all my savings to buy the old schooner and put her in shape after those dirty rum-runners let her go. But I've got you, and you're true blue. You showed it in that gale. We'll soon make her pay. Paint and polish can come later."

"Don't forget our luck, Jack," Joan laughed happily. She tried to slip her round wrist through the stretched-out and worn ring. It was too narrow. A piece of scale, rust and crustacean shell, still adhered in the one part where she might have thrust her hand.

"Oh, it's a shame!" she said. "It would feel like good luck if I could have got my hand into it again."

"We'll just go on hoping for the good luck and never mind the signs," said Jack, hugging her shoulders. "We're doing none so bad."

The misshapen ring gently fell over. It struck the forelock, and the scale fell to the deck. Joan's eyes were big and limpid. She slipped her hand through the ring, and knew their luck would hold—the anchor, which knew about holding on, had told her.

The Old Police Combination

By

MEIGS FROST

A star reporter here sets forth the clever and dramatic solving of a specially interesting murder mystery.

Illustrated by O. E. Hake

HARDLY had the door labeled *"Chief of Detectives. Private,"* closed behind Police Commissioner Stanley's dignified exit, when Dan Dempsey exploded. He had a right to explode, he felt. It was his office. It had been his office for ten years—though at that particular minute he wasn't sure it was going to continue his for ten days. The Commissioner was new. And he was trying to the soul.

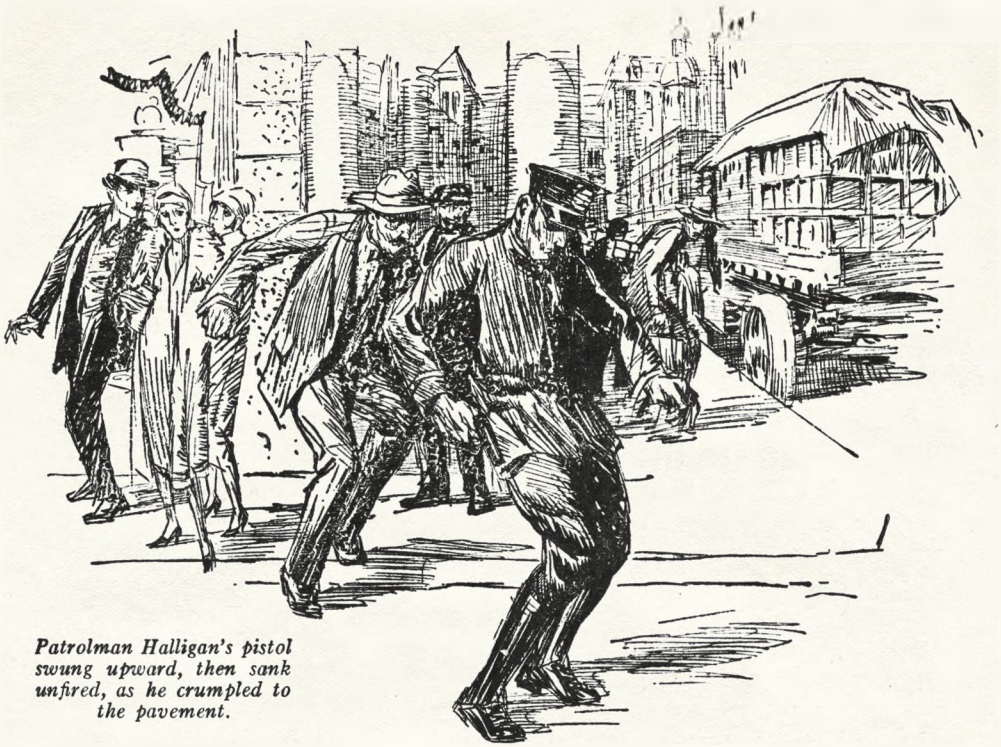
"The mutt! The lily-handed, manicured mutt! Him and his criminology! Him and his deductions! Him and his psycho-analysis! Him and—"

The door had opened. Through it stepped Tim Culligan, assistant chief of the plain-clothes squad.

"I met him just now in the corridor, Chief," grinned Tim. "Has he been learning you more about how to run your job?"

Neither of them needed any name to identify Tim's "him."

"He has!" There was plenty of steam left in Dan Dempsey's vocal boiler, even after that first explosion. "He has, the white-collared scut of a reformers' shirt-front! Just as if you and me hadn't been pounding a beat down the Irish Channel when his mother was leading him to Sunday-school in his long curls and his velvet pants! Just as if we hadn't been grabbing crooks by the collar before he was old enough to yell 'Rah-Rah!' at the football games he never was man enough to play in!"



Patrolman Halligan's pistol swung upward, then sank unfired, as he crumpled to the pavement.

"Sounds like a bad session you been having, Chief." Tim was sympathetic. "What's wrong?"

"We're all wrong, he says." Dan Dempsey's neck was shading from red to purple. "It's some wop named Lombroso he's been reading, the big stiff! And some frog named Gaboriau. He's choked to his neck about the magnificent record of some French dick named *Lecoq*. He's ready to give three ringing cheers for *Sherlock Holmes* too, or I miss my guess. We're too rough and crude, Tim. More brain-work we must have in this department. More science. We mustn't forget that the poor crook is a sick man and he has a soul. We must gentle him till he's proved guilty. If he gets naughty-naughty, we must outwit him. Put ourselves in his shoes. Think circles around him. But never, never be rough with him. There's a lot more, but I disremember it just now. I'm too damn' mad."

"Put ourselves in their shoes!" Tim Culligan was chuckling. But there wasn't a chuckle in Dan that minute.

"It's meself I'd like to be putting inta the heaviest pair of pavement-pounders I've got to me name, and get set for a good swinging kick at him. And that's the truth, Tim. Him telling me we're too rough, when you know standing there that we never slugged a guy yet if he'd come along peaceable. Him telling me that the department is all out of date and behind the times. And the dirty hint he slipped that there might be a shake-up if we didn't get out of our old-fashioned rut. And it all comes outa me trying to treat him like an intelligent man. It's the last time I ever try to talk sense to a boob!"

"Easy, now, Chief. Let down before apoplexy gets you. Come on over to the Greek's with me for a cup of coffee. It's a change of scene you need, and some mild stimulant. Old Doctor Culligan talking."

Dan Dempsey grinned at last.

"You're on, Tim." In a vest pocket his thick fingers fumbled. He produced a quarter. "I'll match you for the coffee."

Tim won. They headed for the Greek's.

"And what was it ye told him when ye tried to talk to him like one intelligent man to another?" queried Tim as they walked down the street.

"Arrrgh!" Dan Dempsey's throat emitted a deep rumble. "I told him your scientific crime-detecatif is all right for the magazines and the theayters. But what you want on a real police-force, I says to him, is leather and luck and guts. 'What?' says he, raising the supercilious eyebrows of him, the mutt! 'Shoe-leather the boys aint afraid to wear out going after a crook,' says I. 'Luck in picking up the trail. And guts to make the pinch.' "

IT was a drizzling gray day. Down at the Marketmen's Branch of the Seaport Bank they were getting ready for the rush, for it was the day before Christmas. Any minute the branch manager was due to open the vault. Already half a dozen favored customers had slipped in at the employees' side door to get in line for the moment the cash was stacked in the paying-teller's cage, though the front door yet was locked and the curtains drawn.

Up to the curb rolled a coupé of modest make. Out stepped the branch manager. In through the side door he strode in all his managerial majesty. Dignified greeting in a deep bass voice he gave the favored customers. Hat and rain-coat he hung beside his desk. Slowly, solemnly, he stepped to the door on the vault. The time-lock had clicked past its night's vigil a few moments before. Majestically the manager turned the knob. By that simple act, he felt, the whole commercial life of his section of the city sprang into being once more.

In through the open door of the vault stepped bookkeeper and teller to emerge with the ledgers and the cash-tray. In a moment they would be in place. In another moment the curtain would be raised on the big plate-glass front door; the door would swing open. . . . .

"Up with your hands! Put 'em up! High, damn you! Reach for the ceiling!"

Through the little room the voice rasped, insistent, commanding. Like automatons spun on a pivot, those in the bank turned around. It was a masked figure they faced, a figure back of a heavy pistol.

"See here, *you*—"

It began, that expostulation, in the most dignified, deepest bass of the branch manager. It ended in a high falsetto squeak. For the masked man with the pistol had taken a sudden step toward him.

The managerial hands reached skyward.

"Line up inside the rail! Make it snappy! Every one of you!" grated the order. They lined up inside the rail. Behind them came prodding the man with the pistol. A big bandana concealed his face. An old black slouch hat curved down to meet the shrouding handkerchief. He was clad in old blue overalls. His shoes were mud-stained. That much they saw.

HE stepped to the telephone on the manager's desk. A single slash of a clasp-knife, and the loose ends of the severed wire dangled free.

Sharp orders crackled. To the staccato rapid-fire of them, the teller dumped the packets of currency into the open kit-bag on the floor—the kit-bag the masked man had kicked ahead of him behind the rail.

"Into the vault with you! Every damn' one of you! I'll drill the man who makes a break!"

Not even a falsetto squeak came in protest. Man by man, before that pistol-muzzle, the manager, his staff, the vanguard of his favored customers, marched into the little vault. The heavy steel door slammed as the last back went through the opening. Muscular fingers twirled the combination as the bars shot home.

Another twitch of those fingers, and the bandana mask came off, to be stuffed into a pocket. The kit-bag, heavy with currency, was snapped shut. The man in overalls picked it up. Outside the railing he strode. Near the end of the little tiled lobby he raised a package that leaned against the wall—a package about two feet long. With this under his right arm, with the kit-bag in his left hand, he stepped out of the side door and into the street. Up the street he walked with the casual gait of a workman going to his job.

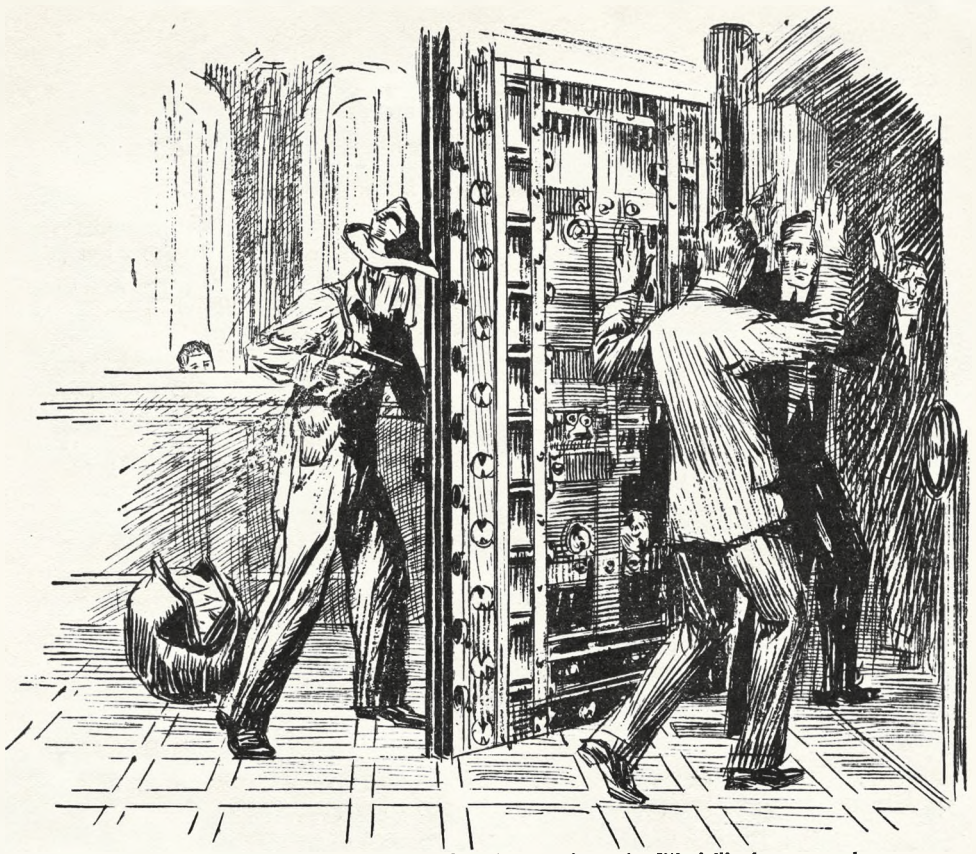
AS the side door of the bank branch closed behind him, a face peered out from behind one of the desks. There the office boy, unseen by the bandit from behind the partition, had dropped to the floor at the first sharp command of the hold-up.

The youngster rushed to the side door, out onto the street.

"Stop thief! Stop thief! Police! Police! Help! Stop him! He held up the bank!"

The boyish treble cut shrill and high through the street noises. Men came running. Nearly two blocks away, now, up the street, they saw the overalled figure to which the frightened, shrieking boy was pointing. That figure had just passed the crossing where Patrolman Jerry Halligan was directing traffic.

Patrolman Halligan spun at the shriek. There could be no mistake. He saw the crowd gathering in front of the bank. He saw the overalled figure at which men were pointing as they ran toward him shouting, quicken its pace. Patrolman Halligan charged forward far ahead of the crowd, shouting command to halt. As he ran, he fumbled beneath his uniform-coat for his holstered pistol.



"Into the vault with you—every damn' one of you! I'll drill the man who makes a break!"

At the corner the man in overalls paused, wheeled, faced the onrushing policeman.

"Beat it!" he called. "Turn around and beat it, bo! I don't want to have to kill you!"

The command was wasted on Jerry Halligan. His fingers had just closed around the butt of his pistol.

"You're under—" he began the formula of the law. The sentence was never finished.

Mysteriously, for there was no weapon in sight, flame and smoke spurted from the side of the man in overalls. With that spurt sounded a booming detonation that was not the sharp crack of a pistol.

Patrolman Jerry Halligan halted. For a second he stood there, wavering uncertainly. His own pistol, tight-gripped at last in his powerful right hand, came free of its holster. Upward it swung, driven by an impulse stilled a split second before. Halfway up the arc that would have leveled it at the bandit's body, it sank again, unfired.

Halligan crumpled to the greasy pavement—lay there, sprawling strangely.

Before the mute menace of the sight, the pursuing crowd halted and huddled. Some of them stepped forward and bent over the twisted figure.

"Dead," said the man who turned the body over, face up to the gray and drizzling skies. There was no question about it. A charge of buckshot in face and throat at close range had done its work. One of the slugs had pierced the brain. Halted by the horror of swift death in a busy street—of open murder done in broad daylight—it was a moment before the crowd looked from the slain for the slayer. When they did look, he had vanished.

UP and down Dan Dempsey's office Police Commissioner Stanley strode—in what he thought fondly was masterful and impressive fashion.

"From what I can see, we're not getting anywhere," he said with a click of outthrust jaw modeled on the very best studies of leaders of men. "I don't like the way you're handling this case, Dempsey, and I don't mind telling you so."

"So I've noticed, not being blind or

deaf." Dan Dempsey's voice was ominously quiet.

"No impertinence, if you please." The Commissioner's jaw clamped again in its best imitation of a steel trap. "I tell you, we've got to do something about this. Here a bandit in broad daylight gets away with fifty thousand dollars of a bank's money and kills a policeman in his getaway. The biggest men in this city are calling me up to demand that we do something about it. We've *got* to do something."

"I haven't applied for any vacation, have I?" Dempsey's voice sounded weary, now.

"You might as well, for all the good you seem to be doing," came the official retort.

This time Dan didn't wait for a door to close before he blew up. He turned fiercely on his official superior.

"Is it my resignation you're fishing for this minute?" he demanded. "Is that what you're trying to say?"

"Oh, no! No, indeed!" Commissioner Stanley hadn't meant it to go as far as that. "I'm simply trying to impress on you the necessity for results in a case as important as this. If ever there was a case for impersonal brain-work, this is it. Here is a carefully planned crime with an element of mystery. You've got to out-think the man or men who executed it. But because a policeman is killed, every man in your department is rushing around, red in the face, threatening what he'll do if he finds the killer. This is the time for quiet concentration. You've got to put yourself in that man's shoes. You've got to figure out what you'd do in his case. It illustrates perfectly what I told you a few days ago."

"Listen, Commissioner." There was something beside weariness in Dan Dempsey's voice; there was disgust. "There's up to half a million people in this city. If you think this impersonal concentration stuff of yours can make you walk out among them and grab the guy who pulled this job, you hop to it. If you think there's anybody on the force can handle it better than I can, you hop to that, too, and let me work under him without pay. But if you want me to do it, for the love of Pat get off my neck and stay off for a few days."

"But what's your theory?" persisted the Commissioner, choosing to ignore insubordination and holding to the main line.

"Theory? I don't work on theories!" Dan Dempsey's disgust was supreme. "I try to find some facts. It's leather and luck and guts, I told you, that gets results here. Right now we're using the leather. With a little break in the luck, there'll be a chance to use the guts in a day or so—and believe me, the boy who makes that pinch will need 'em."

"Luck!" Commissioner Stanley snorted.

"Yes, luck," said Dan Dempsey simply. "And by the time you've been a commissioner half as long as I've been a cop, you'll know it."

"It must have been one of these organized gangs of bank-breakers." Commissioner Stanley was far afield amid his theories and speculations again.

"Organized, hell!" said Dan Dempsey. "It was a one-man job. And it was done the day before Christmas. If you're so hell-bent on having a theory, take this. It's good as any—better than most. It was a lone-wolf pulled this job—an amachure—scared half to death when he pulled it—and he did it to raise the jack for a woman."

Commissioner Stanley brightened perceptibly. "Ah, *cherchez la femme!*"

Dan Dempsey had turned to the insistent summons of his desk telephone.

"Fine," he said into the transmitter. "I'll be there in two shakes."

He turned to the Commissioner, midway in the job of shrugging his big shoulders into his overcoat.

"Shershay your grandmother!" said Dan. "Will you get off my neck and stay off it and let me get to work? You and your impersonal brain-work! When it's my own niece's husband that lies dead, killed by that murderin' bandit! *Arrrgh!*"

He dashed out of the door.

IN a small locked room in the rear of the City Hall—a room on the door of which was no sign whatever to indicate what went on behind its panels—the Commissioner was unburdening his soul to the Mayor.

"I should dislike intensely," he said, "to demote a man of Dempsey's long years of police service. But he seems to have become almost wholly insubordinate. Impertinence is a mild term for his language to me. And I should say impartially that the man's conduct verges on the unbalanced. You know how vital it is that we make a showing in this case. I've tried every element of encouragement that my personal presence can give at police headquarters. I've tried to arouse interest in

modern criminology as against old-time police blundering and brutality. Yet I would almost say that I—the Police Commissioner!—have been ordered to get out of there and stay out of there. Yes, virtually it amounts to that."

The Mayor made a sound that might have been interpreted as sympathetic. The Commissioner chose so to interpret it.

As the man twisted free, his hand darted, snakelike, under his armpit.

"Most incomprehensible," he went on. "There are angles to the case that are a blank mystery. Patrolman Halligan indubitably was killed by a charge of buckshot. There were a score of witnesses at least. Yet no man of them all saw a shotgun in the hands of the murderer. Not a man saw any firearms in his hands at the time of the killing—any weapon—not even the pistol with which he held up the bank, though a pistol does not shoot buckshot. Astounding!"

The Commissioner's head leaned forward on his clenched fists. It was a posture indicating intense thought. A sculptor named Rodin achieved some fame with a model in such a posture.

"And the last time I went to police headquarters," he resumed, "I stepped into a most astounding scene. There in the detectives' rooms, under the supervision of Dempsey, a dozen members of the force were busily engaged in what looked like childish pastimes. Kindergarten stuff! Piles of cardboard were around them. Some were marking the cardboard with pencils. Others with knives and scissors were cutting it into strange shapes. Isosceles triangles, of varying sizes, seemed to predominate. Stacks of them were on the table. They seemed to be arranged in sets. From time to time a patrolman would take a finished set and leave hurriedly. I demanded of Dempsey what this cutting out of paper dolls and jigsaw puzzles meant. His answer, and I believe I quote him correctly, was to get to hell out of there, for the love of Pat, and stay out of there for a while."

The Mayor kept a straight face. He was old and wise in his craft. He nodded gravely. An unintelligible sound rumbled in his throat.

"Such an extraordinary procedure coupled with Dempsey's earlier statement when I tried to reason with him on the subject of modern criminology—his statement that leather and luck and—er—guts were the whole secret of police success; all this leads me to wonder if it is not barely possible that Dempsey has outlived his usefulness on the force."

The Commissioner's voice was grave. He

was a very new Commissioner. The Mayor's face was equally grave. Now and then, to corral the reformers' vote, you had to put up a shirt-front like this on the administration ticket. And you had to be patient with them.

"I've known Dempsey a good many years," said the Mayor, placatingly. "I'll talk with him today. He's done some good work. I wouldn't take his grouch too seriously. He's always like that on a big case."

"But those isosceles triangles—incomprehensible!" the Commissioner was murmuring as he rose.

"I'll find out about them, too," promised the Mayor.

A few minutes later, the private conference office far behind him down the corridor, he was out in front at the desk where the public found him. He turned to his secretary.

"Martin," said he, "you're a college man. Now, what the hell is an isosceles triangle?"

IT was a city five hundred miles distant from the scene of the robbery of the Marketmen's Branch of the Seaport Bank and the murder of Patrolman Jerry Halligan. Into the train-shed of the Union Depot rolled the Dixie DeLuxe with its long line of Pullmans. Through the gates to the concourse streamed the hurrying travelers. Out into the great waiting-room they spread and scattered. Porters and passengers, baggage-checks in hand, formed in a group that clotted at the baggage-room door.

Behind that half-length door with its brass-covered counter suddenly started to stream outward a procession of kit-bags and golf-bags and heavy suitcases. At the side door taxi chauffeurs clamored for steamer-trunks. Men and women plainly clad, men and women luxuriously tailored, stood side by side in the democracy of travel. Inconspicuous among them was a pair who had descended from the train. The man was young, smooth-shaven, dressed in the well-fitting clothes of the prosperous mechanic. The girl was slim and bobbed of hair. Her dark dress, long coat and little *cloche* hat were in the current mode.

To one of the long rows of seats in the big waiting-room they walked. She seated herself. To his lifted hand a porter came running. The young man handed the darky a baggage-check and a small suitcase.

"Get me a taxi. Have this suitcase and this trunk put on it," he ordered.

"Yassah, Cap'n."

THE porter crossed the waiting-room and pushed the ticket across the brass counter. The baggage-room man who took it glanced at the number. As he wheeled toward the long line of waiting trunks, with his hand he made a sign imperceptible to those who stood at the door.

He found the trunk. Out to the waiting taxi it was trundled. The young man, hand on the girl's elbow, ushered her through the open door into the cab. One foot on the curb, one foot on the running-board, he stood, calling the name of a hotel to the chauffeur before he stepped through the open door. And at that exact moment, three men in plain clothes from the crowd about him closed in on him. Wordlessly they lunged, reaching for his wrists.

There was a sudden swirl of deadly motion. A swinging blow to the head rocked on his feet one of the three, as the young man struck, sprang and twisted free. As he leaped, his hand darted snakelike beneath his coat, under his armpit. The blunt black automatic came out—and it came out spitting flame.

Instantly the spot was a surge of milling forms. Terrified cries were punctuated by the crash of shots. Pistol answered pistol. Sharp explosions. Glancing darts of orange flame pale in the white glare of the arc-lights. Screams. Curses.

Three men were down, sprawled drunkenly on the pavement. One of them was the young man. The fourth hurled himself upon the gun-man as he fell. A smashing blow from a hand that clutched a police pistol deflected the last shot of the automatic. The steel-jacketed bullet smacked against a concrete post and screamed off into the night. The young man's wrists were grasped at last. But they had gone limp.

Out of the darkness of the taxi's interior, where she had crouched through the nightmare of that battle, sprang the slim figure of the girl. The detective wrenched the automatic loose from the limp hand that held it, tossed it away, and, his own pistol cocked on its last cartridge, looked keenly into the face pallid in the arc-lights against the background of the grimy pavement. Then he rose.

Hysterically the girl threw herself upon the body sprawled there.

"Harry!" Her call rang out frenziedly. "Harry! Speak to me! Say something! Oh, I told you you mustn't! Harry! Harry!"

"'Will you draw me a little horsey, Mister?' she asks me. I've done it for me own—so I took up the crayon."

The young man on the pavement did not answer. He would never answer human voice again.

DAN DEMPSEY sat far back on his shoulder-blades in the swivel chair behind the door labeled: *"Chief of Detectives. Private."* His heels rested on the scarred and littered desk. For the fifth time in less than five minutes he read the telegram from the chief of police in the city five hundred miles away.

"May your soul rest easy, Jerry Halligan, poor lad!" he murmured. "We got him for you."

Then he picked up the telephone.

An hour later he sat there in the same posture. The reporters had gone—with the story of their lives. On one side of his desk sat the Mayor. In through the door came Police Commissioner Stanley, immaculate in dinner jacket.

"Guests at the house for dinner and bridge," he explained. "I couldn't get away before. Congratulations, Dempsey! I'm afraid I said some harsh things while I was wrought up about the case. But the murderer is dead, and all but five hundred dollars of the money was recovered in his trunk. Let's let bygones be bygones. We'll forget what I said about a departmental shake-up. And now will you tell me how you did it?"

Perfunctorily Dan Dempsey took the hand that was extended to him. He was far from mollified.

"Leather and luck and guts—the old police combination like I tried to tell you once before," he said gruffly. "That's what did it. What you college men would call the triple threat, I guess. It's a threat any crook fears."

"Ah, yes—but—you might explain it a bit more. For instance, those isosceles triangles."

"Those what?"

"Those little bits of cardboard I found you cutting out here, that day you told me to—er—get to hell out of there."

"Oh, them!" Dan's heels came down from his desk.

"It might interest you, Commissioner, to know just how a real police department works on a real case. I dunno how your friends Lombroso and Gaboriau and *Lecoq* and *Sherlock Holmes* would 'a' done it. But this is how we done it!

"You remember how the bandit disappeared the minute after he shot poor Jerry Halligan? Well, he didn't disappear on foot. He run around that corner. There was an automobile truck passing. A dozen of them pass there any half-hour. He jumped aboard this one—climbed up beside the negro driver. Jams a gun into his ribs. Tells him to take orders or get his. The

darky takes orders. He drives his passenger around half a dozen corners to the block where the truck slows down and the lad hops off with the jack. The driver goes on."

"Why didn't he shout for police?" the Commissioner's voice was very superior.

"Because he's a darky. And he's been told he'll be filled full of holes if he lets out a peep. 'Didn't want no police ruckus, boss,' he tells me afterward. How did I get to him? Chapter One in the luck part of it. A fella is driving a machine behind the truck when our gay gunman jumps on. Sees it all and takes pains to notice the license-number, which he telephones me, though his nerve doesn't carry him far enough to follow a man with a gun and yell for help. So I trail the truck, and I find the driver."

"How far did that get you?"

"This far," said Dan Dempsey. "It got me to the block where the guy jumped off the truck. I take the whole precinct force and the plain-clothes squad and go through every building with a fine-tooth comb for two blocks in all directions."

"Looking for a needle in a haystack, weren't you?"

"Maybe. But we found the needle. We wore out a lot of shoe-leather finding it. But we found it. This—"

From the deep drawer on one side of his desk Dan Dempsey pulled out an old suit of overalls—a cheap bandana handkerchief, an old slouch hat, and a queer cardboard box about two feet long.

"There's the outfit he wore," he said. "The crowd at the bank identified it. We found it up in the attic of a cheap lodging-house a block from where he jumped off the truck. No, he wasn't in that house. He'd just gone up and stripped off this stuff, and gone out again. Anybody can go through those halls without a question. The clothes meant nothing. But this,"—he held up the strange-looking pasteboard box,—"this was what we needed."

"THIS" was made of the sort of material that forms a box in which a ready-made suit of clothes is folded to be taken home from the store. Once it had been such a box. From its original size, it had been cut down by more than half, to form a neatly folded rectangular receptacle. Midway on the narrow side it was pierced with an opening cut big enough to admit a human hand. One end of it was shredded by an irregular hole charred black around the edge.

"What do you make of it?" asked Dan Dempsey.

The Commissioner shook his head, puzzled.

" 'Twas a new trick to me for carrying a concealed weapon where you can reach it quick—and I thought I'd seen them all," said Dan Dempsey grimly. "That held the sawed-off shotgun that killed Jerry Halligan. Look—"

He rose and illustrated.

"You carry it under your right arm like any ordinary package. Your arm conceals the hole. If you have to use it quick, like when some one stops you, you reach over with your left hand and grab it. You drop your right hand through this hole—right where you reach the hammer and the trigger of your sawed-off shotgun. You shoot through the end of the box."

Commissioner Stanley felt a prickling tingle run up his scalp. It was so simple—so deadly.

"Here on the box," went on Dan Dempsey, his thick fingers smoothing out the notched and creased cardboard to a flat surface, "you see part of the address and name of the clothing-store it came from. I got a stack of those boxes from there. I laid this box on top of 'em and cut out the smaller one, just like the bandit did at first. Five hundred times we did it, like a kindergarten class cutting out paper dolls. And we threw away the smaller boxes when we'd finished. But we kept the scraps that was left—the isos—isos—whatever kind of triangles you said they was."

Glimmerings of understanding were beginning to flicker in the back of the Commissioner's brain.

"Not being a story-book detecatif, but being an honest-to-Gawd plain-clothes dick," Dan Dempsey went on, "of course I have every lodging-house in the city listed, precinct by precinct—just as I list the pawnshops. And I had nearly the whole force out carrying samples of those pasteboard scraps to every landlady in the city, asking her had she cleaned up anything like that in the room of any of her lodgers. The hotel chambermaids too, of course."

"And you found the place?" The Commissioner's voice was trembling now with the thrill of it all.

"It was a long shot, but we found the place. A little lodging-house not ten blocks from police headquarters. Scraps of paste-

board like that had been swept out of the room of a young mechanic and his wife. Down from the North they were on their honeymoon, said the landlady. Planning to settle here. The man looking for work. He hadn't found it. His money had run out. They were three weeks behind on their room-rent, the landlady said, when on Christmas Eve he came in and said they'd got money from home. He paid the bill, and the pair of 'em went out to do some Christmas shopping. Four nights later they left. They'd been gone nearly ten hours before we got there. Had a transfer-company wagon call for their trunk. Left in a taxi. No, the landlady didn't remember which transfer-company it was that got the trunk or which station it had been taken to. That's what we had to find out. And there's fifty transfer-wagons and five hundred taxies in town to check up on—and the bandit on the train."

The Commissioner's breath was coming quickly now. "How did you do it? Go on!" he urged.

"We'd used the shoe-leather. We needed the luck, now. We had it," said Dan Dempsey. "The landlady has a baby girl five years old. She was on the floor playing with her toys—innocent-like, pretty. It's three of my own I've buried, and I fall for the kids, hard. Even if I'm one of the brutal and blundering police, as you've mentioned, Commissioner. We're human, sometimes. That kid—

"A new set of crayons she had. 'Look at them, Mister,' she says. I sat down on the floor beside her.

"'Will you draw me a pretty little horsey, Mister?' she asks me. I've done it for me own, though sure an' I'm no artist. So I—the brutal and blundering cop, Commissioner—I took up the crayon and a card she handed me. I drew the horse. It wasn't so good. Another card she gave me. Another horse I drew. It was rotten too. I couldn't see straight, just then. There were tears in me eyes. It was of Jerry Halligan's baby I was thinking. The kid must grow up with no daddy to draw pitchers for her and play with her, was in me mind. Oh, if there was only a way to trace the murderin' devil by his trunk! If I could only find the transfer-company and get at their record from the house address and get the train from the baggage-check number that the transfer-company's check-number would show up at the depot! All that was in me mind while I make another try on another card she gives me to draw another horse."

Had the man gone maudlin? The Commissioner asked himself that as he looked at Dan Dempsey. This garrulous, sentimental old ass a chief of detectives!

"Let's drop the nursery tales and get down to cases, Dempsey," he said crisply. "I fail to see just what bearing these bedtime stories have on the matter."

He was hopeless, that Commissioner!

"I'd judge you would," said Dan Dempsey, curt and gruff. "But we thick-headed, brutal, blundering flat-feet see things now and then that better men miss."

HE rose suddenly from his chair. Thick, stubby fingers fished in his vest pocket. Under the Commissioner's nose was thrust a grimy card.

"Look well at it," growled Dan Dempsey. "By that we ran the bandit down. By that we learned the train he took and telegraphed ahead. By that the man who murdered Jerry Halligan lies dead tonight, and two good policemen who helped get him, five hundred miles from here, are in a hospital fighting for their lives. Shoe-leather and luck and guts, I told you. We wore out the shoe-leather here. Those two in the hospital five hundred miles away had the guts and proved it when they shot it out with this Harry Fosdick. For that scared amachure who couldn't stay straight with Christmas coming on and no money for his bride—he was more dangerous in his fright than the worst gunman that ever lone-wolfed it out of a big city. Keep that card, Commissioner. Frame it. Take your hat off to it the next time you hear a guy pull a wise-crack that there aint no such thing as luck."

Curiously the Commissioner regarded the white, dingy card he held gingerly in his fingers. A crude drawing of a horse done in red crayon looked up at him.

"Maybe you can tell me," Dan Dempsey was saying, "how all the impersonal brain-work in the world would tell you that the man who called for the trunk would leave a handful of those cards with a baby he met who had a set of new crayons and nothing to use them on!"

The Commissioner had studied the horse from head to tail. He turned the card over.

On the other side was the printed advertisement of the transfer-company that had taken the bandit's trunk to the depot.

HERCULES *in* HELL

There was nothing much the matter with Herc.

By

BERTRAM ATKEY

Illustrated by
Everett E. Lowry

WHEREIN the private life and public exploits of a great hero are gayly recorded by the author of the Easy Street Experts stories.

IF one is to judge by the writings about Hercules one can hardly fail to arrive at the conclusion that this popular hero was a young man of practically no character and of pronouncedly dissipated habits. It is the intention of the present writer to prove that these historians were in error.

The Atkeys are descended in a more or less direct line from the great Greek hero, and thanks to a recent discovery, Bertram of the clan is able to throw a good deal of new light upon the life and labors of Hercules.

Some years ago Bertram's great-aunt, when making her will, remarked with a tolerant smile: "It is quite useless to leave poor Bertram any money, as he is a literary person—the only one, thank goodness, in the family—and I understand that literary people have no idea of the value of money. But he must not be forgotten. Let me see; he is fond of reading, is he not? Very well, then. Let him be put down in my will for that great chest full of old volumes, in the attic."

For some time the chest of ancient, moldy, moth-eaten books reposed unopened in the writer's chambers, and it was only when, entirely running out of coal one bitter winter's evening (says Mr. Atkey), he

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opened the chest in search of a little fuel, that he discovered among the volumes a very old book, written in ancient Greek, which a moment's study showed him was nothing more nor less than a close account of the famous labors of Hercules, and which must have been written either by Hercules himself or some close relative.

Spellbound, Bertram flashed through the faded parchment pages. And in the transcription from them which follows, he is able to straighten out the whole affair:

There was nothing much the matter with Herc. He was, of course, a little thoughtless and rather apt to leap before he looked; he was inclined to be extravagant; he was susceptible to feminine charm; and it is not to be denied that he was a little quick-tempered. But these are faults which are characteristic of youth of all nations and all ages. On the other hand Herc was bold and high-spirited; he was an out-and-out sportsman; he was no slacker; he kept himself fit; and he was generous to a fault. So let us not fall into the mistake of judging him by what Homer says about him. Herc was a regular fellow. Homer was a—well, a poet.

The facts in the case of Hercules are as follows: His godfather, a very influential party named Zeus, apparently being under some obligation, of which no record is left, to the father of His Majesty, King Eurystheus of Mycenæ, entered into a contract that the boy Hercules when he grew up should enter Eurystheus' service for a period of twelve years.

There appears to have been no legal reason why, when he grew up, the lad should have troubled himself about the matter. But Herc was straight. He went of his own free will to King Eurystheus and placed himself at the King's disposal. Hardly the act of a crook, that! He became the best of friends with Eurystheus, and the following stories give a fairly exact account of the various little services which Hercules rendered the King. In conclusion of this note, the present writer would say that if there is one statement in these stories which is not true, let Homer disprove it. But he wont! And why? Because he can't!

BERTRAM ATKEY.

IT was early summer in Greece when young Hercules, in accordance with his godfather's command, presented himself before the Oracle Madame Pythia and thrust a palm the size of a soup-plate before her. After a brief survey of the big, badly calloused member, she pronounced:

"What do I see in this hand? I see a busy future and a deplorable past. The owner of this hand is a violent man when roused. He is fond of the ladies. He should beware of a dark lady whose name begins with a *D*. He will go upon a journey very shortly. I see in this hand a signal from the Fates—an order—that the owner hereof must journey to the home of Eurystheus, King of Mycenæ, and offer his services to that gentleman in accordance with a contract made years ago when the owner of this hand was a child. That contract was to the effect that for a space of twelve years Alcmene's son should work for King Eurystheus. The contract is binding and completely in order."

She dropped the great hand and glided away into the temple.

SOME days after his consultation with the oracle, Hercules arrived at Tiryns, and engaging a chariot, drove out to call upon King Eurystheus, who was staying at his country-place some miles outside the town.

Arrived at the palace, Hercules tossed the charioteer a coin, and telling him he need not wait, was about to enter the house when he was called back by the charioteer, who with an expression of extraordinary bitterness on his face was staring at the coin which lay in his open palm and muttering to himself.

"Here, what d'you think this is?" he said insolently as Hercules returned.

"Your fare, laddie—what do you think it is? A medal?" replied Hercules, good-humoredly.

"It aint right—it aint enough," insisted the charioteer. "Lumme, what's it coming to?" he continued sourly. "Toffs come here and expect you to give 'em free rides into the country—"

Hercules hitched his club into a more convenient position.

"That's your legal fare—and a trifle over," he said, quietly. "So take it and," —his unfortunate temper suddenly flared up,—"and shut your unshaven jaw! You've got vine leaves in your hair!"

The charioteer flushed darkly. He did not appear to be very good-tempered himself, and undoubtedly he had, as Hercules suggested, been gazing upon the wine when it was red.

"Who? Me? Me got the vine leaves in my—*hic*—hair? You'll have to prove that! I don't let no bilker tick me off—not if he's the size of a house!" He began to get off, but Hercules' patience was already exhausted. He swung in a curious underhand shot with his club at the chariot. There did not appear to be much force in the quick, easy-actioned stroke, but it was beautifully timed; it wrecked that chariot as few chariots have been wrecked before or since.

The dour charioteer, suddenly sobered, gasped, gazed at Hercules a moment, and then turning abruptly, tore away down the drive after his horse, which had promptly bolted.

Hercules stared after them for a moment, and then with a smile bade a gaping chamberlain announce him.

KING EURYSTHEUS was in his library alone,—when at his country-place the King lived the life of a simple country gentleman,—and received him with complete cordiality.

"Well, my boy, so you have come to carry out that little arrangement made by Zeus so long ago?" he said. He was a mild, rather subdued-looking individual.

"Sit down, my boy, sit down," he said, cordially. "I must say that this is a very pleasant surprise—very pleasant indeed. It isn't every young fellow who would cheerfully come along to give twelve years' labor to another man in this way, and I appreciate it. It's honest—and honesty is getting rarer in Greece every day. But mind you, Hercules, it's no more than I expected of you. I've heard a good deal about you, one way and another, and I must say that I expected you. I'm sorry the Queen isn't at home—she has been looking forward to meeting you; but there will be plenty of opportunities of making her acquaintance later on."

He paused a moment, raking absently at his beard.

Presently, with a rather nervous laugh, he spoke again.

"Now, I don't want you to think that I'm rushing you away to your work in a hurry," he said, "but the fact is you've come at a very opportune moment, and there happens to be a very great favor which you can do me almost at once. It is the Queen's birthday next month, and she's set her heart upon a new set of skins. There seems to be a craze this year for lion-skin, and of course the wife, being the Queen, wants a set of the very best. In fact—between ourselves—she's simply crazy on getting the skin of that lion down in the Nemean valley. You've heard of it, I dare say?"

HERCULES signified that he had.

"Well, foolishly enough, I've promised her that she should have it—you know how it is: they wheedle these promises out of you before you know where you are. I sent a party of hunters after this lion last month, but they didn't do any good. Got devoured, most of 'em, in fact. And it's put me in rather an awkward position. If you could do the business for me you would be doing me a very great service and you would start right with her. As you're going to be more or less living with us for the next twelve years it would be the tactful thing to do, too. Mind you, Hercules my boy, I haven't got a word to say against her. She's been a good wife to me—one of the best; but—er—well, you see how it is. Tact, my boy—tact—a little tact goes a very long way. To go and kill this lion and bring her back the skin would be a very tactful start."

He looked anxiously at Hercules, who smiled.

"Oh, if that's all," he said buoyantly, "don't worry."

Eurystheus' face brightened up, then clouded over.

"It's not an easy matter, I tell you frankly. This lion is not merely a man-eater—it is said to be about the biggest brute ever known, and as intelligent as a human being. Don't underrate the beast. Are you pretty skillful with your weapons?"

"Oh, not too bad," said Hercules modestly. "I've done a bit of wrestling with Autolycus—he held the heavyweight championship of Parnassus for ten years, and taught me quite a decent bit. I learned my archery from Eurytus, and my heavy-armor fighting from Castor. But my club work I taught myself. You can't beat a good club for infighting. Don't worry about me."

Eurystheus nodded.

"Well, my boy, you know best. But be careful. And that settles that. Will you have anything?"

Hercules rose.

"No, thanks. I think I'll get that skin as soon as possible, if you don't mind. I'm

rather keen on starting well with Her Majesty," he explained.

Nodding approval, Eurystheus rose also.

"Very well, my boy." He shook hands. "Have you everything you want—money?"

"Yes, thanks—quite all right," replied Hercules gayly. "Expect me back before long—with the skin, what? Good-by."

CHAPTER II

The Nemean Lion

TWO mornings later Hercules might have been seen standing by a cave at the entrance to the Nemean valley, engaged not in searching for the lion, but in exchanging badinage with an attractive peasant maid.

"Yes, my child," he was saying, as he passed an amorous arm round her lissome form, "yes, my child, I purpose camping in or about this valley until I run across this lion everybody seems to be talking about, what? And naturally I shall want some one to bring me milk and eggs from the nearest farm—which appears to be *your* papa's farm, little one. Why shouldn't it be you, child?"

He patted her pretty cheek.

"Do you like me, little one?" he inquired.

"Very much," she said, softly.

"And I like you," said Hercules. "What is your name, my little pigeon?"

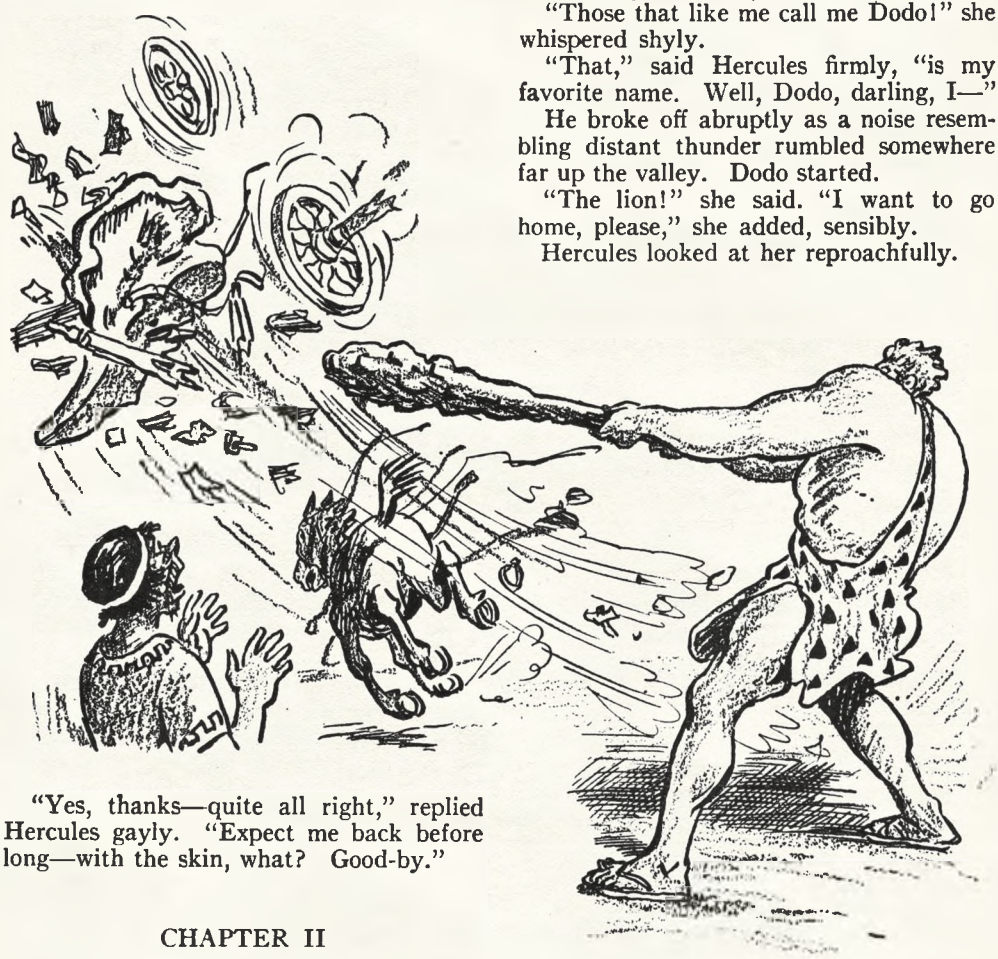
"Those that like me call me Dodo!" she whispered shyly.

"That," said Hercules firmly, "is my favorite name. Well, Dodo, darling, I—"

He broke off abruptly as a noise resembling distant thunder rumbled somewhere far up the valley. Dodo started.

"The lion!" she said. "I want to go home, please," she added, sensibly.

Hercules looked at her reproachfully.



Hercules' patience was exhausted. . . . . The quick stroke wrecked that chariot as few chariots have been wrecked!

"Oh, I say, Dodo, don't say that, what?" he exclaimed. "Surely you aren't afraid of a mere moth-eaten lion when you have your Hercules here to take care of you!"

But apparently Dodo was. She slipped out of the lion-hunter's grasp with a deftness which to a less unsuspecting man might have hinted at a certain amount of practice.

"I've stayed too long already," she said. "Mother will be wondering. When are you going to begin hunting the lion?"

"Oh, after lunch, perhaps. Any time," he said carelessly. "The first thing I must

do is to find a decent cave to sleep in, what? Sort of headquarters. Do you know of a good cave anywhere about here, Dodo?"

Dodo appeared to reflect.

"Yes," she said at last, "the very place. It's a lovely cave—we used to have picnics in it before the lion came. It is about a mile up the valley just past a clump of cypress trees on the right. It is rather dark right at the back, but it has a sandy floor and it's awfully comfortable."

"The very place," said Hercules. "Will you bring the eggs and milk there, dear little Dodo, or are you afraid of the lion?"

She glanced at him under her long lashes.

"I will bring them in the moonlight," she said. "The lion never hunts in the moonlight. Will that do?"

"Will it do?" echoed Hercules. "I should think it will do, darling. It's most frightfully sporting of you, Dodo. And you really-truly will come at moonlight for a little chat with your Herky-boy?"

"Yes," said Dodo, and blowing him a kiss, tripped away.

HE watched her until she turned a rocky corner. Then, with a sigh, he shouldered his kit-bag, picked up his club and headed up the Nemean valley.

"What a positive little peach!" he said to himself as he went. "The sweetest little thing that ever happened! And her darling little name is Dodo! Dodo! And how fresh and pretty and healthy! How different from our set. What a jaded lot *they* seem beside Dodo. And how ingenuous and innocent!"

Thus communing with himself, he proceeded at a leisurely pace up the valley. He would perhaps have somewhat modified his opinion of Dodo's ingenuous and innocent nature had he been able to see her then. No sooner had she turned the rocky corner which hid her from Hercules' sight than she came face to face with another individual—a tall young man, tastefully arrayed in a leopard-skin and a bangle. He was not by any means the physical equal of Hercules, being at least twenty-five per cent smaller, but he was not at all unhandsome (for those days) though he had a rather shifty eye, and a hardish jaw.

He took Dodo in his arms and kissed her.

"Well, kiddy, and what did the great stiff have to say for himself?" he asked, jerking his thumb up the valley.

"He's going to hunt the lion for the sake of its skin," said Dodo. "He's going to camp in the valley till he kills it!"

The gentleman in the leopard-skin frowned.

"Oh, is he? Did you explain to him that I'm out to get that lion alive, that I've come here specially from Rome, and have been here for the last month, kid?" he inquired.

"Yes, Max, dear!" said Dodo, using an affectionate diminutive of Maximus, which was the name of the young Roman who was her lover.

"What did he say, honey?"

"He was rather gentlemanly about it," said the little traitress, "but very firm. He said he was 'awf'ly sorry and all that,' but he'd practically promised the skin of the lion to a lady, and that, being a Greek gentleman, he simply had to keep his word. He said—don't be angry, Max, darling—he said he couldn't possibly allow any dago circus-proprietor to have his lion. It wasn't his way, he said. And he looked fearfully determined when he said it!"

Max ground his teeth.

"Dago circus-proprietor, eh, kid? He called me that, did he—me, the biggest wild-beast importer in Rome! The hulking Greek gink! They look down on Rome, these guys over here do. I know it—but Rome's a growing little burg, believe me, kiddo, and it wont be long before we get these measly Greeks guessing! Dago circus-proprietor, hey? I'll tell you what it is, hon, that great muscle-bound Olympian gorilla is scheduled for some rough work if he don't beat it out of this locality."

Dodo nestled close to the exasperated importer of wild animals, and soothingly patted his cheek.

"I don't think I should worry, Max darling," she said. "I think perhaps I have been able to help you. Of course I'm only a weak girl, I know, but every little helps."

"Why, kid, what have you done?" demanded Max, holding her at arm's length, staring hard at her.

"Well, he asked me if I knew of a good cave to take up his quarters in," she said softly.

"Yes, hon—go on!"

"And I told him of a beauty—one about a mile up the valley just past three cypress trees on the right. And he's going there!"

A look of admiration dawned slowly on the face of the hard-looking Max.

"Why, Dodo—that cave is the favorite den of the Nemean lion!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, Max," said Dodo meekly.

"Gee!" shouted Max, and pulling her to him, embraced her with extreme liberality. "Why—why, the great gink will walk bing into the lion's jaws!"

"Yes, Max!"

"Oh, you Dodo! You little genius!"

He kissed her enthusiastically.

"Why, within the next hour he'll be eaten! We'll give him time, and then we'll quietly scout up the valley and see what's happened," proposed Max. Dodo agreed.

MEANTIME, Hercules, heavily laden with his weapons, his kit-bag, his cooking utensils and luggage generally, was innocently approaching the cave, his mind so occupied with the delightful Dodo that he had temporarily clean forgotten the lion. He went dreamily on, dragging his club at the trail, until he saw the cypress trees and just beyond them the dark mouth of a large cave.

"Ah, that's the place that dear little thing meant," he murmured. "Good! Not at all a bad little cave, either."

He turned toward it, and humming a snatch of the latest song, entered. A few feet inside it curved rather abruptly to the left, and Hercules walking round the turn nearly fell over a sleeping lion which, in the subdued light, seemed as big as a rhinoceros.

"Great Zeus!" he gasped, and as the big beast scrambled violently to its feet, with a horrible and blood-curdling snarl, Hercules dropped his luggage and shot out of the cave with a rapidity that was remarkable in one so big and burly. But the Nemean lion was what Max would probably have described as "no slouch." The big brute was not more than a few yards behind Hercules as he tore frantically toward the nearest tree, and brave man though Hercules undeniably was, the growls of the man-eater made his blood run so cold that he would not have perspired had he run ten miles at the same pace.

He was not afraid of the lion. He feared the big beast no more than a fly, for he was one of those men who have not an atom of fear in his body. In fact, he did not know what fear was. He would have faced half a dozen such lions, any day—provided he was ready.

The reason he was going to climb a tree was not because he was afraid of a Nemean lion or any other kind of a lion, but because he wished to find a place where he could think out a plan of action without being disturbed. He would have turned on the brute like a flash, as he explained later on to Eurystheus, but he—well, he wasn't ready.

He reached the tree first, with perhaps four yards to spare, and he went up it like a squirrel. The claws of the lion tore a shower of chips from the bark about an inch below his foot as he jerked it up into safety.

He worked his way out upon a bough, and sitting comfortably in a fork, surveyed the raging man-eater below with complete coolness.

"Well, old top," he said cheerfully, "you made a close finish of that little sprint, what?"

"Oo-wough!" went the lion, leaping for him, but springing at least six feet short.

"Oh, don't get stuffy about it," said Hercules. "You've had your chance—thanks to that little dev—that little vixen Dodo, and you've missed it. It's my turn next, old son."

For some minutes the two stared at each other; and then the lion, apparently realizing that it was wasting its time, strode away, growling sulkily. It did not return to the cave, but passed it and turned into a little ravine which opened into the valley some ten yards past the cave.

Hercules watched the beast go and then devoted a few minutes to reflection.

"Now, let me see—if I were a lion with a reputation for great intelligence, what should I do? That's the way to work these things out. Well, it's easy. I should hide round the corner of that ravine until my dinner climbed down. And that's what the brute is doing, if I am any judge. I'll take a bit of a rest, I think."

And having come to this wise conclusion, he settled back to doze.

IT was beautifully warm and sunny in the valley, and save for the lazy chirping of birds, it was drowsily quiet. A rabbit of youthful and inexperienced appearance presently issued forth from its hole and played about a little. Presently it hopped into the ravine. It did not return.

Hercules smiled slightly and shouted. But the rabbit did not come racing back to its hole. Evidently something had detained it.

Hercules nodded and settled back again.

Presently a stray tortoise-shell cat came strolling up the valley, apparently looking for either a rabbit or a good place in which to bask in the sun. This creature also turned into the ravine, Hercules watching it alertly.

He saw an extraordinary thing occur.

The cat reached the corner of the rock round which the rabbit had wandered, and then suddenly went straight up into the air, with a frantic yell of surprise. It landed again a good ten feet farther back from the ravine, and then only for an infinitesimal fraction of a second. It went bounding away down the valley as though pursued by a pack of starving wolves.

Hercules smiled again. He had seen the vicious sweep of a great hooked paw as it flashed like lightning over the spot the cat had just left when she first went up.

"What a brainy old beast it is!" he mused.

Then, chancing to look down the valley, he saw approaching slowly and cautiously two figures—one of them Dodo!

He started a little, frowning. This complicated things.

"I can't allow that pretty little thing to walk into danger like this," he said to himself. "True, she allowed me to—but after all women nowadays have to fight with what weapons they can get. We're not really civilized yet. Later on, in the twentieth century or thereabouts, it will be different, no doubt. Women wont send men to the dogs—or lions—in those days. I must warn her and her friend in the leopard-skin."

He stood up and measured the distance from the tree to the cave in which his weapons lay.

"Might just do it," he said. "But it will be a close thing. I don't care about it. I may, in fact, get a fairly thorough mauling. But there's nothing else to do! If I shout to warn them it will probably bring the beast out, and he'd catch them before they'd gone a hundred yards!"

He took off his wallet. It was a big wallet, as wallets go, being about the size of a satchel, and judging the distance carefully, threw it about forty yards up the ravine. He heard it fall with a soft thud.

"If the brute goes to investigate that it's odds on *me!*" he muttered, waited ten seconds, then dropped to the ground and raced for the cave.

He heard a grunting *"Whoof-whoof!"* from the ravine as he went, and out of the tail of his eye had a glimpse of huge, dun-colored body all eyes and mane and teeth charging out of the ravine. But he won. He had just time to snatch up his club and dart back into the open, when the Nemean lion, the terror of the district, was on him.

BUT this time Hercules was ready. He met the man-eater with a full, butt-ended shot that connected with its frontispiece like a sledge-hammer on an anvil. It made the club, tough hickory wood though it was, groan. But it made the lion groan louder.

"Come on, then, you Nemean burlesque!" shouted Hercules. "You a man-eater! How's *that?"* He slid in a lateral clip to the animal's ear with the knotty side of the club, which rolled it over like a rabbit.

But it was full of fight and as strong as an elephant. It came on for Hercules' throat like a wildcat. Hercules dodged neatly and steered one to its slats as it swung past, a blow that made it boom like a drum. Hercules began to shout his war-cry—a habit of his when excited.

"I learned my wrestling from Autolycus, heavy champion of Parnassus!" He deflected another charge by the maddened lion with a sparkling whang to the jaw.

"And Eurytus taught me my archery!" Here the crispest of sideswings closed one of the man-eater's eyes.

"What I know about armor fighting I picked up from Castor—"

Here he missed a vicious drive and lost a good two pounds of flesh from his thigh to a steel-hooked claw as he whirled clear of the charge.

"But my club-work is my own idea—ah!" he roared, furious with pain, and deposited a pile-driver on the lion's intellect-plate which made the very ground shake and must have jarred the beast clear back to the tassel on its tail.

The animal went down as though struck by lightning, but it was up again before Hercules could repeat the frontal slam. . . . . Some hundred yards away Max and Dodo stared in fascinated wonder.

The lion doubled itself up and leaped again. But it was tiring slightly, and Hercules, seeing his chance, stepped in with his left foot and handed out a dazzling shot which would have sent a lighter lion clean to the mat.

"Club-work!" roared Hercules. "Some club-work, too! What?"

Wearily the man-eater rose again, and again precipitated itself at its enemy. But its chance—if indeed it had ever had one—was gone. For Hercules was roused.

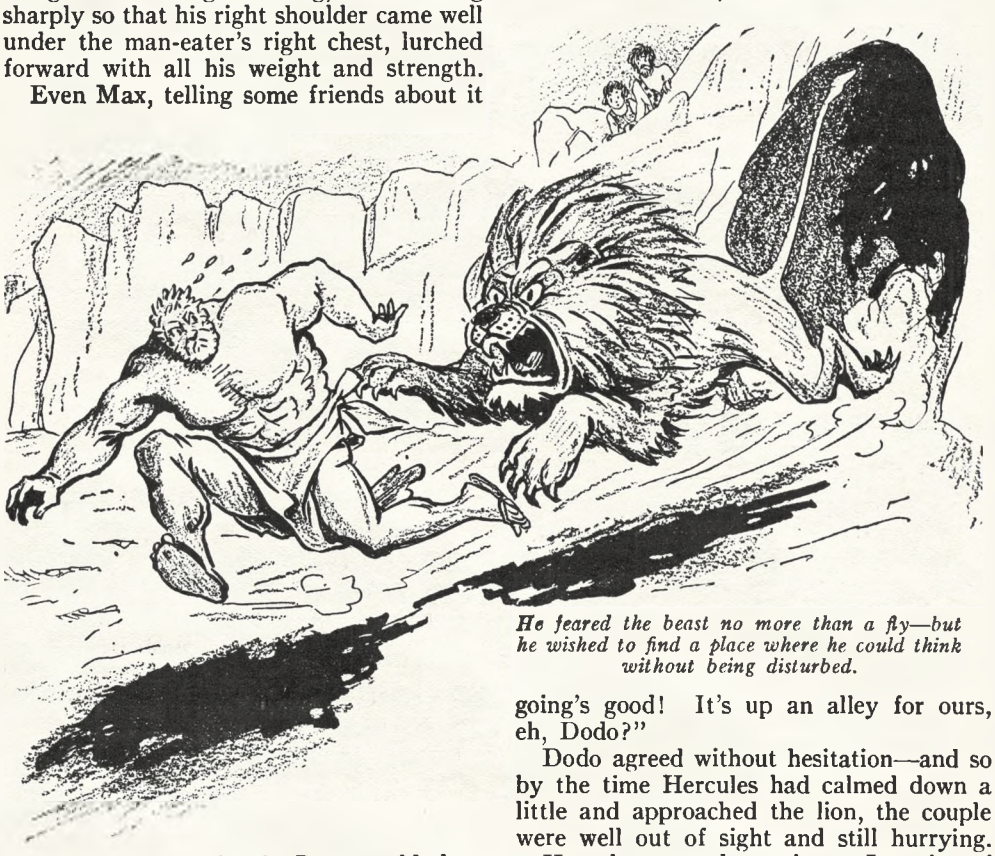
With a yell he dropped the club, and ignoring the claws, met the lion as it came. He grabbed its right foreleg, and twisting sharply so that his right shoulder came well under the man-eater's right chest, lurched forward with all his weight and strength.

Even Max, telling some friends about it later on, one morning in Rome, said that, although he, personally, disliked Hercules immensely, he could honestly say that he had never seen a better flying mare executed by any wrestler before or since.

For thirty-three clear yards the Nemean lion traveled through the air like a projectile, and even then was only stopped by a large granite boulder, weighing some fifty tons, which obstructed its flight. The big beast arrived with such a fearful impact that it split the boulder, practically wrecking it, and as Hercules afterward discovered, breaking its own neck in six places and in six different positions.

IT was at this moment that Max threw off his fascination. He turned to Dodo and jerked a thumb over-shoulder at Hercules.

"Kid!" he said solemnly, "he wins it! I'm no coward—but what's the use, anyway? I'm not a bad little old workman on the wrestling mat myself, but gee, honey, that Greek guy's out of my class altogether. I own it—I admit it. Do you want your little Max to commit suicide, kid? No? Well, let's beat it while the going's good! It's up an alley for ours, eh, Dodo?"



He feared the beast no more than a fly—but he wished to find a place where he could think without being disturbed.

Dodo agreed without hesitation—and so by the time Hercules had calmed down a little and approached the lion, the couple were well out of sight and still hurrying.

Hercules wasted no time. In spite of his victory he had taken quite a dislike to the Nemean valley. He had been looking forward to a charming idyl interspersed with an occasional day's hunting. But Dodo's default had wrecked his dreams as completely as he had wrecked the lion's future.

So, having bound up his wounds, he proceeded promptly to skin the dead man-eater, roll up the great hide, and collecting the remainder of his gear, start for home.

He was in an excellent humor. True, he had one or two nasty wounds, but if ever a person was used to nasty wounds it was Hercules.

He called in at the farmhouse of Dodo's parents on the way back, but Dodo, they said, was out.

"Oh, well," said Hercules, shrugging his

shoulders. "With the gentleman in the leopard-skin, I presume."

He drank a bowl of wine, and reshouldered his gear.

"You might tell Dodo I looked in to say good-by," he said to the farmer, "—to say good-by and to thank her for telling me of a good cave," he said sarcastically. "You might add that Hercules said that if she ever feels a longing for another picnic in that cave it will be quite all right. There's nothing left in the Nemean valley more ferocious than a stray tortoise-shell cat—and I doubt if that's feeling very ferocious after this afternoon, what? Adieu!"

And so saying, he turned away, and headed steadily for home.

CHAPTER III

By Order of the Queen

IT was perhaps three weeks after Hercules had settled the affair of the Nemean lion and he was sitting one evening, after a busy day's hunting, enjoying a small tank of wine (as was the custom in those days) with the King.

They were putting in the week-end at Eurystheus' country place near Tiryns—a retreat to which the King was ever ready to flee for a few days' rest from the social whirl of the town, and it is necessary to add, from the keen and lengthy criticisms of his wife and daughters, with whom, it may be said, Hercules had made but a very moderate hit. They considered Hercules "coarse"—for so, in comparison with the curled, perfumed and somewhat undersized exquisites of the court, he appeared to them.

But Hercules, who was no very pronounced admirer of Eurystheus' family, was bearing up under their coolness very well, and like His Majesty was glad to get away from the court whenever possible.

"They may say what they like, my boy," remarked Eurystheus, dipping his crystal pitcher into the wine tank, "but they will never convince *me* that this isn't the correct way to spend a week-end. What is there to do in town, after all? A banquet with a crowd of people you don't know and wouldn't like if you did know, and a lot of dancing or gambling after it. That's the Queen's idea of an evening. And what is there to do in the daytime? Nothing—absolutely nothing that one hasn't done a thousand times before. Laying foundation-stones, receiving ministers and things like that. Attending bazaars, eh? Absolutely treadmill work, Hercules. Hey, boy?"

Hercules nodded.

"You are right—as usual," he replied. "There never yet was a bazaar in Tiryns, or anywhere else, which was worth a run like we had today, what!" He too refilled his pitcher.

"Hounds went well," he continued. "Never known 'em go better. They're coming on—we're getting 'em together."

Eurystheus agreed.

"It was a rare good scent, my boy—but you're right for all that. They're a very even lot of hounds and as stanch as gladiators. I was afraid the fox was going to reach the rocks—another five hundred yards and we should have had to whip 'em off. It's a bit of bad country there. There's a kind of sharp-edged shale stuff very plentiful there, and it's lamed me many a good hound." He emptied his pitcher thoughtfully.

"I thought old Pegasus seemed to be going well with you today," he said.

Hercules' eyes brightened.

"He was. That's a rare good horse, Eurystheus, an uncommon good horse. I used to think that he wasn't quite up to my weight, but he is. I don't mind owning that—"

But whatever Hercules was willing to own did not immediately appear, for at that moment a page entered with a pink envelope on a salver—an express letter.

"This has just arrived by special runner from Tiryns, Your Majesty," said the boy.

Eurystheus took it, eying it uneasily—the more so as he observed that it was addressed in the handwriting of the Queen's secretary.

"What's wrong now?" he mumbled, as he dismissed the page, and opening the envelope hastily, read the letter. Then he handed it over to Hercules.

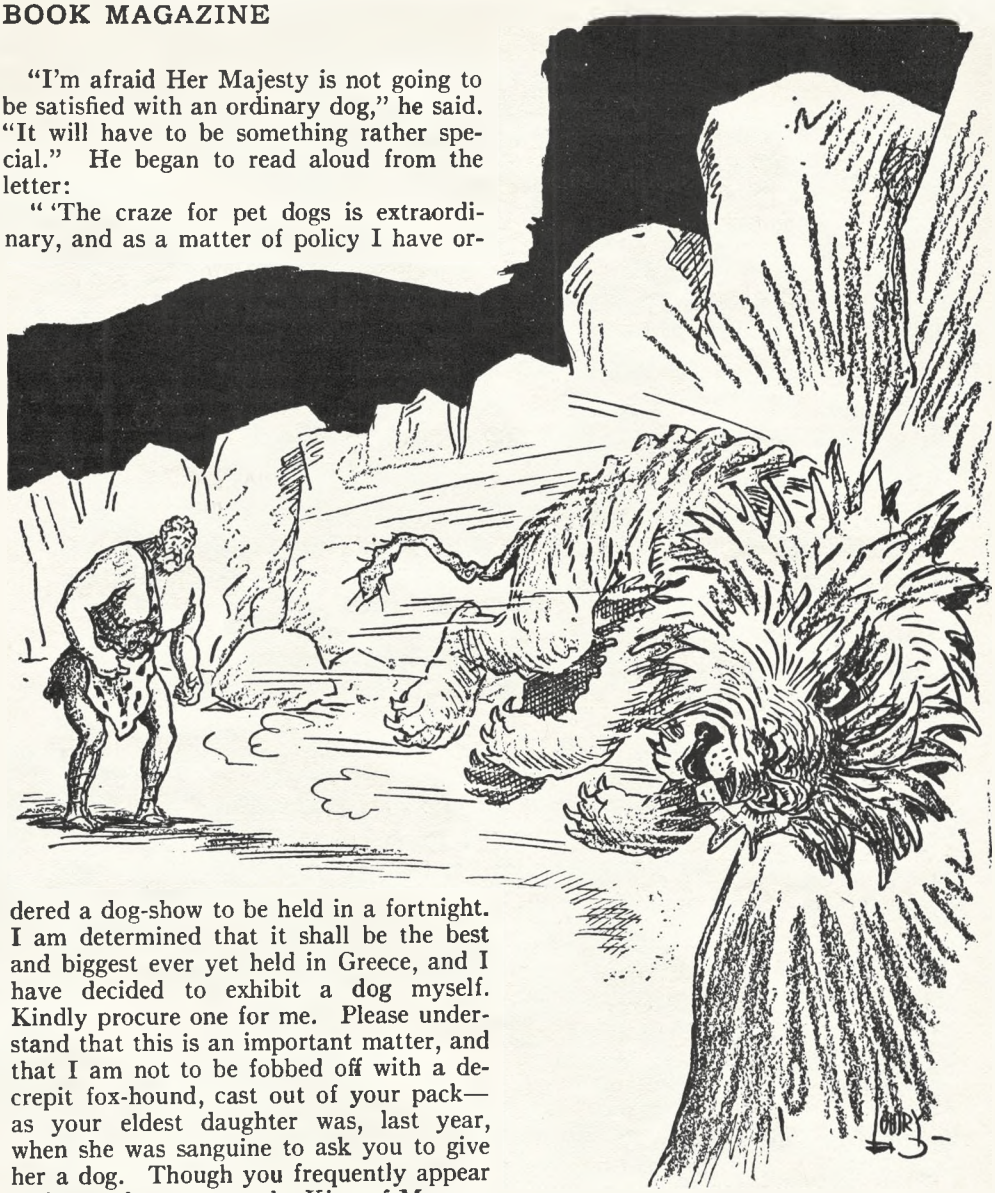
"Damned nonsense!" muttered Eurystheus under his breath. "What on earth does any sensible woman want with a crawling little insect of a pet dog? If it were a decent setter or retriever or a good little terrier, I could understand it—but these fancy, curly-haired freaks raise my very gorge! What do you think, Hercules?" He clapped his hands as he spoke, summoning the page.

"Send in the kennel-man, boy," he ordered.

Hercules looked up from the letter.

"I'm afraid Her Majesty is not going to be satisfied with an ordinary dog," he said. "It will have to be something rather special." He began to read aloud from the letter:

" 'The craze for pet dogs is extraordinary, and as a matter of policy I have ordered a dog-show to be held in a fortnight. I am determined that it shall be the best and biggest ever yet held in Greece, and I have decided to exhibit a dog myself. Kindly procure one for me. Please understand that this is an important matter, and that I am not to be fobbed off with a decrepit fox-hound, cast out of your pack—as your eldest daughter was, last year, when she was sanguine to ask you to give her a dog. Though you frequently appear to forget that you are the King of Mycenæ I will permit no one to forget that I am the Queen, and I insist upon a dog being procured which is not only worthy of exhibition by the Queen, but which, naturally, will sweep the board. I assume that you can spare a day to see to this matter!' "



The lion traveled through the air like a projectile, and was only stopped by a granite boulder.

HERCULES finished, and for a moment the pair gazed at each other in silence. Then, automatically, they refilled their pitchers. Before they had time to discuss the somewhat acidulated request of the Queen the kennel-man entered—an ancient, weather-beaten person of remotely horsey appearance.

"Ah, Taxi, come hither," commanded Eurystheus, who, humble though he was in the presence of his wife, was decidedly capable of keeping his end up with other men.

Taxi went thither, touching his forehead as he pulled up before the two.

"What have you got knocking about in the shape of a good dog, Taxi?" asked Eurystheus. "Not hounds, you understand—dogs!"

Taxi looked thoughtful.

"Well, Y'r Majesty, there's nothing much besides Y'r Majesty's setters, and

spani'ls and retrievers," he said. "There's a sheep-dog or two down at the farms, and mebbe a few tarriers—but nothing much good, Y'r Majesty."

The King nodded, as though he had expected the answer.

"Well, they wont do," he said, half to Hercules, half to himself. "Do you happen to know of a good dog for sale anywhere, Taxi? A well-bred one, you understand—a show dog, in fact."

Again the ancient reflected. Finally he shook his head.

"No, Y'r Majesty," he replied, "not at the minute, I don't. But I'll inquire round about."

"Do, Taxi, do," said Eurystheus kindly, and dismissed him.

As the old man left the apartment Hercules suddenly laughed.

"What's the joke?" asked Eurystheus.

"Why, I've just thought of a dog that would sweep the board at that dog-show," answered Hercules. "A better dog than any dog in Tiryns, or Greece, for that matter, or anywhere else."

Eurystheus brightened. "Oh, what dog is it? Is he for sale?" he inquired.

"Cerberus!" said Hercules, laughing rather excitedly as he refilled his pitcher.

Eurystheus stared.

"Cerberus!" he gasped. He sat for a moment, taking in the idea. Then he said wistfully:

"Yes—Cerberus would sweep the board at any dog-show. But—who is going to get him for me?"

Hercules emptied his pitcher.

"I will," said he.

Eurystheus made a gesture of unbelief.

"You've had too much wine, my boy," he said. "I know you're a strong man—and we all know you've got pluck, but—well, talk sense, my boy, talk sense. You wouldn't have any more chance in Hades than a—snowball!"

Hercules rose. It was only when he stood up that one was able to get a fair idea of his immense size. He looked what he was—gigantic.

"By Zeus, Hercules, what a hefty great chap you are!" ejaculated the King.

Hercules laughed.

"Look here, Eurystheus, if I get Cerberus for the Queen will you give me that grand old weight-carrier Pegasus? I've taken a fancy to the horse—I did the moment I saw him. He's too big for you, anyway."

Eurystheus stood up. "I will," he said eagerly. "Is it a bargain?"

Hercules silently extended his hand, and they sealed the compact.

But Eurystheus added a condition.

"Of course there's no necessity to—er—steal the dog, you know, if you can get him any other way. We don't want Pluto sending his folk up here after him again—as he would. We should have half Hades about our ears before long. Try to fix up an arrangement to borrow the dog until after the show. It would make it much easier for you—and the Queen wont want him long after the show. She never really cared for dogs—cats are more in her line," he added feelingly. "When shall you start?"

Hercules pondered.

"Let's look—hounds meet at the cross-roads tomorrow, don't they? Yes. Well, I'll hunt tomorrow. After all, there's just a chance it may be the last time I shall ride to hounds this side of the Styx. I'll start on Monday."

"Good man!" said Eurystheus approvingly, and they refilled their pitchers to the brim. "Well—here's to fox-huntin'," said Hercules gayly.

"And dog-stealin'," added Eurystheus facetiously.

Then they went to bed.

CHAPTER IV

Hercules Goes Over the Styx

IT was just a week later when Hercules, who as usual had taken things comfortably, arrived in the neighborhood of Hades, the subterranean kingdom of Pluto. Although by no means so emphatically disconcerting a district as we of these days would expect to find, nevertheless it was a decidedly depressing locality and contained nothing whatever calculated to allure the wayfarer into lingering there.

The scenery for the greater part consisted of rocks—hard-looking, jagged, black rocks, very untidily distributed. Here and there pine trees stood about in a discouraged sort of way, and a clump or two of brilliantly hued toadstools endeavored, without much success, to lend a touch of color to the scene. The fauna of the place seemed to consist mainly of an occasional lizard of extremely impoverished appearance, a very shabby and depressed snake or so, and sitting upon a bough on one of the pine trees, a pair of bedraggled ravens of

cynical and extraordinarily demoralized aspect. None of these took the least notice of Hercules as, perceiving a gigantic cavern-mouth in a huge wall of rock just before him, he halted and took a leisurely survey of his surroundings. He shrugged his mighty shoulders.

"Dull," he said. "Very dull, what?"

Then, without more ado, he hitched his club into a convenient position and passed through the gloomy portals of the cavern.

KEEPING, as was but natural, a sharp look-out, Hercules pushed along down the rather abrupt slope. The way twisted and turned quite a lot, and a number of side-roads seemed to branch off from the main road. There were no signposts, and Hercules stuck to the main road.

He had been walking for perhaps ten minutes when, turning a corner, he came abruptly upon a river.

"Ah, here we are," he said relievedly. "The Styx, what!"

Some forty yards to the left he saw a notice-board upon which was painted the following legend:

FERRY.

BOATS FOR HIRE.

Teas. Punts. Bait supplied.
Geo. Charon, Prop.

In a ramshackle boat moored to the post of the notice-board sat an elderly, bearded person of remotely nautical appearance, fast asleep.

Hercules shook him, and he woke with a start. "Sorry, sir," he muttered. "Going over?"

"I am. You don't imagine I have come here merely to admire the scenery, do you?" said Hercules. "Put me across as quick as you can."

"Very good, sir," mumbled the old fellow. "Though you're the first gentleman I ever knew to be in such a hurry."

He rowed across in silence. The river was very calm and reasonably slow, and to Hercules it looked a likely trout-stream.

"Some pretty good trouting about here, what?" he said.

Charon nodded.

"There's plenty of fish—good fish, sir; but there's precious few anglers," he replied meaningly.

Hercules laughed.

"The people here evidently don't know when they're well off," he suggested.

"That," said Charon as he ran the boat alongside, "is what I'm always telling 'em."

Hercules got ashore, and leaving a coin and a pleasant word with the old ferryman, headed down a long, rock-bordered chasm which evidently was intended to fulfill the functions of a carriage-drive. Presently the chasm widened suddenly into an enormous basalt-walled square, at the far side of which rose the main front of a big, but very gloomily designed palace.

"Well, here we are," he said to himself, and began to cross the square. Evidently it was night time in Hades, for the square was entirely deserted. There was not even a policeman or sentry at the gates. For a moment the intrepid Hercules was astonished, but a moment's reflection brought home to him the fact that there was little need for any such guardians here. It was highly improbable that the boldest of burglars would ever venture to exercise his nocturnal art in this locality.

Besides—as a sudden growl from the big doorway which he was approaching reminded him—there was always that champion house-dog Cerberus to be considered.

Hercules stopped a few yards from the great main door and groping in the haversack he carried drew therefrom a large piece of that delicacy which never fails to appeal to a dog—cold boiled liver, slightly sprinkled with anise.

Then, with the liver in one hand and his club very much at the ready in the other, he mounted the steps.

He had not set foot on the topmost of the steps when, with a blood-curdling snarl, Cerberus bounded into view from out of a big stone kennel in the middle of the hall.

FOR a moment he and Hercules surveyed each other. Neither had ever before seen anything quite like the other, and consequently both were interested. Cerberus was, indeed, as unique a dog as Hercules had always been given to understand; he had three heads, one of which—the middle—was pure bulldog, massy, heavy-jawed and extraordinarily wrinkled. The left or near head was distinctly that of a well-bred old English bob-tailed sheep dog; and the head on the right was exactly that of a good foxhound. The body, too, was that of a very large foxhound, with plenty of good bone, and the tail was barbed.

All the heads were growling savagely—two at Hercules and the left at the foxhound head. There seemed to be very lit-

tle love lost between the two outside heads. Hercules noted this and consequently threw the piece of liver to the sheep-dog, which deftly caught it as it fell.

Instantly there was a dog-fight of a richness and variety which Hercules had never before dreamed was possible. He stared, lost in wonder and amazement. Almost before the sheep-dog head had seized the liver he was pinned by the ear by the bulldog. With a frantic yelp of rage the sheep-dog dropped the liver, which was promptly snatched up by the hound, with the result that he immediately found himself called upon to fight for his life against the joint heads of the sheep-dog and the bull. Grinning with fury, he turned upon his two companions and "mixed it" right royally with them until by accident the sheep-dog gave the bull a nasty nip among his wrinkles, thus drawing the attentions of both bull and foxhound upon himself.

The clamor of them was deafening. It was superlatively civil war—precisely as Hercules had planned it. Cerberus had long ago ceased to notice Hercules—he was much too insistently engaged on his own affairs. And so, after watching the fight until he felt himself becoming dizzy, Hercules, perceiving that the position of each head rendered it impossible for one seriously to injure either of the others, turned away from the unique spectacle and crossed the great hall to a door in which was a pigeonhole labeled *"Inquiries."*

HE rapped peremptorily on the panel which closed the pigeonhole, and after a little delay it was slid back and a heavy-eyed porter with abundant whiskers looked out.

"What is it?" he asked sourly.

"An envoy from Eurystheus, King of Mycenæ, to Pluto, King of Hades!" replied Hercules sharply.

"Envoy! What's an envoy?" grumbled the man. "Envoys cut no ice here!"

"Naturally!" replied Hercules, with a chuckle. "Not bad that, what!"

He grew stern again, and laid the end of his club on the ledge under the porter's face.

"Perhaps that does," he rapped out.

Evidently it did, for the porter became a trifle more respectful.

"What's the good of coming to Hades at five o'clock in the morning?" he demanded. "The King isn't up—nor aint likely to be for another four hours."

Hercules pondered, and as he pondered it dawned on him that he was hungry.

"Very well, I'll wait. Just turn out a cook or a butler or something and give me some breakfast, will you? Unless," he added blandly, seeing that the man hesitated, "you particularly desire me to report adversely to the King upon the inhospitable character of my reception here!"

The porter suddenly was galvanized into activity.

"Pardon, my lord," he said. "I am but just awake from dead sleep. You are the first who has ever got past the dog—"

"That's all right, my man," replied Hercules. "The dog was too busy settling a little difference of opinion with himself and his friends to trouble about me."

The porter threw back the door.

"Enter, my lord," he said, and in accordance with what Hercules afterward learned was the custom, added sonorously:

"Abandon hope, all ye who enter here!"

Hercules stared at him.

"Not at all. Why should I? You appear to be a bit of a pessimist, what! Do hurry up that breakfast."

And so passed in.

CHAPTER V

Miscalculation by Pluto

WITHIN the next two hours Hercules had eaten an unexpectedly good breakfast, enjoyed a hot—very hot—bath, and had made himself much more solid with Cerberus by the simple process of taking each head a big bone.

Then he had returned to the apartment in which he had breakfasted and adjourned to a big couch in a corner to rest for an hour or two. For some moments he had pondered whether it would be worth his while to hunt up a rod from somewhere and have an hour with the trout in that likely-looking stream, the Styx, but finally he had decided against it.

He wrapped his big lion-skin well round him, turned the lamp low, and dropped off to sleep almost immediately.

It seemed to him that he had not been sleeping more than perhaps five minutes—though in reality it was well over an hour—when he was roused by the sound of whispering. He was wide awake in an instant—a very necessary habit to a man of his type in those days—and without moving, listened.

Grinning with rage, the hound-dog head turned upon his two companions and "mixed it" with them.

Evidently the whisperers were in the room, for he could hear every word distinctly. And it was equally evident that their business was secret, by reason of the fact that they did not turn up the light.

"We—the court—shall be ready within a week," whispered one of the newcomers —a woman. "There are only just the four to win over—and I can answer for three of them. How are you progressing with the people and the troops?"

"Fine, fine," came the whispered reply —a man this time. "The Trade Unions are practically solid for me—or at least they will be in a week's time, when my big remittances arrive. And the reports about the troops are most promising. The Hades Hussars are with us to a man. It is just a question of the Household troops—the Bodyguard. I understand that they've had no pay for weeks. Work on that, my dear. It should just do the business. We must have the Bodyguard with us before we can dream of a *coup d'état!* Never mind about the politicals now—though do what you can, of course. Concentrate on the officers and N. C. O.'s of the Household troops. Be secret, but be bold. You are not on such dangerous grounds as you think. All Hades is tired of Pluto—it is only a question of months before he is flung out even without us. With us it should be a matter of days only!"

"And the Queen is mine—you understand that clearly. I am to do as I like about Persephone."

"How you hate her!" whispered the man. "But yes—certainly, Mintha. You shall have absolute power to decide the fate of Persephone!"

"Good!" came the sibilant whisper of the woman. "That's all, I think?"

"For the present, yes. Good-by, Mintha, dear! You still love me?"

"Need you ask, Jakæ? Good-by! I must fly!"

THE conspirators rustled stealthily out of the room, and Hercules sat up.

"It seems to me that I have been overhearing secrets, what!" he mused. "Jakæ—whoever he may be—and Mintha are evidently engaged in what looks like being a successful little revolution in Hades."

He reflected.

"Mintha's fearfully bitter against Queen Persephone." He shook his head. "That wont do," he added. "It doesn't seem quite cricket to stand by and see her thrown into the clutches of that Mintha, who certainly sounded rather a terror, what! Of course it's no affair of mine if they're getting up a revolution in Hades, but—well, dash it all, a man has got to be on one side or the other, and I'm a royalist. Always have been, anyway, what! I must go into this at the first opportunity," he decided.

He had not long to wait, for at that moment a chamberlain came in announcing that Pluto had been informed of his visit, and, having now breakfasted, was ready to give him an audience.

"Thanks very much," said Hercules, rising and taking his club from the settee.

"You wont need that," said the courtier, with a slightly superior smile.

"Possibly not," replied Hercules blandly, "but I'll take it along. Always feel such an ass without it, what!"

"As you wish, of course," said the courtier. "This way."

HERCULES followed him through innumerable corridors to the great hall in which the king of Hades usually gave audience. Evidently Hercules' reputation had reached as far as Hades, for the crowd of courtiers and hangers-on of royalty generally, with which the hall was filled, very respectfully made way for him as he followed the chamberlain up to the throne upon which sat Pluto and Persephone, awaiting him. There were many whisperings.

"That's he, eh? . . . . Who? . . . . Yes, Hercules—the Terrible Greek. Enormous—gigantic! Notice the club. . . . . Famous big-game man! . . . . Oh, yes—killed Nemean lion—might have been a kitten. Remarkable person, very—fearless chap. . . . . Oh, quite—lives Mycenæ—great friend Eurystheus. Grand wrestler—rather! Challenge him best two falls out of three . . . . Græco. . . . . You? You wrestle him? Don't be foolish. Ha, ha, very probable! One does not think so. . . . . *Ssh!* He's greeting Pluto—stout fellow, what?" ran the confused comments as Hercules bowed before Pluto and the Queen. He noted, as he did so, that Cerberus, newly groomed, was crouching at Pluto's feet.

"Welcome to Hades, Hercules," said Pluto—a tall, stout, bearded, rather untidy person, with a cold eye and an egg-stain on his beard. The Queen bowed with a slight smile.

"Thanks very much, Your Majesties," said Hercules easily.

"This is your first visit here?" continued the King, motioning to an attendant to place a seat for Hercules.

"Yes," said Hercules, sitting.

"And what do you think of Hades?" inquired the Queen, smiling. She was a somewhat passé, rather acidulated-looking lady, clearly verging on middle age.

"Well, Your Majesty, I have seen very little of it yet, but what I have seen I like. The Styx looks like an ideal trout-stream, and I should say it's a very fine hunting country once you get clear of the rocks," replied Hercules diplomatically. "Have you plenty of foxes?"

The court looked at each other with puzzled eyes.

"I'm afraid we don't understand much about hunting here," said Pluto.

Hercules looked astonished.

"Don't understand hunting!" he echoed. "Why, what do you do, sir?"

Pluto smiled frostily.

"Oh, we have our—er—diversions!" he said. "We are rarely dull here."

"That I can very easily believe," replied Hercules. "But I assure Your Majesties you ought to start a pack here—with yourself as M. F. H., I suggest, sir. Life without fox-hunting is like—er—well, thirst without drinks! Look here, sir," he went on enthusiastically, "I've no doubt King Eurystheus would be very glad to send you down a few couples of hounds to start, and I could make you up a fair pack by getting in more couples from friends of mine in different parts of the country!"

PLUTO pondered. It was apparent that the suggestion that he should be M. F. H. ticked his vanity, though he hardly looked like a riding man.

"Thank you, Hercules," he said. "I will turn the matter over in my mind."

"Do, Your Majesty, do; you will never regret it! By the way, sir, you have a

grand beginning of a pack at your feet—Cerberus. That off head of his is about the most perfect foxhound head I've ever seen. Grand dog, sir!"

"Yes," said Pluto. "We flatter ourselves that we know a good dog in Hades when we see one!"

"IT was really about Cerberus that King Eurystheus commanded me to call upon you," said Hercules, seeing a favorable opening.

"Indeed!"

"Yes. You see, Your Majesty, there is going to be held shortly at Tiryns the biggest and smartest dog-show ever known—" And Hercules rapidly explained matters. "And as it was essential that the Queen should exhibit something very special, something that would amaze society, the King bade me wait upon you in the hope that you would allow the Queen to enter Cerberus for exhibition," he concluded rather anxiously.

"I never lend my dog," said Pluto coldly. "I do not believe in making a fool of a dog. One master is enough for any dog. I wouldn't give that!"—he snapped his fingers—"for a dog that would follow anybody."

A murmur of approval ran round the court. The Queen nodded, and even Hercules felt that Pluto was right.

"Quite right, Your Majesty," he said. "Eurystheus would be the first to agree. But he thought that, the circumstances being exceptional—"

"Oh, but that's the Queen's own fault—" began Persephone. Pluto silenced her with a look.

"I don't see it," he said. "It isn't our dog-show. We don't have dog-shows here. Don't believe in 'em. I've got the best dog in Hades, and everybody knows it. What's the good of having dog-shows when things are like that? No," he continued, "I don't see it. I hope I know what is due from one king to another, but I think that to ask a man to lend his dog to another man's wife for exhibition at a dog-show is stretching things too far. I'm sorry, but I can't do it. No. I refuse. Certainly not. It's impossible, quite."

Persephone murmured something in the king's ear.

"Besides, it's illegal—even for me. I made the law myself. The fact is, there used to be too much lending out of things from Hades, and I had to put a stop to it. Things never used to be returned. The law is that nothing shall go out of Hades without something of proportionate value coming in—unless, of course," he added sarcastically, "it is taken out by force."

Hercules suddenly remembered the whispers, Jakæ and Mintha, who had become rather a trump card now, he reflected, and he rose and came close to Pluto.

"Suppose I could tell Your Majesty of a plot against your life and throne—and name the chief conspirators!" he said softly. "Would you regard that as 'proportionate value' for the loan of Cerberus?"

Pluto smiled unpleasantly.

"If you refer to the conspiracy of Jakæ, the court bandmaster, and Mintha, the toe-dancer, to enlist the aid of the Trades Unions and the Household Cavalry in an effort to carry out a *coup d'état,*" said he, "you are considerably too late. The silly plot was discovered an hour ago, and the conspirators have been—er—attended to. We have a quick way with plotters in Hades!"

"In that case, then, I can only obtain the loan of Cerberus by force," said Hercules gently.

THERE was a roar of laughter. The idea of anyone being able to capture and subdue Cerberus seemed to strike the court as too humorous.

"Certainly," said Pluto, laughing immoderately. "If you can get him to come with you I will cheerfully allow you both to go without hindrance."

"You mean that, Your Majesty?" said Hercules.

"I do, indeed."

"Very good—and thanks very much."

Hercules stepped back and swung his club round to warn the court to keep a clear space. They watched in silence while he drew a long rope, thin but very strong, from his haversack. At one end of this he made a noose. The other end he threw over a hook in the ceiling, from which ordinarily hung a chandelier that, probably, had been removed for cleaning or repairing.

The courtiers looked on, giggling. Persephone was smiling her faded, rather contemptuous smile, and Pluto also was frankly scornful. Nevertheless he was the first to guess what Hercules' tactics were to be, for the latter turned to Cerberus, his club under his arm, a noose dangling from the other.

"*'Sss!* At him, boy! Tear 'em!" hissed Pluto, and Cerberus leaped at Hercules like three raving tigers. But Hercules was ready. He stepped lightly aside as the great beast shot past, and plastered the bait against the face of the bob-tailed sheep-dog's head as he dodged.

Once more the heads clean forgot Hercules in their frantic lust for liver. Canine civil war again raged in Hades—but not for long. Moving with extraordinary quickness, Hercules wheeled, and dropping his noose over the fiercely wagging tail of the dog, swiftly drew it tight and rushed to the loosely hanging end of the rope, which he hauled in desperately, hand over hand.

Almost instantly the rope tightened. The noose slipped bit by bit, but was suddenly brought up by the big barb in Cerberus' tail.

And then Hercules hauled on the rope like lightning. Long before the heads of the great dog realized that something was seriously wrong its hind-quarters were raised off the ground. For a second its forefeet scrabbled furiously upon the polished floor as it tried to get a grip, but it was too late. Hercules, excitedly bawling a chanty which he had evidently heard sailors singing when hauling up their sails, pulled on his rope as only Hercules could pull.

There could only be one end to it.

In five seconds Cerberus was well off the ground, and suspended from the chandelier hook was swinging gently to and fro, spinning as he swung, and yelling imprecations in three different dialects and keys—viz., hound, bulldog and bob-tail or barb-tail, as one chooses.

HASTILY fastening his end of the rope to the leg of a grand piano close by, Hercules took three muzzles from his haversack and, with the deftness of a man used to dogs, swiftly muzzled the outside heads first, and lastly the bulldog. Then he tied the forelegs, and next the hindlegs.

Finally he turned to Pluto, with a slight bow.

"My game, I think, sir!" he said politely.

Mortified, disgusted, annoyed, discomfited, humiliated, and disconcerted though Pluto was, he was also a gentleman.

"Oh, quite! Congratulate you," he said, with not too palpable an effort. The Queen said nothing. She was too vexed to pretend to be anything but vexed. There was an ominous silence—and as he noted the silence an ominous shifting to a comfortable grip of Hercules' clubs. But Pluto was a king—though perhaps his kingdom was not much envied him—and knew how to behave. He rose, and in a voice trembling with rage, said:

"I must terminate the—er—audience now. There are important—ah—affairs of State. Treat the dog well—he is a good dog. And—er—consider all Hades at your disposal during your stay."

And without another word he and the Queen, followed by a goodly proportion of the courtiers, left the hall.

A LITTLE uncomfortable, Hercules was hesitating quite how to proceed, when an elderly old beau of very worldly appearance approached him, and whispered:

"Take the advice of an old habitué of Hades, Hercules, and get the beastly brute out of it as soon as possible. The King's bitterly angry about it."

Hercules smiled.

"Sound scheme, that," he said. "I will. You don't seem to care for Cerberus, sir," he added.

The old beau shuddered.

"I don't," he said. "The brute once bit me—with all three of his mouths!" And he hurried away.

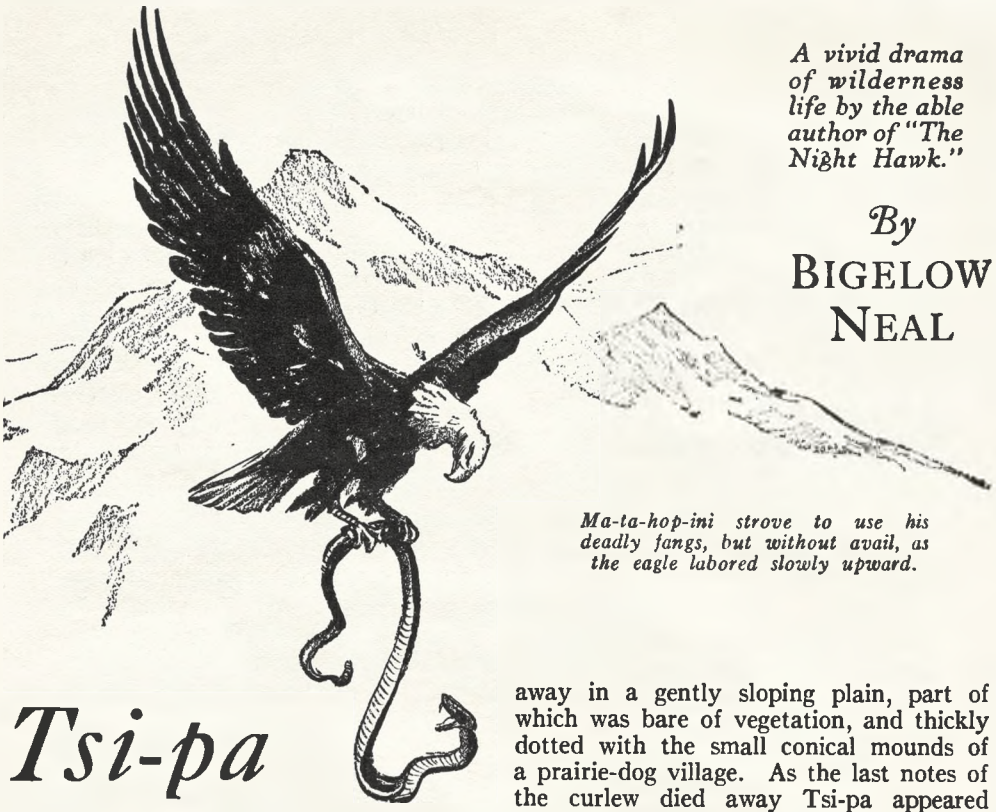
Like most men who can be brave in cold blood, Hercules knew when a quick retreat was good strategy.

He lost no time.

Bluntly declining a cup of wine sent him with Queen Persephone's compliments (and which the delighted lackey took behind a curtain to drink himself—an unfortunate decision, for the wine contained enough aconite to poison a goat), he hoisted Cerberus on his shoulders and started. . . . .

It was five in the morning when he had reached Hades. By eleven he was on the right side of the Styx—extremely good work when one considers the weight of the dog. And it was not until he was a good twenty miles clear of the entrance of the carriage-drive that he began to drop into the steady, comfortable stride that within the course of the next few days would land him comfortably home—just in time, he estimated, for the week-end meet at the crossroads, to which, he knew, the gallant old weight-carrier, Pegasus, (now his own), was looking forward as keenly as he and Eurystheus.

Further adventures of Hercules will be described by Mr. Atkey in an early issue.



Ma-ta-hop-ini strove to use his deadly fangs, but without avail, as the eagle labored slowly upward.

A vivid drama of wilderness life by the able author of "The Night Hawk."

By BIGELOW NEAL

Tsi-pa Runs a Gantlet

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

IT was springtime in the valley of the Missouri, and the dawn of a cloudless day. A faint glow showed on the eastern horizon, growing brighter and stronger with the passing moments, and in response came the twittering of birds among the cottonwoods. The glow expanded to a fan of crimson streamers as a flock of mallards climbed heavily from the gauze-like ribbon of mist above the river, turned in the aërial wake of their leader and swung out over the prairie. The fan trembled, wavered, broke—in its place a great ball of yellow fire hung above the line where sky and prairie seemed to meet. From the marshland along the river quavered the tuneful cry of the curlew.

Between the foot of Coyote Butte and the shore of the river, the bench-land swept away in a gently sloping plain, part of which was bare of vegetation, and thickly dotted with the small conical mounds of a prairie-dog village. As the last notes of the curlew died away Tsi-pa appeared upon one of these mounds.

Tsi-pa—the "noisy fellow," as the Hidatsa Indians call him—was a very small animal with a long Latin name. Although a halfway cousin to the ground-squirrel and the woodchuck, he had many characteristics in common with an ordinary puppy. He was short and muscular of leg, and very fat. His ears, although minute, were very erect and with the aid of a pair of bright eyes gave an expression of alertness and intelligence. His color shaded from cinnamon to tan along his back, fading to a yellowish buff below, while the end of his pudgy nose, like the tip of his stubby tail, ended in a smudge of black. In general his colors blended well with the yellowish, clay subsoil in which he made his home, and during all except the greenest months of the year he merged so completely with the drab of the prairie as to be nearly invisible.

TSI-PA now sat up very straight and for a time so motionless as to become little more than a part of the landscape. But however motionless his body, his brain was fully alert and his snapping eyes were carefully searching out each nook and cranny along the timber for signs of danger. Satisfied that nothing threatened from that

direction, he hopped into the air and came down sitting, as before, but now facing the buttes and Bad-lands behind the village. Apparently all was as it should be, for nothing moved on river or on land, and no threatening monoplane of black hung against the blue of the sky above.

The little dog raised his tail until it stood erect along his back as rigid as a pump-handle. Then, bringing it down with a sudden jerk, he seemed to use the leverage of its momentum to pry from his throat a single bark, a shrill *yap* like that of a puppy separated from a bowl of milk by a screen door. After an interval of impressive silence, he began again, his tail working frantically up and down, his throat vibrating to a long series of high, staccato notes. Tsi-pa was sounding the *reveille* of dog-town.

One minute the village seemed devoid of life—the next, each mound served as base for one or two, sometimes as many as five or six yellowish-brown tenpins and the lone notes of the first singer were multiplied again and again until the air fairly rang with the clamor of their tail-pumping chorus. Then, as suddenly as it began, it ceased; the uproar came to an end as if some one had turned a silencing lever. Even the kingbirds settled back within the shade of their leafy homes, and the curlew, standing on one leg in an attitude of meditation, forgot the spell of the dawn under the heat of the rising sun.

AFTER the other dogs had scattered in search of breakfast among the tall grasses of the prairie, Tsi-pa remained—erect and alone. Somehow, through the mysterious underground channels of dog-town's line of communication, he understood that his turn at sentry duty had come. For him and possibly a few more scattered here and there about the village, there would be no breakfast. Normally their duties were light indeed—but should a darting streak of brown appear on the butte above, to mark the presence of the deadly weasel, or should their eyes detect the stealthy, gliding approach of a bull-snake,—the terror of mother prairie-dogs whose little ones were left alone,—or should a soaring form appear as a speck against the sky, the sentinels were there, the first to see and the first to warn of coming danger.

Suddenly a series of sputtering explosions burst upon the morning air and Tsi-pa sprang straight up in fright. But turning in the direction of the disturbance there was nothing to be seen more formidable than a tractor pulling a set of plows along one edge of the village. Relaxing again, he sat down, allowing his tail to lie out flat behind him. He had no fear of the tractor. He knew that in some way it was connected with the great field of green that came later in the season and with the acres of nodding brown in the fall; knew too, that the golden grain meant layers of fat on little dogs, and days and nights of dreamless sleep when snow lay deep on the prairies.

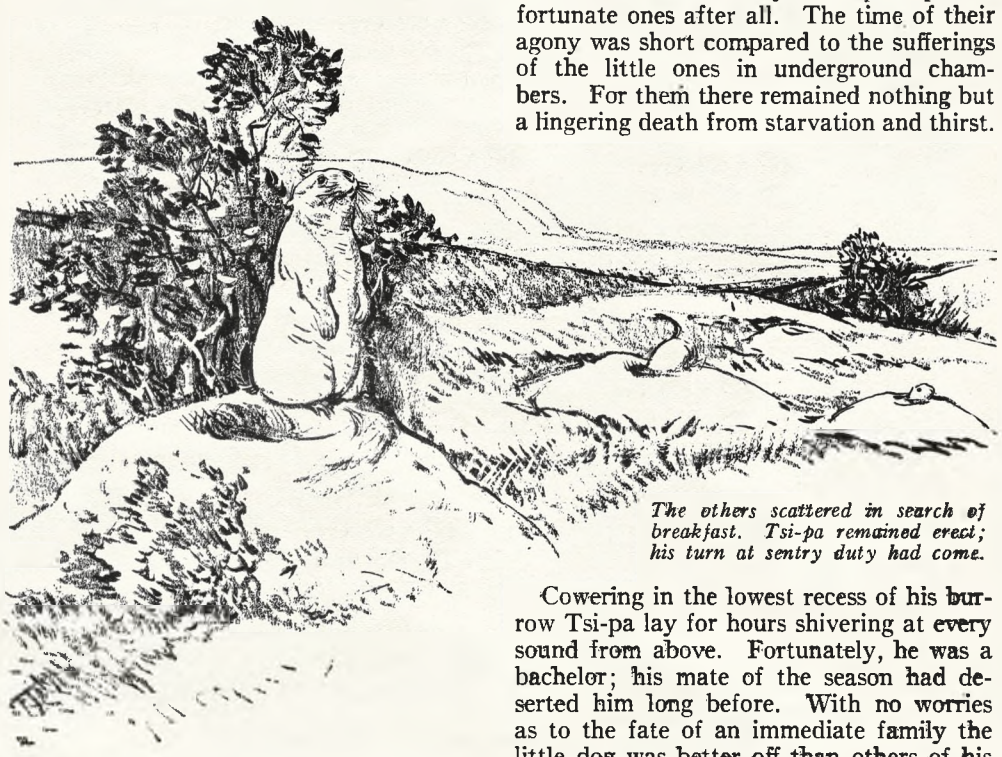
Again his sharp little eyes swept the timber's edge and the sides of the buttes above. Tilting his head to gaze upward, he saw only the blue of the sky and the silvered rim of a summer cloud drifting slowly toward the sun. Truly it was a scene of peace and a time of plenty—and he allowed his attention to wander out where the heat-waves flickered and the horizon wavered in a dreamy sort of way, lulling his senses to a feeling of security.

But just as his eyelids began to droop he saw something which brought him to full consciousness with a sudden start. He saw a prairie-dog come out from a strip of tall grass bordering the village—saw and recognized him as a neighbor, the head of a household which occupied a burrow less than a rod away.

That in itself was nothing; but what caused Tsi-pa to sit up and open his eyes in amazement was the peculiar behavior of the newcomer. Pursuing an erratic and halting course, every few paces he would fall on his side, all four feet into the air, striking out as if in the throes of great agony. When halfway to the mound where Tsi-pa sat the dog's progress had been reduced to almost nothing, while the kicking spells came with greater frequency and violence. Obviously he was making a tremendous effort to regain his burrow, but it was equally obvious his efforts were in vain. When almost at the feet of Tsi-pa, he was seized with a paroxysm still more violent; then his struggles ceased and he was dead.

For a time Tsi-pa sat and stared at the body of the other dog. He was familiar with death in many forms. He had watched the crushing talons of the eagle and the murderous dart of the mink. He had seen his comrades wilt under the cold ferocity of the weasel and the lingering

death of those carried into shadowland by the venom of the rattlesnake. But here was something different! This dog had gone out a few moments before and had returned to find death on his own threshold! Gazing in deepening horror over the field, Tsi-pa saw that the unfortunate dog at his feet was only one of many—



The others scattered in search of breakfast. Tsi-pa remained erect; his turn at sentry duty had come.

for now there were others dragging paralyzed limbs slowly and painfully across the plain. He saw them scattered here, there and everywhere, each one, like the first, in the grip of a mystifying death.

Presently through a maze of stupefaction, the sentry caught a faint glimmer of the truth. Somewhere out in that border of waving grass there lurked a new agency of death, more powerful even than the crushing talons of the eagle, more cruel than the venom of the rattlesnake! With this realization there burst upon Tsi-pa a sense of responsibility to the village. Sitting erect, he worked his tail up and down with all the speed he possessed, sending out a warning in notes high-pitched and sharp enough to carry to the farther reaches of the village.

A few days before when Tsi-pa had sounded the recall at sight of an eagle soaring above the field, his town-mates had responded, thronging from the tall grass by the thousands. Today they came only in pitiful dozens and even of those but few indeed reached the shelter of their homes. Whatever might be that hellish thing lurking silently in the grass, it had done its work well. Those lying among the grasses and on the barren clay were perhaps the fortunate ones after all. The time of their agony was short compared to the sufferings of the little ones in underground chambers. For them there remained nothing but a lingering death from starvation and thirst.

Cowering in the lowest recess of his burrow Tsi-pa lay for hours shivering at every sound from above. Fortunately, he was a bachelor; his mate of the season had deserted him long before. With no worries as to the fate of an immediate family the little dog was better off than others of his kind, but the fear in his heart was very real and the greater because the reason for it all was a mystery and the fears of Tsi-pa were magnified a hundredfold by its unknown origin.

TOWARD evening, his fears diminishing slightly, Tsi-pa ventured up the tunnel of his home and looked about. For a long time he remained on the slope of his den peering above the brim and watching the scene before him. The air seemed filled with fluttering black wings; vultures, red-headed scavengers of the prairie, stalked slowly about, while hawks and crows on laboring wings moved slowly above, and among them bright-hued magpies fluttered with raucous cries. Over all, the sun struck fire from the burnished feathers of a great golden eagle watching with telescopic eyes the denuded plain below.

Of the villagers Tsi-pa could see no

sign. There might have been a few here and there, but if so they crouched deep in the ground, a despairing remnant of a once happy community. As far as Tsi-pa could see he was alone in this vast cemetery of his people where the air was filled with enemies and even the friendly earth harbored the deadly unknown. Loneliness clutched at the heart of the little dog, and he returned to his underground chamber, there to shiver and whimper in dread.

Sometime in the darker hours of the night hunger drove him forth again. Instinctively he knew it was no time for him to be abroad, but in the dark the black wings and the vultures would be gone. He must eat, and to him the tender grass and roots were both food and drink.

Silently, stealthily, he crossed the deserted village and none disputed his path. In the grass he followed a runway until he found an Indian turnip. Its top and pulp furnished food and the moisture in its leaves and root quenched his thirst; but as he ate he detected a faintly sweet odor from the ground. Pushing an inquiring nose down into the grass he found a little pile of oats that smelled like the finest of food, making his mouth water with desire. He picked up an oat in his forepaws, cracked the hull and began to chew.

It seemed that never in his life had he tasted anything so good. It was too good to be true—and out of this fact was born a suspicion.

Tsi-pa knew nothing of saccharine, nothing of the deadly alkaloid which men call strychnine. He did not even know the meaning of poison—but in some way Nature had sounded a warning to the prairie-dog. He dropped the poisoned oat and turning, ran for the slopes of the great buttes—ran until he sank exhausted in the sage. He was whimpering again because he was a wanderer without shelter; the shadows of the night were full of fearful things; the wind sounded hollow and forbidding among the hills.

All night long he forged ahead. He was afraid of the land to which he had come, but his fear of that which lay ahead was as nothing to his terror of that which lay behind. Once he met a coyote, but by darting into a thornapple thicket he escaped the snapping jaws by a fraction of an inch. He ran almost headlong into a skunk but his was the greater speed, and he left the lumbering animal far behind. He stumbled over a bullsnake coiled in the grass and his teeth chattered in fear, but the fear proved his salvation for it drove him on and on until he came to the side of a bare peak where rain had undercut the clay. Crawling up the tunnel formed by the running water, he found a spot where he could lie down with some degree of comfort, and here, thus partially protected by Mother Earth, he curled himself into a ball and fell into an exhausted sleep. All day he slept, but toward night hunger returned with redoubled force and the twilight found him out again digging for artichokes, which he found growing in a clump of buckbrush. His hunger now somewhat appeased and his thirst quenched for the time being, he struck out through the dusk.

He was well within the Bad-lands now, and although he was ignorant of the fact, the actual dangers in his path were fewer than in the coulees near the river. In this broken country where the cañon floors were largely of alkali, and the walls of barren clay, his chances of running headlong into danger were slight, while the opportunities for escape grew in proportion. There were many holes and underground ways among the eroded hills and sandstone ledges and the outcroppings of irregular slabs offered sanctuary on the higher slopes.

WHEN dawn broke again Tsi-pa was very tired. He had been moving slowly for hours past, partly because the memory of the fearful thing behind had dimmed with distance and partly because his feet became more and more painful with each step. He climbed a hogback with considerable difficulty and paused on the crest to crawl under the protecting arm of a sagebush and study the scene ahead and below.

He was looking down into a valley; unlike many which he had traversed during the night, this one was broad and covered with irregular patches of vegetation that looked pleasantly green. There was a watercourse winding along the valley, and although it was a dry run—merely a ditch in dry weather—its sides were lined with brush and occasionally an ash or a cottonwood towered above the smaller trees. It reminded the little dog of the land from which he had come. Here he would make his home.

All day Tsi-pa lay within the shelter of the sage. It proved a nerve-racking ex-

perience, however, for an eagle persisted in soaring directly over his hiding-place. Sometimes when the great bird swooped downward, a darting shadow crossed the sage and the little dog could hear the whistle of the wind through the great bird's burnished feathers. Once the whistle became a fluttering roar as the bird banked and settled slowly toward the ground. Tsi-pa crouched low and scarcely dared breathe, as the eagle came to rest almost within wing-length of the wanderer. But the eagle took the air again, soaring upward in hundred-foot leaps until he had become a speck against the sky.

The shadows began to reach out across the valley and a new enemy came upon the scene, a female coyote, in search of supper for her young. Tsi-pa saw her climbing the face of the butte, and his heart almost stopped beating when he realized she was heading directly toward him. He knew coyotes; he had many bitter memories of times when they had crawled through the tall grass at the edge of the village, to spring suddenly and savagely into the midst of the dog-folk! He crouched, trembling, against the ground. Halfway up the slope the coyote changed her course slightly, and he shivered in relief, for on that course she would pass him by; but he had not taken into consideration the breeze. He saw her turn suddenly, the bronze hairs of her mane fluffing outward, and he read the message of death in the cruel gleam of her eyes. She had his scent!

Desperately Tsi-pa looked about him, but he knew the barren clay offered no protection whatever. A little way off, however, was a pile of sticks. He was speculating on his chances of safety beneath the pile, when another cruel head appeared in its midst and he was looking into the yellow eyes of a young eagle. Tsi-pa had no way of knowing that the eaglet could not fly. To him all eagles were alike. Should he trust himself to the open? The talons of the bird of prey were equally as merciless as the fangs of the wolf!

Death was hovering perilously close—but even as the coyote gathered herself for a leap, a whining drone sounded from the air.

Tsi-pa heard, though his reasoning process was not quick enough to grasp the source; but the coyote knew without so much as an upward glance. It was the whine of the wind in the flight-feathers of a great bird, the rushing of air through partly folded wings as their owner lunged plummet-like toward the earth.

The whine rose to a shriek. The coyote turned to run—and the crags of the Badlands echoed to a high-pitched scream of fury as the eagle struck!

Long yellow talons gripped the coyote's shoulders, and the force of the cloud-king's rushing body automatically closed the talons with crushing power. As Tsi-pa sat up to gaze in wonder at the scene before him, the eagle struck again and again—until the tumbling, darting pair of warriors disappeared over the edge of the cliff in a cloud of dust.

Tsi-pa broke from the shelter of the sage and darted down the face of the butte on a course of his own choosing. It took him along a rugged washout, over beds of sliding scoria, across bands of yellow and blue-green clay and at last over the face of a lignite-coal vein where a landslide had cut the surface clean.

Suddenly a passageway opened before him, a seam in the broken face of the coal, and he disappeared from sight. Before the dawn of another day Tsi-pa had decided in favor of the permanent safety offered by this home within the coal. Here he would stay and build again for the future.

FOR a time, possibly a month or more, the prairie-dog was satisfied with his quarters. Just below on the floor of the valley was a plot of buffalo-grass and near it, a low place where artichokes grew rank and tall. However, there was one flaw in the new home, for Tsi-pa was by nature an excavator. His Creator had designed him as a digger second only to the badger; dig he must, if only for the joy in digging—and the seam of coal offered but scant opportunity for indulgence in this trait.

Another thing disturbed him. One night he saw a shadow moving near his home. It was not a large animal, but its eyes shone green through the dusk and the prairie-dog saw the telltale tip of white bringing up its rear. He would have recognized him from eyes and tail alone, but his conviction was made a certainty when he caught the scent of the weasel. Even here he must be vigilant, it seemed. If this were true, his only system of defense demanded a home of his own construction—and so one evening, when his stomach was full of grass and his ambition enhanced by a long rest, he sought out a

favorable spot on the level ground and began to dig.

Of all the animals on the prairie, there is none that can dig as fast as the badger; but the badger brings to the task powerful muscles, claws which were designed for the sole purpose of tearing the earth, and jaws endowed with the grip like a small vise. Tsi-pa too was designed for a subterranean dweller and he also was well-muscled and compactly built. He had few peers in the art of burrowing, although as a practical excavator he fell far behind that animated battleship of the weasel tribe which we call the badger.

The first part of Tsi-pa's work was comparatively simple, for while the sod was tough, the soil bound within the grass-roots was black loam and very soft. In a few moments the little dog was working with his head beneath the surface, and before darkness came nothing except his waving tail remained in sight. With the coming of dawn he was again busy and the dust arising from the cone of black earth looked for all the world like the explosions from a toy volcano.

For two feet or perhaps a little more, Tsi-pa drove a vertical shaft.

Then he changed to a gentle slope for the reason that any dirt which he tried to throw out below that point simply fell back on the end of his tail. From there on his method was to loosen the soil with his claws and teeth, until he had about a cupful beneath him. Then he began a series of jerky backward movements, at the same time pushing with his forepaws and nose until he came to the vertical shaft. Occasionally he varied his method by filling his mouth until his cheeks bulged with their load, and carrying the dirt out in that way.

Many days passed before the new home was entirely completed for, being in no hurry, Tsi-pa was subject to long spells of forgetfulness. Sometimes, following an evening of successful foraging, he forgot to get up in the morning. Sometimes he passed many of the cool hours of dawn sitting on the crest of his partly builded mound, barking endlessly at nothing more important than the equally senseless screaming of magpies among the thornapples and cherry trees.

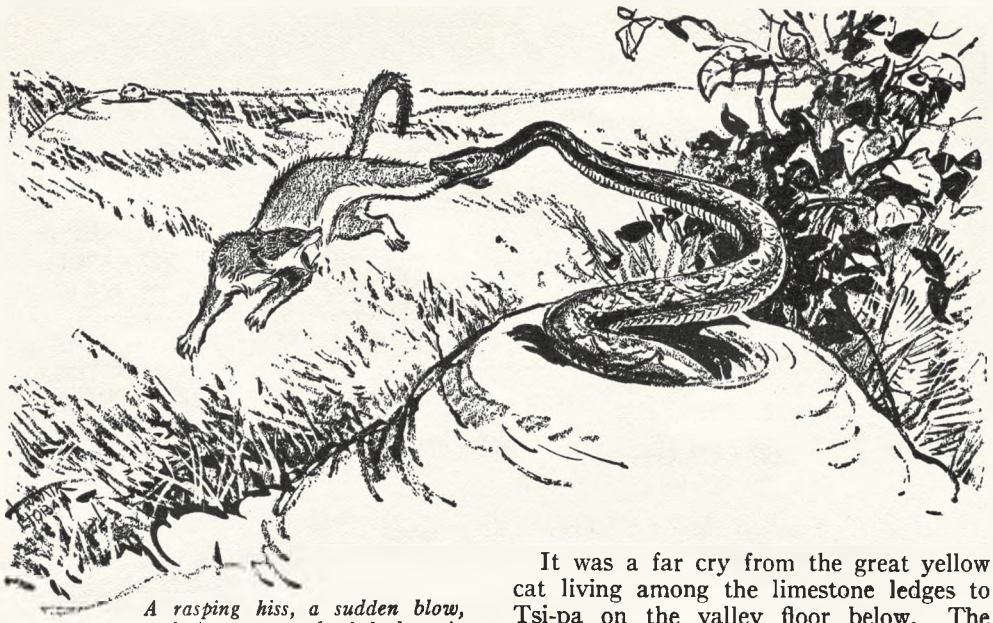
But at last the little dog was done. The day came when the hole was finished and when, with his paws and pudgy nose, he worked the loose soil on the surface into the conventional, cone-shaped design of his people. At the lowest extremity of the tunnel he had excavated a drainage-chamber large enough to catch the flow from heavy rains, and a little farther up he had driven a short tunnel horizontally, with sleeping-quarters at the end. Lastly he cut and carried many mouthfuls of grass and sage to construct a bed in which he might obtain a well-earned rest.

IT was well that Tsi-pa finished when he did, for fall came almost overnight—any day might turn the prairie gray with snow. Then, too, he had become very fat, almost too fat to work, for it would soon be time for the period of semi-hibernation—a condition in which he might sleep for a day, a week or a month at a time, coming out at intervals to sit in his mound until his ears got cold, or to drive tunnels beneath the snow purely as a means of winter recreation.

Tsi-pa was very contented, for of late he had forgotten the most of his troubles. As month after month passed carrying him farther and farther from the tragedy of the spring before, and as the days went by without bringing any new signs of danger, the little dog gradually reached the peace of forgetfulness.

One night when the air was clear and still, a strange sound came from far down the valley, so far away as to be all but inaudible even to the sensitive ears of the little dog—but he heard and knew it to be the call of his kind. Somewhere near there were other wanderers, and for a time the gregarious instinct surged strong within his veins—but after all it was not the mating-season, and he was satisfied with his new home. In the end he resisted the call of the colony and went on with his preparations for winter. In the spring it would be different; then he might answer, and, finding a bride in the village down the valley, return to found his own colony.

And then, after he felt well assured of peace and safety, he saw the shadow again, and knew beyond the possibility of a doubt that it was the shadow of Oh-sis-a the killer weasel, advancing from shelter to shelter, and darting from place to place with the sinuous motion of a snake. As Tsi-pa crouched, watching, in a clump of buckbrush, the weasel scented the burrow and disappeared over the rim of the mound. In a minute he was out again, but he paused on the top and his glittering green eyes boded ill for the little prairie-



A rasping hiss, a sudden blow, and fangs were buried deep in the flank of the weasel.

dog whose good fortune alone had taken him away from home that day. Presently Oh-sis-a was gone, but Tsi-pa knew well that it was only a question of time before he would return. And the weasel knew it, too. Some night he would come, the silent death that he was, and then the valley would no longer hear at twilight and at dawn the cheerful song of the prairie-dog.

SOMETIMES when man comes from afar and looks out for the first time over the tumbled chaos of the Bad-lands, he calls it "the spot that God forgot." He can see among those age-worn hills nothing but the stillness and silence of utter desolation. And yet in the Bad-lands, as everywhere else, a heavy undercurrent of drama flows steadily on beneath the eye of him who will stop to look and to hear. One sees only vast areas of alkali, gleaming blue-white under a burning sun. Another sees a spotless stage where, under the sun or under the stars, tragedy and humor walk hand in hand. One sees a hole under a ledge of sandstone, and to him a hole is a hole. Another visions the gaunt gray form of a mother coming forth with the last of day, in the eternal search for food that the whelps in the cave below may live and grow to become in turn actors on the stage of Nature. Each is born in the way of his kind; each goes forth into a world of constant danger; and those who survive are those whose vigilance is on a par with fate.

It was a far cry from the great yellow cat living among the limestone ledges to Tsi-pa on the valley floor below. The mountain lion feared only the rifles of men, for even the lordly buffalo-wolf moved sullenly aside rather than risk battle where the odds were three to one against him—while the little prairie-dog must spend half his time in shivering dread. His Creator had given him no dagger-claws to rake and tear, no powerful jaws to rip and crush. By day he must watch the air for birds of prey, and the earth for everything from coyote to bullsnake. Under cover of darkness came owls from above, and from below, wolves that rent the air with howls of savagery, while through the grass and sage crept and crawled the whole host of the weasel tribe—the deadliest killers of all.

The slate-gray days of early fall gave way to Indian summer. At noontime heat waves marshaled their forces for the last dance above the Bad-lands, while each dawn found the red of the scoria mantled in white. Two seasons meeting in combat—and, as among the wild folk, the victory goes ever to the strong.

One evening Tsi-pa came from his burrow to find a new tang in the air. It had been hot during the day and the valley had sweltered under a broiling sun. Now a cool breeze swept in from the prairie and with it came the blue haze of prairie-fires. The sun shorn of its power, hung sullen and coppery in the west.

Tsi-pa sat up straight on his mound and filled his lungs with air. Again and again he sorted the scents that came on the north wind and read the message they carried. He knew that another dawn would see the

battle of the seasons fought and won, knew that summer would go down in defeat before the lances of the frost-king's host. This was his last chance for supper—and he scampered quickly to his feeding-place.

IT was during his absence that a new actor appeared upon the scene—Ma-ta-hop-ini, the rattlesnake—a visitor who carried no card of invitation, received no words of welcome. All day he had basked in the warm sun and so sluggish was his brain that it was not until the cold north wind sent a shiver down his back that he bethought himself of a winter sleeping-place. When the idea came it came with such force as to send him down into the valley in search of anything that would offer shelter from the winter.

Ma-ta-hop-ini was near-sighted and saw but little; his hearing apparatus scarcely more efficient and his sense of smell was rudimentary; therefore it was merely blind luck which drove him against the slope of Tsi-pa's mound. When the little dog came toward home with a mouthful of weed-seeds, it was to find a new and deadly enemy camped on his very threshold.

For a time Ma-ta-hop-ini and Tsi-pa regarded each other in silence. The little dog's face expressed disgust and fear, while the snake returned his gaze with cold lidless eyes, apparently with no emotion whatever. As a matter of fact Ma-ta-hop-ini regarded the little dog only as a source of food at some future time, having already eaten as much as he required for the winter. Unlike the weasel, the rattler never kills from a pure love of killing. He kills only to eat or to protect himself from those who would harm him. Just now he had other business—and as Tsi-pa watched in open-eyed horror, he flowed over the crest of the mound and disappeared from sight.

And now either way the little dog turned lay apparent death. In his burrow lurked the rattlesnake; without, the still greater danger of the weasel.

As between the weasel, the snake and the certainty of storm and snow, the prairie-dog decided to follow the snake. He knew something about snakes, for his life had been spent in eluding them. Long association and a certain degree of familiarity had bred a measure of confidence in himself. He would go down the hole and investigate.

Slowly, cautiously, he moved down the tunnel, halting at every step to listen and sniff the air. At the last turn he could see down into the drainage-chamber and here he stopped, fascinated.

Ignoring the comfort of the grass-lined home of the dog, Ma-ta-hop-ini had chosen the comparative cold and damp of the tunnel's end. There he had drawn his long body into a shimmering golden ball, and as Tsi-pa watched the pendulum-like swaying of the rattler's head, the movement grew slower and slower until at last that wicked triangular head disappeared, driven deep between the folds of the gleaming ball. Presently all motion ceased; the breathing slowed to almost nothing; the rattler slept.

With a great sigh of relief the prairie-dog crept gently into his den and when the weasel came at the first light of dawn the mouth of the burrow was filled and covered deep with snow.

But the green-eyed killer knew the place. The snow might postpone his visit for a time, but spring would solve the difficulty. It was only a question of time when he would find the little dog at his mercy—and of mercy Oh-sis-a had none. So all winter long he watched the burrow, visiting its neighborhood even when snowdrifts covered it many feet; so great was his patience that spring found him still watching.

THE white mantle of the hills had long since turned to a sickly yellow and from under each drift a lacework of trickling water led down to the lowlands. As the sun grew stronger and the red of the scoria burst through into sight once more, the ice veil before the little dog's home broke and a few days later the heat began to penetrate to the end of the tunnel. That day too, the weasel remembered, and turned his head toward the burrow of the prairie-dog. That day as well, the warm rays of the sun carried a message down into the drainage-chamber of Tsi-pa's home. Once more the head of Ma-ta-hop-ini was swinging free.

So many times had Tsi-pa been in and out of his burrow during those first warm days of spring that he had forgotten the unwelcome visitor in his home. On this day of the warm sun he was busily engaged in changing his bedding, carrying out the old grass and sage and replacing it with dry, new material. He had nearly finished and was on his way out with his last load when he heard a sound from below—a low *whirr* scarcely louder than a whisper. Turning, he peered down to see

that the shimmering ball had collapsed. The folds had slipped over and under and through each other until now the rattler lay coiled in the shape of the letter *S*. Once again his head was swaying from side to side and the tip of his tail was restless with awakening life.

With a squeak of fright Tsi-pa scurried to the mouth of his burrow and there he remained all day and all night. Shivering from fright, not daring to return to his bed, fearing also to venture forth into the night, Tsi-pa clung to the top of his mound. But with dawn came the killer weasel.

ONE leap ahead of the green-eyed one, the little dog lunged downward and away from the latest threat of death. Turning the last corner he darted into his sleeping-chamber and a sudden harsh buzz came from below. It lasted only a moment, then died away to silence again. Realizing that he had reached the end of his rope, Tsi-pa turned at bay. Here he would do his best, inadequate though it might be. Against the cruel blood-sucking weasel, now crouching for his murderous leap, he stood no chance at all. But it seemed that the day of the little dog had not yet come, for as the weasel launched himself on his cruel errand something from below with the speed of a lightning-bolt, struck him in midair. A short buzz, a rasping hiss, a sudden blow —and the fangs of Ma-ta-hop-ini were buried deep in the flank of Oh-sis-a the weasel. The weasel ran a little way, then stopped. For a while he struggled with the inevitable. In the end he died.

But inside the burrow the luck of Tsi-pa had improved but little. Oh-sis-a was gone, but now the same deadly fangs were almost at the door of the little dog's home. Tsi-pa crouched in his bed, hardly daring to breathe.

Hours passed. The snake did not move; apparently he slept again. Noon came and again the sun beat down the tunnel. Slowly Ma-ta-hop-ini began to move. After a long time when the rattles had passed his door Tsi-pa crept out and followed, determined to escape at the first opportunity. At the foot of the vertical shaft he saw something which brought his fears back again with redoubled force. The rattler lay covering the mouth of the burrow with his ample folds. Tsi-pa could not escape and by evening the snake, wide awake and peevish from hunger, would return for the night.

To the little dog it seemed that his life had become a succession of narrow escapes. A few hours and he too would pass as had the weasel. . . . .

But Ma-ta-hop-ini was not the only one to answer the call of spring. There was still one more to enter this drama of the wild, even though the voice of Nature had been forced to carry well within the Arctic Circle.

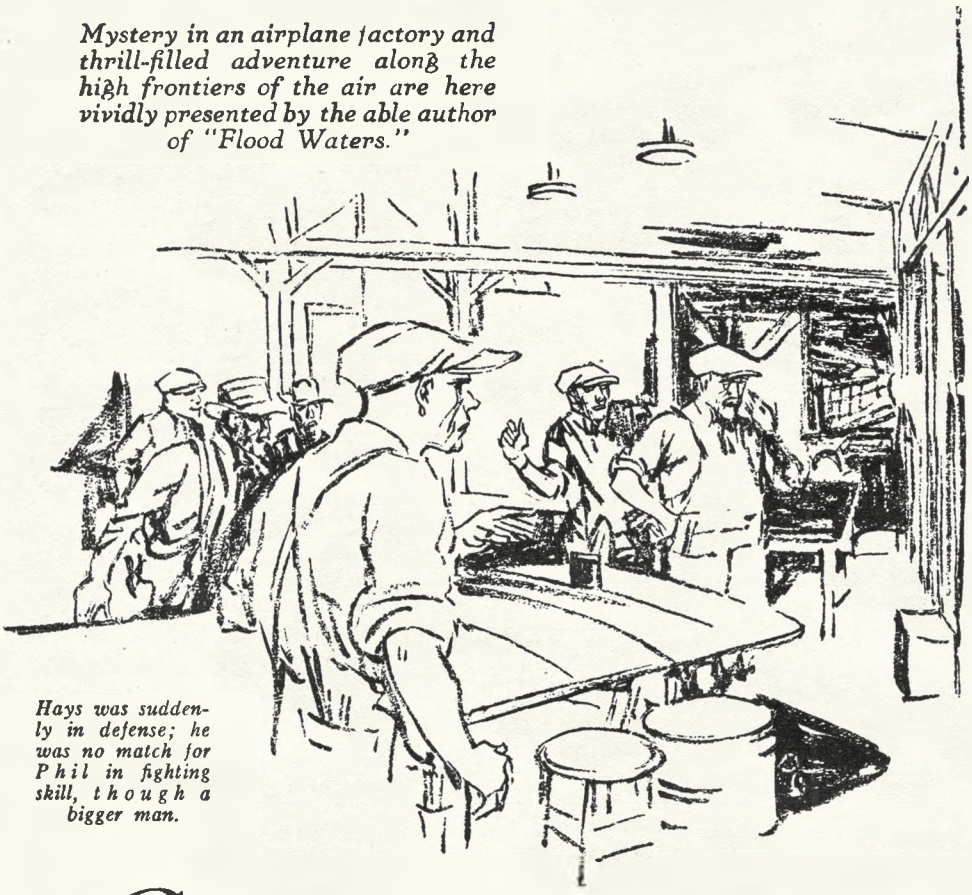
The cloud-king too had heard, and he was hurrying southward to his mate and to a nest on the bluff above the home of Tsi-pa. Just how he knew she would be there he could not tell, but she had never yet failed him. All night and most of the day, his powerful expanse of wing-spread had been pushing him toward the Southland, and ever, as he labored on the crest of the wind, his yellow eyes swept the country ahead and below. Almost at the end of his journey, he longed for the peaks and the cañons of his youth. Having purposely begun the thousand miles of his flight without food, he hungrily watched the ground below for signs of life.

The sun reached the horizon. The great snake felt the first chill of evening. All day he had been as motionless as the hills about him, but now he must flee again from the cold of night and the gnawing within him was not satisfied. Slowly the shining folds began to revolve upon themselves; his head was moving toward the mouth of the burrow. Never before had he been caught without the protection of sage or brush, but today he had been sluggish and because he had remained motionless he had not been molested. But now as the shining folds of his gliding body caught and reflected the light of the setting sun, sharp eyes looked down from above.

AGAIN a blue-black form shot downward. Again came the high whine of wind on hurtling feathers, and a roar sounded through the valley. A cloud of dust arose from the mound. Long yellow talons drove through the body of the snake. Ma-ta-hop-ini, still sluggish from his winter sleep, strove to use his deadly fangs but without avail, as the eagle labored slowly up toward the sandstone ledge above.

When a breeze came along the valley and the dust-cloud moved aside, Tsi-pa sat erect on the top of his mound. Once again he was barking in an excess of sheer joy, while his tail worked frantically up and down.

Mystery in an airplane factory and thrill-filled adventure along the high frontiers of the air are here vividly presented by the able author of "Flood Waters."



Hays was suddenly in defense; he was no match for Phil in fighting skill, though a bigger man.

CRASH PILOT

By LELAND S. JAMIESON

Illustrated by William Molt

THE first of twenty pursuit planes being built by the Rand Aircraft Corporation for a South American government came out of the shops on the morning of the fourteenth of January, at nine o'clock. Mechanics trundled it out to the line and chocked the wheels and ran the motor up, then waited for the test pilot to take it into the air. But the test pilot did not appear, and after waiting twenty minutes in the chilling blast of a south Texas "norther" the line chief went into the office to find out what was wrong.

Dale Hays, the manager of the Rand factory, evinced surprise that Andrews, his chief test-pilot, was not at hand; and after several minutes of fruitless searching called Rand on the telephone and asked what was to be done about it.

"I'll send Phil Warner over to make the test," Rand told Hays over the telephone. "It wont take much time, will it?"

"Warner?" Hays questioned, and the name was uttered like an exclamation. "Oh —oh, all right! No, it wont take long—thirty minutes or so."

He hung up the receiver and his tall, gaunt frame seemed shrunken. His face, lumpy and distorted and bruised-looking from some long-forgotten airplane crash, was pale and troubled.

But he recovered his composure quickly, and when Phil Warner arrived at the office five minutes later Hays was the suave, slightly distant man his assistants knew.

Phil came into the office without delay and introduced himself. He was a small man about thirty-one years old, and power-

fully built. His face had a leathery look to it, from exposure to the blast of a thousand propellers; his eyes were blue-gray, and there was about them a look of shrewdness, a calculating look. He appeared to be efficient and capable, and at the same time he seemed friendly. You liked him the instant you saw him, and as you came to know him this attraction grew into an affection of a sort.

"Andrews is gone some place," Hays explained, watching Phil narrowly. "This is a new job here—pursuit crate for a South American outfit." He led the way out to the ship. "What I want you to watch particularly, Warner, is this plane's landing speed and high speed. See how it performs in acrobatics, and when you bring it in, make out a complete report of how it handles." He paused, and seemed to estimate Phil. "Had any experience in pursuit flying?"

"Some. None recent, but I guess I can fly this bus. I hope she doesn't go to pieces in the air!" he joked. "If she does, there's where I bail out and let her go."

"She wont," Hays reassured him.

A TRIM, powerful craft was this plane, built for speed and stamina in military fighting—the most difficult and equipment-racking work to which an airplane can be put. The specifications called for a top speed of one hundred and seventy miles an hour, a landing speed not in excess of fifty-five, and a safety factor of at least twelve to one—meaning that it could and would withstand twelve times the amount of strain received in normal, level flight.

"I'd like to talk with your final inspector," Phil requested. "Just a word or two about structural standards. I haven't been here long—just started to work three weeks ago."

Hays was quietly hostile.

"I do all the inspecting," he informed Warner. "What's the matter—afraid something's wrong inside this crate?"

"Oh, no; I'm always cautious, though." He questioned Hays about a few major points of design and construction, then asked: "How long have you been here, Mr. Hays?"

There was a fleeting fear in Hays' eyes, but Warner did not notice. He swung his parachute on and climbed into the cockpit. He strapped himself in with meticulous care, spent five minutes testing the motor and checking his instruments, then gave the signal that he was ready.

He taxied out across the field slowly at first, then a little faster as he experimented with the ship's controllability on the ground; then he opened the throttle wide and the plane streaked across the field, climbing easily after a two-hundred-foot run. He grinned at the feeling of power that the motor gave him—this was a real little ship!

He made four landings, watching his instruments closely as he did so to be positive that the plane did not have an excessive landing speed. Then, zooming off the end of the runway, he climbed rapidly and scurried away toward the hill country to the northwest of San Antonio for the portion of the test to be devoted to speed tests and acrobatics.

Probably not one pilot in ten would have chosen such country over which to test an untried airplane. The hills were almost uninhabited; fields were scarce, and what fields there were, were too small to land in. Phil chose this territory because he had been testing airplanes for three years, and because, in that time, he had had five new ships go to pieces under him. He had seen one of those ships fall through the roof of a house, and, although it killed no one, it had implanted in his mind the resolution to test airplanes in the future over country where they could hurtle to the earth without causing damage.

He observed, as he was climbing to four thousand feet to begin these tests, that the little ship seemed very light and that its rate of climb was far in excess of that required of it. In other respects it was above the average in performance—a good plane.

This work was the kind Phil Warner liked; he could estimate a ship's capacity and capabilities with almost uncanny accuracy. He wondered about the feasibility of asking Rand for a transfer to the factory—to do test work. At present Phil's duties consisted of pushing a tri-motored, twelve-passenger transport around the sky for Rand Airlines, Inc.

He put the ship into a vertical dive and stood up on his rudder as he rode her down two thousand feet. At the bottom of the dive he checked his instruments again, saw that the airspeed was registering two hundred and fifty miles an hour, and pulled up into a vertical climb that rocketed him back to three thousand, five hundred feet. He climbed back to four thousand quickly.

"So far so good," he muttered. "Landing speed, climb and dive O. K. Let's see what she'll do in a slow roll."

HE opened the throttle slightly and let the ship pick up one hundred and thirty miles an hour, then he pulled the nose up a little and pressed the stick over to the right side gently and, as the wing went down, he held the nose on an imaginary spot far in the distance. The ship rolled over until it was in a vertical position, and Phil was holding the nose up with top rudder. It rolled slowly over on its back and, since the floats in the carburetor shut off the flow of gasoline from the cylinders, the motor stopped. Holding the nose up now with the stick pressed forward, and hanging heavily in his belt, Phil started to roll on over and resume the normal, upright position of flight.

But as he did that—while he was still partially on his back, hanging in his belt—he felt a violent shudder in the nose of the plane and simultaneously felt the sting of hot oil and water in his face. The whole motor seemed to pound up and down in its supports with tremendous force; the entire plane shook and quivered, the wings fluttering wildly.

Smoke bellied out from around the motor cowlings and swirled up around the windshield and into his face, cutting off his view of the ground. His heart leaped, more from surprise than from fear, and he made a clutching grab for his safety-belt—to jump. He cut the switches as he did so, and was standing up in the cockpit holding to the trailing edge of the upper wing for support, before he saw that the plane was not on fire. An oil-line had broken when the motor snapped loose from its supports, and the smoking oil was whipping back along the fuselage.

He sank back into the cockpit, buckling his belt with one hand while he flew the

plane with the other. His goggles were covered with oil, and he couldn't even see the ground; but he dared not remove the goggles because the oil would get into his eyes. The smoke and stench sickened him, and try as he might, he could not turn his head so that he could avoid it. He wanted to jump! But he would have to land the ship as nearly intact as possible to find the structural weakness: if he jumped and let the plane crash, he could learn nothing from the subsequent examination.

He managed to wipe away the blob of oil from one lens of his goggles with his sleeve and, quieting his excitement as much as he could,—holding his nerve and thus preserving his judgment,—Warner picked the timber-covered side of a hill and came in toward it, snatching a fleeting glimpse of it now and then when he could wipe away the oil and stick his head around the corner of the windshield. He came in slow, "squashing" the ship down at minimum speed, yet still traveling at sixty miles an hour. The hillside was so steep that he couldn't begin to get the tail down, and he plowed into the ground on the wheels. The ship tore through the scrubby brush until it struck a sizable tree; one wing was severed clean, and the remainder of the plane whipped around and turned over on its back.

And Phil, clawing for a grip with which to hold himself in the cockpit and thus avoid striking his head upon the ground when the ship went over, felt his hold break as the force of his body snapped his belt. He was flung out and down, and struck the ground violently. He was stunned; he lay there in agony, gasping for breath.

AFTER ten minutes the pain gradually diminished, stabbing back at him occasionally in hot flashes. At last he struggled to his feet and found that he was not badly hurt, and after a few minutes more he felt well enough to walk. He turned to the wreckage of the ship to discover what had caused the crash.

He began at the motor mount of the little plane, tearing away crumpled cowlings to get to the motor. He found that a welded joint in the motor mount had given away, and this surprised him; for the factor of safety of a pursuit plane should have been high enough that such a thing could never happen. He looked further—and gasped in incredulity.

This plane was shoddy! It was built with obviously evident haste and with poor materials! What Phil saw was poor workmanship on the inside of the ship, poor craftsmanship, and a design that was calculated to save material and time and labor.

"Maybe those suckers want this kind of ship," he told himself. "But I wouldn't fly one again—and put it through the mill!" He whistled softly when he thought of that two-hundred-fifty-mile-an-hour dive which he had made—in this ship.

"Unsafe—rotten!" he muttered. "And that's the kind of a guy I'm working for! A money-snatching miser who'll build a ship that men'll kill themselves in trying to fly!"

He slung his parachute over his shoulder and started east through the hills toward the road that led down from Leon Springs. The going was rough and painful, but he was not worrying about the trials of getting home. He was trying to find the motive behind the builder of that ship.

He knew the reputation that Rand had in the North—whence Phil had come recently. He wondered how a man who built his planes like this could establish such a reputation as Rand had in the minds of airmen the country over.

"He couldn't!" Phil muttered. "They'd be on to him in a second!"

Then would he do this—knowingly? Not likely!

Yet it seemed hardly possible that these ships could be built that way and Rand remain in ignorance of it. Rand, it seemed to Phil, was the type of man who watched things closely, who kept facts and figures at his fingers' ends, who knew what was going on in his factory. This was true in Rand Airlines—Rand was at the office daily, listening to what Dick Burney, the chief pilot, had to tell of the problems encountered in the work. Phil presumed that he was in just as close touch with Hays, the factory manager, for the two industries were operated only half a mile apart.

Of Hays Phil knew nothing, except that the manager of the factory was a wartime ace, and was supposed to be efficient. Now Phil wondered, more than anything, if Rand really had countenanced the manufacture of shoddy planes, or if he were in ignorance of it and if it were being handled by Hays. Hays was his only employee who could do such a thing and make it stick; Hays might juggle the purchase price of all his materials, buying shoddy stuff and pocketing the difference.

It was none of his affair, Phil realized, from the ethical standpoint. Yet human

life lay in the balance; Phil presumed to make it his affair when it concerned unsuspecting pilots who would in the future fly these planes, thinking them capable of any maneuver. Yes, it certainly was his affair!

CHAPTER II

WARNER reached the hill-bordered road five miles south of Leon Springs at eleven-thirty and turned down it toward San Antonio. Only a few minutes later an inbound car stopped and picked him up, and within forty-five minutes he walked into Hays' office at the flying-field. He bore no marks of the crash other than a slight cut under his left eye, and a sprained thumb; but he was very tired from the long struggle through the hills and from the shock of cracking up. Hays met him.

"What the hell happened to you?" Hays barked. "I've had ships out for an hour, looking for you."

"Find the wreck?" queried Phil. "About twenty-five miles up in the hill country—northwest of here."

"Wreck? You piled that ship up? You crashed it? You—why you—"

"Motor quit when I was over the hills. I didn't have any place to go, so I had to put her in the best way I could. The motor may be worth salvaging, but you'd just as well burn the rest of it right where it is."

"Well, I'll be damned!" Hays exploded. He was suddenly contemptuous and angry and vociferous; yet it seemed to Phil that there was a certain vicious pleasure in his face when he added: "You're the test pilot for the airline over there, eh? And by damn—a crash pilot!"

"Crash pilot?" Phil cried, astonished at Hays' words. "Say, you big yokel, you cut that out—right now! That was a legitimate crash—the motor conked and I didn't have any place to go!"

"You're a damn' fool to get out over that kind of country with a new ship! My Lord!" He reached for the telephone and called Rand at the other office. "Warner just came in," he said impatiently. "Crashed my new ship out in the hills. I wouldn't have let him have it if I'd known he was a crash pilot! If I don't have all the rotten luck there—"

Phil reached up and grabbed Hays by the shoulder, spun him around, and snatched the telephone from his hands before the tall man knew what was happening.

"Warner speaking, Mr. Rand," he said. "I had some hard luck awhile ago—piled up that new pursuit job. I'm sorry." He was seething with anger because Hays had told Rand that he was a crash pilot.

"Crashed it, eh?" asked Rand. He wasn't excited, and if he thought about the financial loss that he would suffer it did not show in his voice. "You stay there a minute—Burney and I'll be right over."

Phil hung up the receiver and sat down on Hays' desk. The factory manager walked the floor, agitated and angry; but he held his tongue.

"What makes you so sore?" Phil inquired mildly. "It's no skin off your nose, is it? You act as if I'd wrecked your pet automobile, or something!"

"You've cost the factory a lot of money!" Hays complained bitterly. "You've wiped out a twenty-thousand-dollar airplane, and all the profits that it would have brought in!" He glared at Phil. "Oh, it's nothing but a trifle!" he added, acidly sarcastic.

"Listen, you're taking this too hard," Phil objected. "Rand is the one to crawl down my throat—not you; he's the loser!"

"Yes, but I don't—"

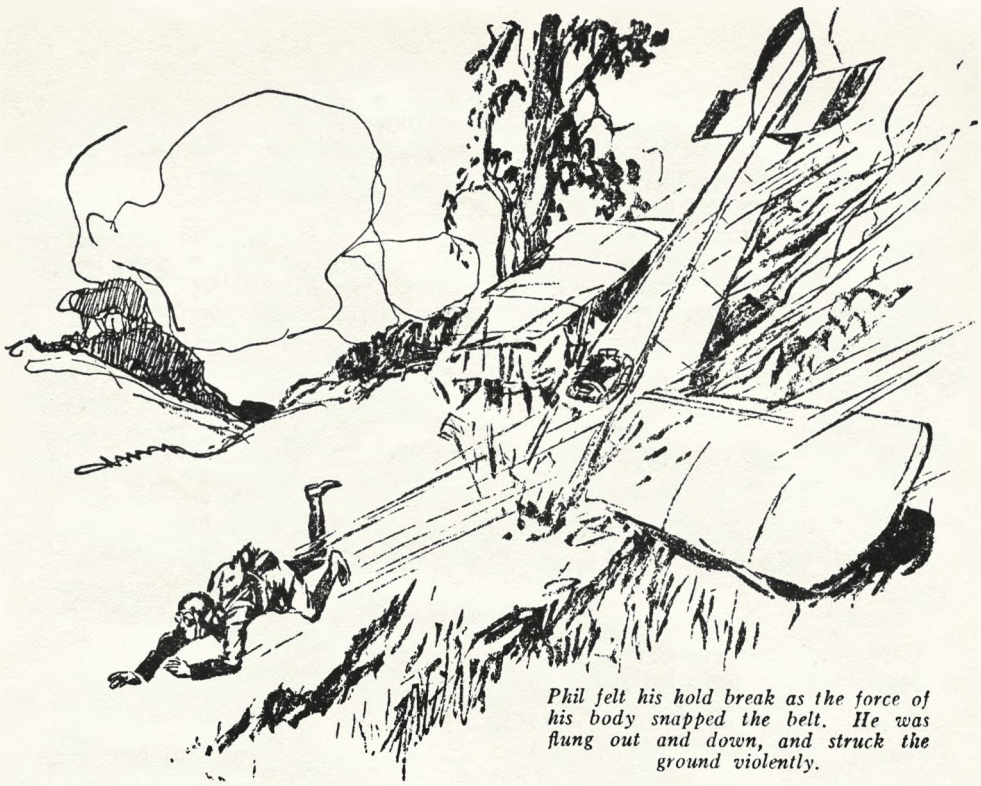
RAND, followed by Dick Burney, walked into the office, and Hays broke off. The financier was a heavy man in middle age, his hair gray about the temples. He had a fighting jaw and his lips pressed tight together when his mouth was closed; when he talked he snipped the words off sharp.

"Now, gentlemen, sit down here and we'll go into this," he ordered; and when they had complied, he added: "Warner, tell us what happened."

Phil began, with grave concern: "The motor just quit. I couldn't get it started again, and there wasn't any place to land—I had to pile her up, or jump; and I figured I might be able to get her down without completely wrecking it, so I stayed in the cockpit."

"Did you?" Rand asked. "Did you get it down, or did you jump?" He was a novice in the flying profession, and he did not fully understand the terms used. He was a business-man, and he knew flying only from the financial standpoint.

"Not much!" Phil lamented. "I picked out the most likely-looking hillside, and cracked her up. The crankcase of the motor's split, and the ship is so much kindling wood. I wouldn't go back through all that brush for what's left of the whole airplane."



Phil felt his hold break as the force of his body snapped the belt. He was flung out and down, and struck the ground violently.

"How far from the road did you hit?" Burney asked. "Could we get a truck in there to haul the motor out?"

"Might—but it'd take days to do it."

"Um-m-m," murmured Rand. "Not your fault then, except being over bad country?"

"That's all, I think."

"How do you explain being there? That's an important factor—why weren't you over good country, where you could have landed?"

Phil smiled, and wondered if Rand or Burney would understand him. He knew Hays wouldn't. "One time, on a test—two years ago—I saw a new ship of mine go through the roof of a house while I was dangling up there above it on a parachute. I didn't like the sight—so now I do my testing over country where nobody'll be killed if something happens to the ship and I have to leave it. It saves worry for me, and it might save you a lawsuit."

"Doesn't seem like a bad idea," Rand half agreed. "Nothing else wrong with the plane was there—it came through all the test all right?"

FOR an instant Phil considered confessing that he hadn't completed the test, that he had barely started it. But he reasoned that whoever was behind the shoddy construction of these ships would remain vigilant until the ship had passed its first test, and after that would relax somewhat and feel secure. Phil had no single element of proof against anybody, and he had three possible suspects—Rand, or Hays, or some one whose identity he had not yet learned.

"Tested fine," he replied to Rand's question. "It certainly is a nice ship, and I feel bad about crashing it."

"What was the high speed?" Burney asked. "Any wing-flutter in a dive?"

"Better than a hundred and seventy; the wings fluttered just a trifle at two-fifty, but not enough to worry about. Oh, it's a sweet ship!"

For the better part of half an hour they sat there discussing the various elements of the craft, and what it would mean to the Rand interests to have it adopted by the government in South America as the standard pursuit job for its air service.

"Well, it's too bad you wrecked it," Rand said, rising. "But we'll build more of them. You report down here tomorrow—Andrews is sick, Hays tells me, and you'll have to do the testing that's done until he gets back."

"But he can't," Burney objected. "He's going to El Paso tomorrow morning in that little T-10. Two airline pilots have reported that the field out there is bad, and Phil's got to go out and make arrangements for repairs on it."

"He has to go?" Hays inquired carelessly. "Funny he'd be taking a T-10 when he could go in a smaller ship."

"He's running a test on fuel-consumption at the same time," Burney explained. "He's going out solo and coming back with a load of special passengers from El Paso. I'll do any test work you have to do."

"I'll appreciate it," Hays replied.

Rand turned to go, and said to Phil: "Come over to the office, Warner."

PHIL entered Rand's office with some misgivings, in apprehension that he was being called before the financier in private to be rebuked for having lost the ship; but he learned shortly that this was not the case. Rand had a special mission for him to perform the next day in El Paso, and he explained this in detail; but he made no further mention of the crash.

And Phil, being thus admitted to Rand's presence, had the opportunity of asking questions without calling attention to his eagerness for information, and when his employer finished with him he remained for a time, offering as an excuse the fact that he was interested in design of military types.

"That new bus is the best thing I've ever flown!" he declared enthusiastically. "Mr. Rand, I wonder if I couldn't work over there with Hays for a week or two? I'd like to see how the factory is run, and what methods Hays is using in production."

But Rand shook his head. "We need you here," he replied. "I'd let you go if it were possible, but with all the grief we've been having this winter I haven't another man to take your place, without going out and hiring one."

"Well,"—Phil smiled apologetically,—"I thought it wouldn't hurt to mention it."

He returned, early in the afternoon, to the factory; and there, entering by a side door at the far end, away from the office, he strolled carelessly between the aisles of men at work and watched them building wings, landing-gears and fuselages. He remained as unobtrusive as possible, appearing as a casual visitor. He was careful to watch for Hays, but when ten minutes passed and he failed to see the other man, he approached a woodworker who was building up the spars of a wing section.

For a brief period he stood by and watched this man. He became genuinely interested, for he saw at once that the wood being built into the wing was of inferior quality.

"Interesting?" he asked, by way of opening the conversation.

"Until you've worked at it a year or two," the man replied.

"Good money in it, I should think," Phil suggested. "I wish I could get a job here."

"Don't do it, buddy. Don't mess with no airplane company!" The workman was almost vehement in this warning.

"Well, I'd rather fly, but I haven't got enough money to learn how. Maybe if I could get in here I could make enough to save some."

"Make enough?" The man laughed sardonically. "Buddy, do you know how much we get paid here? Well, I aint goin' to tell you, but you'd be plumb astonished! I been here a year now, and I get a five-dollar raise in that year!"

Phil smiled, and nodded understandingly. "Boss hard on you, is he?"

"Say, feller, you don't know what a hard-boiled boss we got here. They say Rand, the big shot that owns this place, is a good feller; but this other guy! I'm tellin' you, you better lay off tryin' to get a job around here. They'd start you in on cigarette-money!"

"Nice work you're doing there," Phil suggested.

"Listen, buddy!" The worker's voice grew confidential. "This work's rotten, see? Don't ever let none of your friends buy an airplane made by this outfit, see? I can build an airplane from the tailpost to the propeller hub, and build it right, see—but this outfit, they've gone cheap, they wont let me put good stuff inside these ships. They used to be fine, when I first come here—built a wonderful job, but they've gone cheap. Now, I'm tellin' you, don't buy no airplane off this outfit if you like to live."

"*Gone* cheap? When did they change?"

"After they got this new boss in here. I'm tellin' you, now, don't mess around here and git a job."

"Well, this certainly is interesting," Phil reiterated. He thanked the man and moved away to another section of the factory. He waited there a few more minutes, and then left, letting himself out cautiously.

WARNER did not see that Hays had been watching him for the past twenty minutes from a small window of the office. He did not see Hays pounce down upon the wing-construction man as soon as he was gone. But Hays did, and he asked his subordinate what Phil had wanted, made him

repeat word-for-word what Phil said. And the man did, afraid to refuse.

So Hays went back to his office muttering. He cursed Phil wrathfully.

"Who'd have thought he'd ever get down here and find me! If I don't get all the tough breaks, a man never did! Damn him—that little pup!"

And he sat down at his desk in the office and gave himself up to deep and silent thought for the remainder of the afternoon. His lumpy face was grim, and troubled; and there was a desperate fear there.

CHAPTER III

DALE HAYS, when he left his office, raced to San Antonio. He did not stop at his hotel for dinner, but drove directly to the wholesale district of town. He found the place he sought, parked his car on a side street, and entered the building.

The store was a wholesale plumbing house, and Hays purchased two hundred pounds of lead in ingots, put it in four sacks, and took it to his car.

From there he went back to his hotel and changed clothes and ate dinner, after which he went to a theater alone. It was almost midnight when he returned to his hotel and changed clothes again, took his car out of storage and drove to the flying-field.

Since he had no key to the hangar in which the T-10's were kept, he broke the hasp silently and entered the building. The night watchman did not hear or see him enter or leave; when the next morning the hasp was found sticking loosely into the wood of the door frame, it was presumed by the mechanic who found it that the wind had worked it out.

Hays, inside the hangar, felt his way noiselessly along the wall until he came to a small T-10 in one corner of the building—a plane that was powered with Whirlwind motors rather than the Wasps that are ordinarily used for that type ship. He knew that it was the only one of its kind in use by Rand Airlines, and was the one spoken of as "the little T-10."

He worked quickly and silently, and, feeling for the safety-wires, he removed the bottom cowling of the center motor. Then, crawling up on a small ladder which he found in the hangar, and working by the light of a pocket flashlight, he placed ingot after ingot of the lead upon the upper longerons. To make sure that they would not fall from their places, he wired them in place with fine steel wire. When his task was finished it was impossible to see the bars of lead without crawling up and poking one's head above the center of the motor—amid a welter of grease and foul-smelling oil and gasoline fumes. Hays knew that this would not be done because Warner was to take off early in the morning.

After leaving the flying-field, Hays went directly to his hotel. He stopped at the desk and asked the clerk for some sealed envelopes that he had deposited there, and received three packages. These he carried with him to his room.

After opening a bottle of gin, he seated himself at the small desk which the room afforded, and opened the envelopes. From one he drew forth several pictures, from another some newspaper clippings; and from the third, four war decorations—including a Croix de Guerre with two palms—and several sheets of paper: citations for bravery. He read the citations through, and then put them and the medals back in their envelope.

HAYS drank a stiff shot of gin and followed it with a chaser, then turned to the pictures that had come from the first envelope. There were five of these, and he thumbed through them slowly, looking at each of them intently. Two of the pictures were of officers of the Lafayette Escadrille, and bore names and dates upon the back of the prints. The third was also of a member of the Escadrille, and this man resembled Hays in some vague respects. He was of the same general build, tall and of good physique; he had the same black mustache, but there was much about his face that did not resemble Hays. His eyes were not the same, and his mouth was totally different. His face was smooth and might have been called handsome; Hays' face was lumpy and scarred and distorted, as though at some time it had been mangled brutally. And finally, there was about the photographed man a geniality of a sort; in Hays this was almost totally lacking. Yet the picture bore on its back the legend:

SERGEANT PILOT DALE HAYS—PLESSIS-BELLEVILLE, FRANCE
August 8, 1917

Hays smiled when he read it. He turned the print over again and studied the picture at length. Presently he tossed it aside and picked up the remaining two.

One of these was a print cut from a news-

paper. It was old—yellowed with age; but there was no doubting that it was Phil Warner. The other was a small snapshot on glazed paper, and on the back of this second one was scrawled in rough writing:

Melvin Hebling—1923

This picture showed a man about twenty-nine years of age, heavily built, and tall. The eyes of Hebling were the eyes of the man who looked at it now—cold, distrustful, calculating; but otherwise there was no slightest resemblance. The face of the man in the picture was full and smooth and almost boyish,—provided one could disregard his eyes,—with a high-bridged nose; Hays' face was a contradiction of all these things, for while his nose was long, it had been broken, and was twisted to one side. The bridge, instead of being arched, was sunk so low as almost to be grotesque.

Hays tossed this print upon the table, but still regarded the one of Phil Warner. His face, when he looked at it, was grim.

When he tired of this he placed Phil's picture on the desk in front of him and, turning, he picked up the contents of another envelope—the newspaper clippings.

He read them through, perusing them slowly, pausing now and again to drink another slug of gin and wash down the fire from his throat.

The sum total of the information in these ancient newspaper stories was to the effect that Melvin Hebling, an official of an airplane manufacturing company in the Middle West, had leaped from an airplane while his student-passenger was making some minor emergency repairs on a flying wire on the wing. Hebling saved his own life with a parachute, but the passenger, having left his 'chute in the cockpit, was unable to climb back up the tilting wing after Hebling jumped, and had been killed in the resultant crash.

Hebling had been indicted by a grand jury and was to come up for trial in the future, one clipping stated, largely due to the testimony given by another flyer, an employee of the company named Philip Warner, who was flying a plane nearby when the accident occurred. The charge was manslaughter and criminal negligence. A point of interest, the clipping pointed out, was the fact that the father of the dead flyer was the prosecuting attorney for the county in which the accident occurred; consequently feeling was running exceedingly high in the neighborhood.

Hays read through the yellowed slips slowly and finally came to the last one. He unfolded it carefully; it was almost the full page of a newspaper.

INDICTED AIRMAN
KILLS BUSINESS PARTNER
IN GUN BATTLE

Joseph Lander, president and general manager of the firm of Lander and Hebling, was shot and instantly killed last night in the office of the company at the municipal flying field by Melvin Hebling, junior member of the firm. Philip Warner, an employee of the company, was also shot and seriously injured, but will probably recover. Warner was the only eye-witness of the shooting.

According to Warner, Lander had been working on the books of the company in an effort to locate a shortage of funds. Hebling, who was recently indicted for manslaughter in connection with the death last month of Russell Mathews in an airplane accident, came to the field office at a late hour. Lander questioned him about the shortage, and a heated argument ensued. Hebling suddenly drew a gun and fired point-blank, the bullet striking Lander in the head and causing instant death.

Before Warner could grapple with Hebling, the latter swung around and cried: "You wont testify before *another* grand jury!" and fired. The bullet struck Warner in the left lung. Without waiting to see if his second victim was fatally wounded, Hebling fled. Warner was able to reach a telephone and notify the police a few minutes after he was shot, but at an early hour this morning Hebling had not been apprehended.

THERE was more, but Hays read only that far. The gin was affecting him, and he tossed the clippings aside and picked up Phil Warner's picture. He leered at the image for a moment, then struck a match and touched the flame to the corners of the paper, as he began a gabbling soliloquy:

"Jush like zhish!" he muttered thickly. "Nish li'l bonfire! Cras-sh!" He reached up and ran his numb fingers over a thin, pale scar that coursed down across his cheek from the outside corner of his right eye. "Changsh the old boysh looksh—ha!" he continued. "He didn't know me—identify me—letsh shee him identify me—" He broke off into a long period of apparent reasoning, and then added, satisfied: "Couldn't do it! Never recognize me!"

Turning up the bottle of gin, he drank again. There was no need to wash it down with a chaser now; he could stand the fire.

One after the other the clippings went up in crawling wreaths of smoke.

For perhaps ten seconds Hays sat staring at the blackened rubble at his feet.

"Warner crashed my new ship," said Hays. "If I don't have all the rotten luck—" Phil snatched the telephone from his hands.

Then he arose unsteadily and fought with an outstretched hand for support upon the desk. He swayed, then steadied and turned toward the door of his room. . . . .

It was daybreak when he awoke. He was still drunk, but not so much that he could not rise and stagger about. For a few minutes he sat on the edge of his bed, collecting his wits uncertainly; then he stumbled into the bathroom and drank five glasses of hot water, waiting between each one for nausea to come. . . . .

After the agony was over he took an icy shower, and by the time he had dressed he could walk without a stagger or a lurch. He ate a heavy breakfast and drank a great deal of strong, black coffee; and then he went upon the street and walked two miles. When he returned it was impossible to detect that he had been drinking.

On the way to the flying-field he looked at his watch. There was a trace of fierce, vehement joy in his voice as he muttered: "An hour more and it'll be over! I'll be out of danger from that guy for all time!"

CHAPTER IV

A WEEK after his employment by Rand, Phil Warner had met Dorothy Rand at a dance. Dick Burney introduced him, and Phil managed to get four successive dances with her.

The evening after his crash in the pursuit ship, Phil took Dorothy to dinner and to a dance afterward, returning to his room after twelve o'clock. As he undressed, he studied the elements of the fraud Hays was working—for, since talking to the wing-construction man, Phil was positive that Rand was without knowledge of what was taking place and that Hays, either alone or with a confederate, was responsible.

The most usual way to accomplish such a thing, Phil knew, was to make arrangements with some directing head of the factories from which the raw material was purchased, paying full price for poor material, and splitting the profits thus created. And he knew that such a thing would be hard to prove unless he could see the books that Hays kept in his office. He would carry on a private investigation the night after he returned from El Paso!

The following morning he arrived at the flying-field at eight o'clock, waited twenty minutes for mechanics to put the finishing touches on an obstinate right-wing motor, and then climbed up into the cabin for the take-off. Inside the ship, he stepped back into the baggage compartment and inspected his load of ballast—sand in small bags that would replace the normal weight of passengers in the ship, since he was going out solo.

He checked his motors, individually and together, adjusted himself comfortably in the seat, and released his brakes. With one last glance at his instruments to see that everything was functioning properly he shoved the triple throttles slowly forward. The three Whirlwinds, generating six hundred and seventy-five horsepower, picked up their revs and their propellers blew out a cloud of dry, brown dust behind them as the ship accelerated. The T-10 rolled easily, light as it was, and reached forty miles an hour on the ground.

THE horizontal stabilizer of an airplane is the long flat winglike portion of the tail. You have seen it, and probably wondered what it was and why it was put there. In reality it is a kind of third wing, and sary, not to maneuver the ship in the air, To the rear of the stabilizer, on each side of the rudder, are hinged the flippers—or elevators—which enable the pilot to climb or dive his craft. An airplane will fly without the flippers, but the pilot can't tell a great deal about where it is going.

This horizontal stabilizer, in most planes, is movable within a small range; and moving it produces in the ship's flight the same result as pulling back or pushing forward on the control stick: the plane will climb or dive. Movement of the stabilizer is necessary, not to maneuver the ship in the air, but to attain a balance, or trim, with varying loads; and this balance is of the utmost importance. A well-balanced ship can be landed easily on three points; a nose-heavy one can't, and if the nose-heaviness is extreme it is possible that the pilot cannot counteract it even with full use of his flippers on the tail. If he can't he is certainly in trouble!

Phil's T-10 reached forty-five miles an hour on the ground, the motors running wide open. It reached fifty, and Phil, pulling slowly back on his control column to lift the plane into the air, uttered a short, crisp oath. The nose was heavy—was dropping, and the tail rising higher and higher on the take-off! His control wheel was almost full back, yet the ship, instead of climbing off the ground normally when pulled up, was continuing level, rising only slightly at the increased speed! He snatched one hand from the control wheel and grabbed frantically for his stabilizer lever, pulling it back with a jerk of his arm. The nose became lighter; the T-10 lifted herself, slowly and painfully, and climbed. But the motors were running wide open and the control wheel was still almost full back in the pit of Phil's stomach! It required strength to hold it there; he knew that he could not maintain that position long!

If it had been a ship that he had flown before, and had grown accustomed to its "feel," Phil would have known that it was dangerously unbalanced several seconds before it left the ground. He could have cut his switches and let the big craft roll to a stop before the end of the runway was reached—or pile up in a mass of fragments when he hit the fence; at any rate, he wouldn't have needed to go into the air with it. He had been flying the same kind of ship, but bigger ones; he had never flown this one before. Every plane has a different feel to it, and until a pilot has had a minute or two to grow accustomed to the slight differences in the ship's reactions, he can't detect the variations in controllability.

So Phil did not realize that he had pulled his control wheel so far back. At low speeds the tail of an airplane is heavier than the nose, and you have to pick the tail up on the take-off; but when the ship gets a little speed the balance is all changed, and the nose gets heavy. Later, when full speed is attained, there is another change: the propeller's thrust and the peculiarities of the wing surface tend to make the plane tail heavy—hence the adjustable stabilizer.

AT a hundred feet, when he was well clear of telephone lines and buildings at the end of the field, Phil ceased climbing his ship and let it pick up full speed. The airspeed indicator showed one hundred and thirty at the end of a two-mile run, and the T-10 would fly level only when the control wheel was held back slightly. When he took his hands off the wheel the nose dropped at once.

With all the strength he had, Phil pulled the nose up again enough to climb, and in an agony of waiting watched the altimeter needle creep around the dial until it registered six thousand feet. He had time to think up there. He could ease forward on the wheel a little and rest his aching arms. But he could not understand what was wrong with the ship, and he could see no way out of his predicament. He could never land without a crash!

He knew—or thought he knew—that the ship had been in perfect condition when he began the take-off. He had seen that there was ballast in the tail—had seen par-

ticularly to that, for without ballast the T-10 would have been uncontrollable—just as it was now!

But from his cockpit Phil could tell little about the plane. He tried to look around and see if some part of the stabilizer had broken—some fitting that would tilt it up and make it lift the tail. But he could see nothing. . . . .

At six thousand feet, with plenty of altitude to recover the ship in case it went into a vertical dive when he cut the throttles, he gradually reduced the revs until the props were swinging over at fifteen-fifty. And as he did this the nose dropped sharply. He tried to force his stabilizer lever back a little farther, to get less lift under the tail, but the lever was as far back as it would go.

A crash, Phil knew, was inevitable! Even at full throttle the ship would not fly level without additional control. He could stay in the air until the gas-tanks ran dry—four hours—and then— He *had* to plan some means by which to counteract that nose-heaviness!

He gunned his motors to their last rev and climbed slowly. When he reached an altitude of eight thousand feet, he slipped out from under his wheel, releasing it, and stepped back into the aisleway back of the cockpit. The nose dropped until the plane was diving at an angle of about fifteen degrees. Phil walked with caution back along the aisleway, leaving the plane to fly itself. As his weight was shifted back, the nose came gradually up; when he was at the far end of the cabin the T-10 was flying level. The air, a mile and a half above the earth, was "smooth." There were no bumps to throw the wing down, and Phil stood for a moment at the rear of the passenger compartment, trying to plan a way out of his predicament.

If he had had a parachute he would have opened the door at his side and leaped out into space. That would have been easy. . . . . But he didn't—the passenger ships were not equipped with parachutes. He had to take that T-10 back to earth, and he had to land it, if possible, without crashing.

HE turned around, letting the ship take care of itself, and opened the door of the baggage compartment. On the floor were six sandbags, each containing fifty pounds of sand: he had started out light—had considered that enough weight to balance the ship. Normally it was, but now, if he wanted to save his life and the plane, he had to move that sand farther back in the tail.

Behind the baggage compartment, in the rear wall, was a small door, put there to make possible an inspection of the tail of the plane without removing part of the covering of the fuselage. Phil opened this door and looked back into the tail. He picked up a sandbag and lifted it through the small opening, lowered it carefully down upon a crossbrace in the tail of the ship. He had to put it on the crossbrace because the bottom of the tail was linen—it would not support the weight.

One at a time, and working swiftly but carefully, he laid each bag upon the cross-member. He shifted three hundred pounds of weight back two and a half feet. When he came out of the baggage compartment and looked forward at the nose of the plane he saw that it was climbing rapidly. He hurried up the aisleway and took his place at the controls. The ship was flying at nine thousand feet—it had climbed a thousand since the weight was shifted.

Again Phil began experimenting with his controls. He cut his motors' speed to sixteen hundred revs. The plane still flew level. He cut the revs to fifteen hundred; the nose dropped ever so slightly below the horizon. Phil cursed, and cut the throttles.

He had expected to be able to hold the plane in a glide with the motors idling, but he found that the "glide" was at one hundred and twenty miles an hour instead of seventy-five or eighty. With the control wheel full back, he couldn't slow her up! He slammed the throttles forward to cruising speed, and the nose came up.

He left the controls again and went back to the baggage compartment. There, reaching carefully through the small opening, he tried to shift the sandbags farther back. But he couldn't reach the next cross-brace—he would have to toss the bags! He hesitated for a moment, considering. If he missed his aim, the bags would go through the linen of the bottom like a rock dropped through a newspaper. Still, that was the only way.

He picked the first bag up and judged his aim. He swung it gently, then heaved it toward the cross-member and let go.

The bag struck squarely on the brace and rested there. Phil felt the nose lift slightly. Two or three more like that and he'd get down safely!

He picked the second one up, balanced it and swung. The bag missed the brace, crashed through the linen of the bottom and was gone! The nose swung down a little. Phil stopped for a moment. If he missed another one, he would be worse off than he was now! If he put the other four on that crossbrace he could get down safely.

He landed the third bag squarely, the fourth likewise. The fifth went through the linen—and the ship went into a shallow dive. Phil, frightened now for the first time since he had discovered this way out of his dilemma, ran up the aisleway and gunned his motors. The nose came up, and he went back to his work.

HE had to put that last bag on the crossbrace! He *had* to! He had lost a hundred pounds already. If he lost fifty more the ship would be more nose-heavy than when he took off! He reached through the hole and grasped the neck of the bag firmly.

For an agonizing minute he judged his distance, and the longer he waited the harder it was to judge his aim. He swung the bag. He started to drop it, but realized his aim was poor and clutched it tightly. He swung again, hard—and let it go. The bag struck the side of one already there, clung for a moment, slid forward, and plunged through the gaping hole left by the one that had gone before! The nose of the T-10 swung downward just a little more, then as Phil leaped forward along the aisleway to reach his controls, the T-10 went into a dive. He pulled back on the control column and forced the ship level.

For five minutes Warner sat behind his wheel and tried to think, but the thoughts that crowded into his mind were not pleasant: he had seen these ships crash before! He was stuck up in the nose of a plane that weighed four tons; there wasn't a way out of it except through one door at the rear of the passenger compartment. If she hit and burned—

He had heard of men, when the wings came off their planes in combat in France, who slammed their throttles up against the stop-peg and rode their mangled crates down to instant death rather than fight it out and prolong the agony of hoping. But Phil could not do that. He felt sure that he must die; but he had always known that sometime death would come to him. If the T-10 had shed her wings and there was no vestige of hope, perhaps he could; but now, though death seemed certain, he could not force himself to it.

If the flying-field had been large enough, Phil could have flown the T-10 to the earth and let it settle into the ground on its wheels—at one hundred and twenty-five miles an hour. It would have rolled a long distance at that speed, but he might have made it without crashing. He would have cracked up, perhaps, but without serious injuries to himself. . . . . But the flying-field was only half big enough for that—if he could have put the plane down skillfully enough to get it on the ground. It wouldn't work.

He decided, in the end, to stay in the air as long as possible, running out his gasoline until the plane became lighter. That meant three more hours in the air—three hours more of mental agony, knowing that a crash awaited him at the end.

AS the minutes passed Warner was able to assume a fatalistic attitude. As he circled helplessly over the field and looked down at it, he remembered that remarkable philosophical line of thought that some one had written to help pilots in France who had not developed their "ignorance" of fear. He himself had learned it there:

"If you fly straight,
There's no need to worry;
If you fly poorly,
Of two things one is certain:
Either you spin or you don't.
And if you don't spin,
There's no need to worry;
If you do spin,
Of two things one is certain:
Either you crash or you don't.
And if you don't crash,
There's no need to worry;
If you do crash,
Of two things one is certain:
Either you'll be hurt slightly or seriously.
And if you're hurt slightly,
There's no need to worry;
But if you're hurt seriously,
Of two things one is certain:
Either you'll recover or you'll die.
If you recover,
There's no need to worry;
And if you die, you *can't* worry!"

Phil said it over slowly, and then looked at his watch. He had been up nearly two hours; nearly half his gasoline was gone, and the ship was getting perceptibly lighter. In another hour and a half it would be light enough to try a landing.

The hour passed slowly. Phil circled the field at five hundred feet and watched the clock on the board in front of him. His

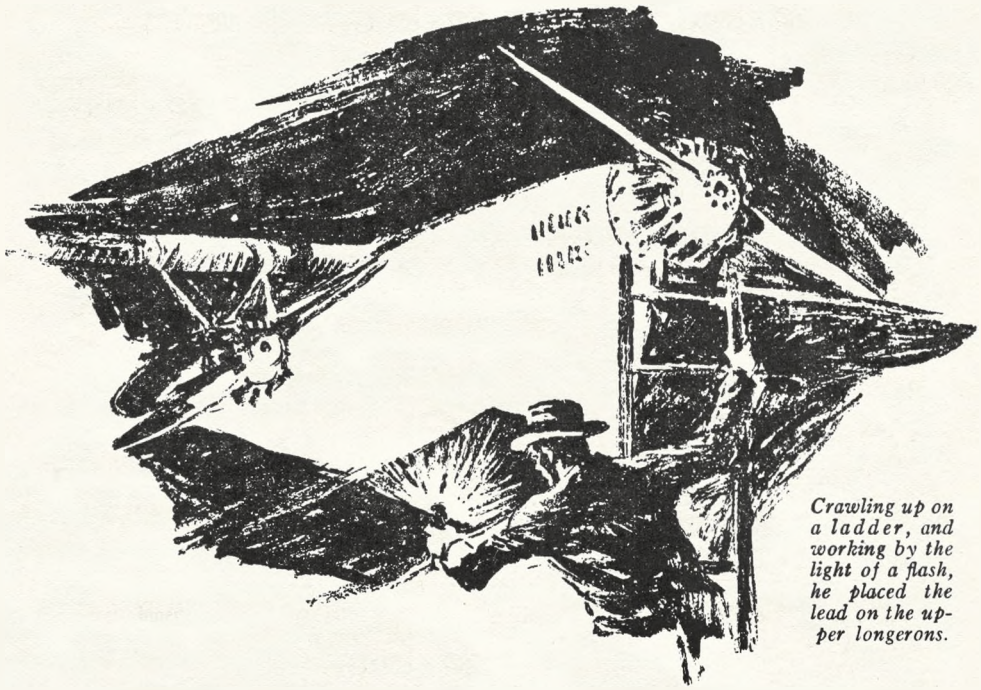
arms ached from holding the control wheel back.

As a kind of forlorn hope, a few minutes before the time for a landing came, he reached up above his head and pushed back all the windows of his cockpit. He shoved the side windows back likewise, and when that had been done he was sitting in his seat under an aluminum framework. At least, if the plane didn't burn, he wouldn't be butchered by splintered glass.

At thirty-four minutes after twelve by the clock on the dash, Phil pulled his throttles back and started toward the landing field. He *had* to make it now! If he waited until the motors died, the plane would dive in at a steep angle and smash into the ground at more than a hundred and twenty miles an hour.

THE T-10 from the ground, as it came in on the approach, looked almost like any other big monoplane of that type. It sank gradually from five hundred feet to fifty as it came in, holding straight for the runway. But to Burney and the mechanics at the field it was not like an ordinary ship. They had known, hours ago, when Phil turned back and began circling the field, that something was wrong. They knew that he *couldn't* get down, or he would have tried. After he had been up an hour, Burney jumped into a small single-motored biplane and went up to see if he could find out what the trouble was; but Phil's plane was running at wide-open throttle at the time, and Burney couldn't get within two hundred yards of him.

The T-10 came in fast—at more than a hundred miles an hour. It dived right to the ground and leveled off at three feet, the wheels seeming almost to touch the runway as it raced along. The motors suddenly stopped their roar and died—Phil had cut the switches—but the props continued to whirl from the pressure of the wind.



Crawling up on a ladder, and working by the light of a flash, he placed the lead on the upper longerons.

The instant Phil cut his switches the nose started down. It seemed to drop only a little before the wheels clipped the ground, almost lightly, it seemed, but actually with a vicious blow. The plane ricocheted into the air, and at fifty feet the nose started again to drop. This time there was no delay. It dropped down until the ship was in a gliding position, then steeper; and a fraction of a second later plowed into the ground and buried itself in a cloud of dust and smoke.

Almost before the ship—the wreckage of it—had stopped sliding, a stab of flame shot up from the forward motor. The flame was visible at the same instant that a thunderous report floated back to the ears of the frightened group by the hangar.

"My God!" Burney shouted frenziedly. "My God, *he's on fire!*" He broke into a

frantic run toward the wreck, the others following close behind him.

And Dale Hays, watching from a window of his office, turned back to his desk and sat down. He was pale, and shaken; but the troubled look that had been in his eyes for twenty-four hours was entirely gone.

He would have to recover the lead that night, he realized. There wasn't much danger of its being found, but it might be discovered when they hauled the wreckage back to the hangar.

CHAPTER V

WHEN Phil came slowly back to dull and painful consciousness he was lying in an emergency ward of a hospital. He had absolutely no recollection of any accident except the one in which he had put the pursuit plane down on the rocky hillside. He woke up gradually, as a patient coming out of ether, and at first he thought that the motor mount of the little plane had just broken while he was in the slow roll. In his semi-consciousness he felt again the sting of hot oil and water in his face.

Naturally he was surprised to find himself in bed, and not to know where he was or what had happened. Since he was alone he tried to reconstruct the events that had taken place just prior to his injury.

His mind was clear up until the time when he had started to dress that morning. He could remember putting on his clothes and getting ready to come to the flying-field; but beyond that his mind was absolutely devoid of memory. He remembered all the details of the crash the day before, and he remembered his determination to discover who was behind the manufacture of inferior planes. He even remembered Rand and Burney telling him that he was to go to El Paso—but he couldn't remember having taken off for that trip.

The whole thing seemed utterly preposterous, and yet it worried him. For it was acutely obvious that he *had* crashed something. His hands and face were swathed in bandages, and pained him; there was a dull ache in his right leg and another stabbing one somewhere in his back. He considered the probability of having crashed another airplane, and instantly realized the contingencies such an event could bring about—two serious accidents in quick succession. He was occupied in conjectures as Dorothy Rand and a nurse entered the room.

DOROTHY was small, and blonde; and there was a wistfulness about her as she stood there in the door and regarded the figure on the bed.

Phil did not see her until she had crossed the room and was standing by him, and when he did he was not quite positive that it was she. But he recognized her a moment later, and tried to smile—he couldn't because of the bandages. He managed a weak movement of his head, and clenched his teeth to keep from crying out at the pain that racked him.

"Oh, is he awake?" The nurse's words floated to his ears as from a distance. "Then we mustn't disturb him. I'll take care of him; you'll have to come back tomorrow."

Dorothy paid no attention to the nurse. She bent forward and laid her hand gently on Phil's shoulder. "Feeling better?" she asked softly. "You're going to be all right in just a little while."

Again Phil nodded—and paid for it. The nurse prevailed, and Dorothy left the room.

"Just what the hell happened to me?" he asked himself, when they had gone. "I'm certainly a sucker to get myself in a hospital in this shape and not know how it happened!" But he could not fathom it. He thought of asking the nurse for what meager information she could give him, but when she came back to his bedside she hushed him with a single word.

The next day Rand and Dick Burney came to see him, and told him the details of the almost fatal flight. He could not comprehend it. He could remember nothing of that day beyond dressing in the morning. For a long time he remained incredulous.

"Well, something happened!" Burney snorted at Phil's dubiosity. "You look like you'd been run through a meat-grinder and then fried! You know something happened, don't you?"

"Don't you recall about the trip to El Paso?" Rand asked. "Don't you remember Burney's telling you that you were to take a T-10 out on an inspection trip that day?"

"Yes," Phil replied with difficulty. "Yes, but I don't remember ever starting out. It's as blank as a wall to me."

"Don't recall being in the air at all?" Burney asked.

But Phil shook his head weakly. He could remember nothing.

"Don't worry about it," said Rand, after they had told him the details of the crash

and were ready to leave. "Don't think anything about it until you get so you can talk, at least. But you had a close call that time!"

"Close, was it?" Phil asked weakly.

BURNEY smiled. "You don't know the half of it! You were just about four feet from the skillet when we got there! You'd have been well browned in about thirty seconds more!"

They turned to go, but Phil made a feeble gesture with his hand to detain them longer. He could not get it all straight.

"If the wreck burned, how in God's name did I get out of there?"

"Thrown out!" exclaimed Burney. "I don't see how you made it through the glass of your cockpit without being cut to shreds, but when we found you you were lying in a heap a few feet from the bonfire and you had a necklace of window frames around your shoulders—you must have taken it all out with you!"

Phil sighed wearily. "What could have happened? Was it my fault, or the ship?" He asked the questions to himself rather than to Rand or Burney. It was strange to be talking about a crack-up that you were in and didn't even remember!

"No, Phil—hell, no; I know it wasn't!" Burley exclaimed. "I saw you come in on the glide and saw you level off doing about twice landing-speed, and I knew right then—had known it for four hours, after you came back over the field—that something was wrong. But Phil, you piled that T-10 up like a novice would have done it—you came in fast and let her hit and bounce and then go in on her nose, and on the face of it it looks just like a dumb stunt—poor piloting. What I'm worried about is satisfying the public—if we can't prove that you were not at fault, they wont have confidence in you—they wont want to ride behind you. A pilot's reputation is pretty well known to air-minded people of a community."

Phil was following Burney's words with keen interest. He looked up into the chief pilot's eyes, and he saw understanding in them. But he knew if he *had* crashed the ship without good cause he was done as a pilot for Rand—or nearly anybody else.

"You can't even remember being in the ship," Burney went on, "so you can't help me with any kind of an investigation. The thing we're up against is getting proof that something was wrong with the plane, and it's lots easier to assume that it wasn't than that it was, since that crate was nearly new. It went up in smoke like dry powder."

"If you don't find anything—what then?" Phil asked.

Burney shrugged. "I don't know. You know yourself that the pilot is to blame for three-fourths of all the airplane crashes—and the public is beginning to believe that—and to discount the old stall that something was wrong with the plane. Five years ago we could have announced that something went wrong—and we could have gotten away with it without much proof; but now we can't. The Department of Commerce inspector will come down here and look things over, and he'll talk to the reporters and give out his version of the accident. We've got to prove to him that you weren't at fault."

"You just forget this thing for a while and get well," Rand ordered. "Don't let it get started working on you. I'm not going to kick you off the force. Forget it."

RAND and Burney left the ward, but Phil continued to probe his memory for an inkling of what had happened during those tense minutes before the crash.

At last he gave up the struggle. "I can't get it," he thought dejectedly. "I can't make it all out! Dammit—I was just getting started with the company!"

No suspicion developed in his mind that his T-10 might have been tampered with. He could remember none of the characteristics of the ship during the hours in the air preceding the accident, and for that reason he had no idea of what might have been wrong. . . . .

The burns healed slowly. Phil's leg was badly bruised, but not fractured. On his third day in the hospital he asked the ward attendant for a wheel-chair, and when this was brought he climbed into it and had himself wheeled out upon the porch.

Dorothy Rand found him there that afternoon. She expressed her surprise and happiness that he was getting well so fast, and pushed his chair to one corner of the porch that afforded a slight amount of privacy; then she drew up a chair for herself and sat down. Phil had been trying to get a cigarette from a package in his lap, but his hands were all bandages, and he could not. Dorothy lighted one for him, and put it between his lips.

"Why, you're positively helpless!" she exclaimed. "What would you have done if I hadn't come?"

"Called the nurse," Phil replied, speaking out of the side of his mouth. "Nice of you to come, though. I get lonesome."

"I know you do," Dorothy said in quick sympathy. "A hospital is an awful place. I don't see how anybody ever gets well in one. But you'll be out soon, wont you?"

"Two more days." He was silent for a minute, studying the outline of his bandaged leg through the dressing-gown he wore. "Two more days—and then I'm going to find out what was wrong with that T-10!"

"Was a control broken, or something, Phil?" she asked. "What made you stay up so long before you tried to land? I've heard Father talking of it, but I couldn't understand very much—he doesn't know enough about airplanes to talk intelligently about them."

Phil shook his head. "All I've tried to do since I got here is to remember," he complained. "But I can't do it—it's all blank."

"But you've *got* to remember, Phil," Dorothy argued with grave concern. "You *must!* You've got to be able to tell what was the matter with that ship, because it might be something that would crash another one—full of passengers. Dick was talking to Dad about that this morning—he said there might have been some characteristic weakness in the plane that no one found when it was inspected."

PHIL considered this. "There might be something in that," he half agreed. "Anyway, I'd hate to think I crashed that bus just trying to land it."

"We all know you didn't," she assured him. "It's foolish even to think of that."

"What're people saying—I mean, out at the field?"

"Why, nothing—there's nothing they can say. The pilots are all worried, though, because they think maybe another ship'll go bad that way. But Dad has ordered a complete inspection of every one, and so far they haven't found anything that looks weak."

"Darn it, Dorothy, if I could only remember how it acted in the air I might figure it out—but I can't. . . . . Nobody thinks it's my fault at all?"

"Well—" Dorothy hesitated. "Phil, has Dale Hays got anything against you?"

"Not that I know of—why?"

"Last night," she went on candidly, "he tried to tell me that you were a crash pilot—that you couldn't fly now, and never could. He said he wouldn't tell that to anyone else, because he didn't want to hurt your reputation. But he was rather nasty about it—very confidential, and all that sort of thing. He seems to be sore because you crashed that new pursuit job that the factory just turned out."

"Oh,"—Phil smiled,—"Hays told you that, did he?" He studied her, and then went on, speaking in a lower tone: "Dorothy, may I ask you something personal?"

"It all depends," she told him archly. "I'm not going to give up any of my *great* secrets."

"Nothing like that," he assured her. "And before I start I want you to promise that you wont say a word of anything we talk about."

"Maybe," she laughed; but he knew that he could trust her.

"Do you think a lot of Hays?" he asked soberly, and he saw by her expression that the question had been needless.

"He bores me to death!" she declared. "I can't stand him!"

Phil grinned. "All right; now I'll ask a few more—not so personal. First, what do you know about him—if anything; and how much does your father know?"

"Why, I don't know a thing. Dad says he's an American ace, and that he made a wonderful record during the war, and since then he's been engaged in airplane manufacturing—or flying, or something in that line. I don't know anything else."

"Do you know where he worked before he came here?"

"Mexico, I think. He talks all the time about the Mexican señoritas he used to know down there. He never says much about what he did before that time. He's all right, I guess, but I get awfully tired of him." And she added, seriously: "Why do you want to know, Phil?"

"I want to know why he called me a crash pilot," he confessed; "and there are two or three other things I want to know, too. . . . . What about your father's factory out there—does Hays run it all by himself, or does your father watch things pretty closely?"

"I don't know anything about that, Phil. I should think Dad would know what's going on all the time. He has a lot of interests, and he's awfully busy; but it isn't like him to let anything get along without his help. He likes to get around and see what's happening."

Phil swung the bag gently, then let go. It struck squarely on the brace. Two or three more like that and he'd get down safely!

"You think he knows everything about the factory, then?" Phil wanted to be sure on this point.

"I suppose so, Phil, but I don't know. I don't know much about such things. Dad never tells me any of the details."

"You're sure you can keep all this a secret?" he asked again. "Later on I'll tell you all about it. Don't tell anyone."

She promised, and added: "I've got to go, Phil—it's almost dinner time. Dad thinks I never eat at home."

And Phil laughed: "If I were on my feet you wouldn't get to this evening!"

He watched her go, and then turned his thoughts again to the T-10 that had almost cost his life. But he was no nearer a solution of the mystery than he had been at any time since the accident occurred. And he was tired of thinking and wondering and trying to peer through the shroud of the enigma that surrounded him. He was weary physically. He wanted to rest, to get out of this damned hospital before he went crazy.

Yet his mind could not rest; it raced on and on, in cycles. And added to that worry was the possibility, since he had questioned Dorothy, that Rand was building death-traps knowingly. Phil didn't like to believe that, and he would not until it was proved.

CHAPTER VI

DURING the next twenty-four hours, while Phil sat in the sun on the porch and while he lay in bed, he did a great deal of deductive thinking. He assembled the battery of known facts at hand, and he considered every shred of evidence.

He had enough confidence in his ability to fly that he could or would not admit that his crash had been caused by anything but a fault somewhere in the plane, and for hours he tried to imagine what this fault might have been. It was a long time in occurring to him that it might not have been the result of a structural failure—that it might have been the result of some one's design to crash him; and even then he scouted the idea. He could see no motive, for he had no enemies at the field.

Yet, apparently, he did have an enemy!

He remembered Dorothy's telling him of Hays' accusation, and he wondered if Hays had learned of what he knew about the factory. But if he did, and if he considered this knowledge dangerous enough that he should try to kill Phil, why had he made this condemnation to one from whom it was sure to reach Rand, or others? That part Phil could not understand.

And working on that theory—that Hays did know that he knew of the shoddiness of the factory product—he looked for proof. But there was none. The ship had crashed and nothing had been learned from an examination of its debris. If Hays had had a hand in the crash, he had concealed himself uncannily.

At noon on the day following his talk with Dorothy, Phil had his ward attendant call Burney at the field and request that the chief pilot come to the hospital. Burney came, and with him came Shorty Cranner, the Department of Commerce inspector, who was at the flying field to investigate Phil's crash.

"Cranner's looked the whole thing over," Dick announced. "He can't find anything wrong with it."

The Inspector asked Phil some question about the accident. Phil laughed ironically.

"Fella, if I knew anything about that crash I wouldn't be sitting here talking to you about it!" he declared. "There've been forty guys in here trying to find out what I know. I don't know a thing—I'm just as ignorant of what happened as you are."

The Inspector sucked his teeth in meditation. "It certainly looks funny," he commented. "I've looked that wreck over from the magneto-points to the rudder-post, and there isn't a thing wrong with it. You got a tough break somewhere, Warner, or else you don't know how to fly—and Burney tells me you know enough about flying to last awhile. I can't see it."

"What are you going to broadcast around about what happened?" Phil inquired. "I guess you'll have to tell something—make a report of it."

"I wont 'broadcast' anything," Cranner promised. "I don't *know* anything. But I wish you could remember how she acted in the air—we might find out something if you could."

"Well, I can't," Phil declared again. "It's the craziest feeling I ever had—just a slice right out of my life—like I'd been dead for a few hours, and then woke up."

"If you learn anything, let me know," Cranner requested. "This is a peculiar case, and I want to keep up with the developments." He put on his hat and left.

BURNEY had taken no part in the conversation, aside from introducing Cranner and stating why he was there; but when the Inspector had gone, he turned to Phil.

"Did you see that editorial in this morning's paper?" he asked, and when Phil shook his head, he added: "Pouring it on—asking how an accident like that can happen, with airplanes advanced as they are now. If we don't dig something up soon this is going to hurt Rand's business!"

Phil nodded dispassionately. "I know it." And then: "Say, Dick, what do you know about Hays—out at the field?"

"Nothing," Burney confessed. "Never saw him until he came down here, but I've heard of him off and on ever since the war. I know three or four fellows who know him well, but I don't know anything about him except what's public knowledge. Why?"

"I just wondered. . . . . Dick, does Rand know anything about that airplane factory? Is he interested in it—that is, does he go over there and look things over frequently? In other words, does he know what's going on?"

Burney smiled. "I'll tell you, Phil, Rand doesn't know a cotter-key from a tail-skid! He hasn't the slightest idea of what it's all about. He watches costs and profits closer than a Chinese money-changer, and he insists on every department showing a profit; but he's a business-man; he trusts Hays and me to run the show."

Phil considered this, and nodded. And he thought: "I'm glad of that—I'm certainly glad of that!" Then, aloud: "Do you know anything about how Hays runs the factory?"

"Not a thing. I never go over there. I don't like the man personally, and I stay away from him."

"Number Two," thought Phil. "I'm glad of *that!*"

"What are you driving at?" Burney questioned.

"Nothing in particular—I like Rand, and wondered how he looked at these things. Hays made an impression on me, and I just thought I'd ask about him."

"You little sucker," Dick accused affectionately, "you're up to something! Now, come clean—what is it? You don't think Hays was back of that T-10 crash, do you?"

But Phil smiled blandly. "I'm up to something—that's right, Dick. But what I think is so far-fetched and so staggering to think about that I wouldn't even tell you what it is until I get proof to stand on. I may be all wrong—but I may be on the trail of something that'll be the biggest news you've heard in a long time. All I want you to do is keep still—don't mention this to anyone until I'm ready to let it out of the bag. I want to depend on your doing it."

"Sure, Phil; but you can trust me if you want to. I'd like to help."

"I know I can—but I don't want to prejudice you against anyone, and if I told you what I think, you would be. If you want to help me, get a key to the factory office, and get it here by tomorrow afternoon. . . . . And I'd rather that you wouldn't ask me any questions."

Burney laughed. "You are the darnedest guy for secrecy!" he complained.

PHIL was released from the hospital on the afternoon of the fifth day after the accident, and he spent that evening with Dorothy at her home.

He left her at ten-thirty, and drove slowly to the flying-field. He felt slightly weak from his experience in the hospital, and the burns on his arms had not entirely healed; but he had no injury that would prevent his returning to work the following day—"work" meaning that for the next few days he would sit in the office and exchange yarns with Burney.

At the flying-field he parked his car at one side of the road under a group of trees, and walked the hundred yards to the Rand factory. He was careful to avoid the watchman; and when he neared the office he was cautious and alert, making sure that no one was there already. He let himself in, and with a flashlight searched for the cost sheets of the materials. But he had not foreseen that these important records might be locked up, and he was chagrined when he found that everything of value to his investigation was probably in the huge safe in the corner of the office. He thought there was little chance that he would be able to learn the combination of the safe, since Hays and Rand were probably the only ones who knew it. He accepted defeat and returned to his apartment.

Next day Phil suggested to Burney that he would like to have this combination, if it were possible to procure it.

"First, you want the key, and now you want the combination!" Burney objected. "You're liable to get in trouble, Phil. If the watchman should see you in there prowling he might take a crack at you."

"Sure he might—if he sees me. Oh, I can take care of myself, Dick. And I'm not going to steal anything out of the safe!"

But Burney was reluctant. "In the first place, I don't know the combination," he protested. "I'd have to prowl a little myself to get it—in Rand's office."

"Well, I'm doing this for Rand as much as anybody," Phil declared. "I'm not out running around in the dark for pleasure!"

So Burney finally agreed, and when Rand was gone that afternoon he found the combination. He was stern when he delivered it to Phil.

"If I didn't trust you, Phil, I certainly wouldn't do this," he declared. "I expect you to use some judgment, and not get into trouble. I think you ought to tell me what you want to do, just in case something happens and you get caught opening that safe."

Phil recognized the value of this advice, but disregarded it. He didn't want to arouse Burney with any wild suppositions until he was prepared to back them up with facts.

"I'll watch my step," he promised; "and after it's all over I'll tell you about it." Despite Burney's urging he left it that way.

THAT night, approaching the office of the factory cautiously, he saw a light over Hays' desk; and when he came nearer he saw that Hays was there, working at something. He dared not come too close, but from a vantage-point behind one corner of the factory he saw that Hays was studying a ledger, and that the safe was open.

Phil thought of leaving, to try again another night; but it was only ten o'clock and he believed that Hays would finish and depart presently. The night was dark and the sky was overcast and threatening rain, but Phil waited, huddled there at the corner of the building trying to escape the chilling northeast wind.

Hays lingered long, sitting at his desk smoking one cigarette after another, studying the ledger in front of him. Apparently he was checking figures, for with a pencil he occasionally jotted something down upon a sheet of paper.

But at eleven forty-five he replaced the ledger in the safe and closed the door and

spun the dial; then he let himself out of the office and locked the door behind him. He was hardly out of hearing when Phil opened the door impatiently.

Phil had decided, while he stood outside watching Hays, not to risk examining the ledger at the office, but to return home for that task. Now, since Hays as yet was no great distance gone, Phil did not dare turn on the light; but he knelt in front of the safe and began working with the dial by the faint glow of his pocket torch. The safe opened without any trouble.

He went through one ledger after another until he found the one that contained the records of the cost of raw materials for the factory, and when he located this one he locked the safe and took the book quickly home with him.

There, in safety, he studied the ledger for three hours. He learned that every piece of material bought for the factory was supposedly of the highest grade, and that Rand was paying top prices. His suspicions were confirmed—provided he could go through the stock of materials at the factory; Hays was operating a graft that must run up into the thousands every year! And worse than that, he was building, under Rand's name—which so far was respected in the aircraft industry—airplanes that would kill their unsuspecting pilots just as certainly as they were put to any stress!

PHIL returned the ledger to the safe, and finally went to bed at four o'clock that morning. He awoke at ten and dressed quickly and hurried to the flying-field. Rand was not there, but Burney was—much agitated at Phil's absence.

"It's time you got here!" he ejaculated. "I thought maybe somebody put a bullet through you. Get what you wanted?"

"Part of it. I'm going over to the factory now."

And without waiting for the chief pilot's permission he started out. He was feeling better each day, although this morning he was a little weary from lack of sleep.

He walked unconcernedly into the factory through the same side door which he had used previously, and just as unconcernedly he started a casual inspection of the stores of reserve material kept on hand. He saw that the greater majority of this material was of third or fourth grade—inferior stuff; but he did find some that was of excellent quality, and worth the price that had been paid for it. He found that there was enough of this good material to build one or two complete airplanes,—the woodwork,—and he presumed that Hays kept it here for use in case some one might inspect his plant.

Phil had spent thirty-five or forty minutes in the factory, and he had satisfied himself that Hays was indeed the criminal he had suspected, when he heard Hays' voice behind him, and whirled about.

"Glad to see you up and around again," Hays greeted him. But then, in the same breath almost, as if he could not wait to say it: "After this don't come prowling around my factory without permission—you don't belong here."

"*Your* factory?" Phil watched Hays' eyes; he saw anger there, a wrath that the bigger man controlled with difficulty. He had the swift impression that he had seen Hays' eyes somewhere before—but where he could not remember. "I'm not snooping on you, Hays—I don't give a damn about your factory. I'm a Rand employee—why can't I come in here?"

"Rand has an order that nobody'll come inside this place without written permission," Hays countered. "I don't care whether you stay inside or outside—as far as I'm concerned; but I've got orders. You can't come in here."

"I'm here, anyhow!"

"You're going to get out, too—quick! Start moving!"

But Phil only laughed, insolently perhaps. He saw that Hays was shaking with anger—that Hays had no idea of why he was there, apparently. "I came in to look around, Hays," he replied quietly. "There're some things here I want to see."

When he saw Hays' quick blow start, he ducked, and countered.

CHAPTER VII

IT is an accepted fact that a good big man can whip a good little man in a physical encounter, but there may be exceptions. It was perfectly evident that both Hays and Phil were good men. They were well muscled, and carried themselves like athletes. But Hays was out of condition, soft, and almost flabby—fat in places. On the other hand, Phil had just returned from the hospital, and although he had been only slightly weakened by this experience, he was slow on his feet.

And Phil was small. He weighed one

hundred and fifty-five pounds with his clothes on. He was five feet seven inches tall—a small man. Hays was at least four inches taller and thirty pounds heavier.

Hays' sudden, lashing blow swished over Phil's head, and Phil snapped his right fist up and drove it into Hays' cheek; his left, following in a lightning-like one-two movement, he smashed into Hays' body. The bigger man, beginning the fight on the offensive, was suddenly in defense; he was rocked on his heels by the fury of Phil's blows, but he didn't go down under them—he was a big man. He jerked back in surprise and drew away. Phil followed, battering with his fists at Hays' body; but the bigger man continued to retreat, and the blows were rendered less effective than if they had found their target when he was stationary, or rushing in.

Hays was no match for Phil in fighting skill, although he was a big man. He let Phil rush him, and with his longer reach and greater height he warded off most of the slashing blows that were hurled at him. And occasionally, despite Phil's ability in defense, Hays drove through with a staggering blow.

A workman, seeing the battle, yelled at the other men in the building, and dropped his tools and hurried to the scene. In a few moments a circle of men had formed around the antagonists, but they did not interfere. They gave ground silently as Hays retreated.

The two men fought in silence, panting brokenly or grunting in surprise or pain when a fist smashed into them. They struggled savagely, moving slowly from the location where the fight had started to one end of the building, then out toward the doorway. There, in retreating, Hays fell backward over an airplane dolly. He crashed down, overturning the dolly and sprawling on the floor.

But he was up again in an instant and into the fight. He still let Phil rush him, and backed slowly away, careful always lest he find himself pocketed in a corner and at a disadvantage.

Before Phil had any intention of calling "Clear!" Hays twisted the crank, and the motor started. Phil jumped.

FOR five minutes they fought savagely before either began to feel the fatigue resultant of their efforts. Phil, being the smaller and having been constantly on the aggressive, tired first. He knew that the fight was lost—unless by strategy he could overcome his handicap in size.

As Phil tired, Hays pushed in, eager, now, to end the fray. He feinted, and Phil followed; and then Hays crashed his fist into Phil's mouth with a thudding blow that was audible almost over the entire building. And Phil went down. . . . .

But Phil had been thinking and planning long before that blow was struck. When Hays feinted, he followed; he saw Hays' blow coming, and he turned his head and rolled the fist off. The impact of flesh on flesh was loud in noise, but little damaging, and Phil fell to one knee of his own accord rather than from necessity.

As he had expected, Hays immediately charged forward for the final smashing blow. Phil waited, and when the big man was almost upon him he came up from his kneeling position with all the drive that was left in his legs. He lunged in and got past Hays' guard, and before the bigger man realized the trap he had sprung, Phil struck viciously four times. Hays went down—involuntarily.

"Get—up!" Phil panted. "You—wanted a fight—get up and take it!"

Hays tried. He struggled to his knees, and knelt there, his hands upon the floor in front of him, his head down. For a time he seemed willing neither to give up the battle nor to renew it; he waited, regaining his energy. So Phil, watching him distrustfully, leaned against the wall and waited too.

Hays came up like a ricocheting bullet. His move was precipitate and without warning. But Phil was prepared for some such action, and when Hays lunged forward Phil met him with a crashing blow that stopped the bigger man's assault with completeness and finality. Hays went down—and didn't get up.

FOR several seconds Phil stood there regarding the fallen figure on the floor, and then he turned and strode through the lane of men and down the line of hangars toward Burney's office. His first thought was to expose Hays immediately, but before he reached the office a new angle of the affair occurred to him. Hays' quick anger and his inability to control it recalled to his mind another circumstance three years ago, when he had seen a man act very much as Hays had acted. There was something vaguely haunting in his mind—some dim connection between the two scenes, but he could not discover what it was.

He decided that it would be unwise to disclose Hays' activities just yet. He had found nothing to prove that Hays was to blame for the crash of the T-10. He was positive in his suspicion Hays had "fixed" the ship, yet this belief was based upon a half a dozen almost intangible things that he had seen or heard during the past week, and no single one of these things was in itself fully credible. He had to get positive proof, and if Hays were exposed and arrested—or fled the country—Phil might never get it! The thing that mattered was not in punishing Hays, especially, but in stopping the production of inferior planes.

So instead of proceeding immediately to Rand or Burney, Phil stopped in the hangar where the wreckage of his T-10 lay. He had found no time to examine it as yet, and he clung to a forlorn hope that the charred ruins might disclose something upon which to base a claim, at least, that the accident had not been his fault.

He found the heaped-up and mangled wreck in one corner of the hangar, and for a minute he stood there in awe of it. He could not understand how he had lived through a crash like that; he thought about the fire that had followed, and he felt his still tender, healing burns. He was not a squeamish man, but the thought almost sickened him.

Presently he examined the wreckage more closely, working his way into the tangled mass of twisted, fire-scarred metal. He stepped from one point to another, fascinated by the evidences of the narrowness of his escape.

He found himself standing behind the nose motor of the plane after five minutes, and he kicked at a crusted piece of aluminum that had failed to melt down in the fire. He picked this up to examine it. While he was stooped over he saw a fine steel wire that circled the upper longeron, but at first this had no significance for him. However when he saw another and still a third, he twisted one off and held it up in better light, and what he saw on the twisted splice startled him. There was a little globule of lead clinging to it at the splice! Phil knew that no such wire was necessary in an airplane—he knew that something—lead, perhaps—had been tied inside that wire!

Feverishly he started digging toward the bottom of the wreckage, tossing broken fittings out of the way, tearing at the mass with his bare hands in his haste to find that which he sought. He looked for perhaps five minutes before he found any of it—the melted aluminum of the nose motor. But when he did come across a small, shapeless slug of it, it was aluminum—there was no lead fused with it or sticking to it.

He did not quit his search, however. Rather, he renewed it with increasing vigor. He moved nearly the whole of the debris—what parts were not too heavy—shoving and lifting with frantic energy. Now he had something on which to base his argument that the ship had been "fixed" for him to crash! Now he knew that he had not been at fault. . . . .

He had spent more time in the hangar than he suspected, and when he reached Burney's office again it was eleven-thirty. Burney was not there, but Rand greeted Phil, a telegram in his hand. He was agitated, and he seemed unable to decide just what to do. Before Phil had time to speak, Rand handed him the message:

DRYDEN TEXAS JANUARY 22 1929
THEODORE RAND RAND AIRLINES
SAN ANTONIO TEXAS
RIGHT WHEEL BRAKE SHOE LOCKED IN LANDING AND GROUNDLOOPED SHIP STOP BROKE BRAKE DRUM AND SHOE STOP CANNOT PROCEED WITHOUT THOSE PARTS STOP FOURTEEN PASSENGERS ON SPECIAL TOUR FRANTIC TO GET AWAY
PETE SLOCUM PILOT

"That's the second case like that in two weeks," Rand pointed out. "I'm going to stop that! There's something wrong with that brake system, Warner. I'm going to send Hays out there to find out—since Andrews is sick you'll have to go along. You can bring the ship back and he can go on with Slocum and find out what's the trouble with those brakes."

"With *Hays?*" Phil ejaculated, and he started to tell Rand what he knew of Hays—he had no desire to ride two hundred and twenty miles in the same airplane with the man.

But Rand interrupted him brusquely, with finality.

"Get your flying-clothes and get out to the ship!" he ordered—then called Hays. . . . . "Rand speaking. You're to go to Dryden—Pete Slocum's held up there with a chartered plane bound for the West Coast. You join him at Dryden and make a study of the braking system on that ship—there's been a lot of trouble with that kind of brakes lately."

"What about the ship I take out there?" Phil could hear him ask.

"You're to take Warner out with you and he'll bring the plane back. Get a new brake shoe and a brake drum and anything else you think Slocum'll need for the ship, and get ready to go. They're waiting on you."

There was a tense silence. Finally Hays replied: "I'll meet Warner at the ship—which one shall I take?"

Rand told him, and hung up.

HAYS' face was not badly bruised as the result of his fight with Phil, but his body was a mass of sore spots. He didn't feel like going to Dryden, but he couldn't very well refuse to obey a direct order.

He walked out to his car, a short distance from the office, and got a thirty-two automatic pistol from the pocket of one door, and he inspected the gun to see that there were cartridges in it before he put it in his pocket. After that he set about getting together the things he meant to take with him; and at twenty minutes after twelve he was ready to go. He stowed away the spare parts in the baggage compartment of the little ship—a small, single-motored biplane—and climbed into the cockpit to wait for Warner.

This ship had no self-starter and it was necessary to crank the motor by swinging the propeller through while the pilot, in the cockpit, worked the "booster" magneto to make the motor start.

When Phil arrived, Hays called: "Pull the prop through for me, please."

Phil nodded, wondering at Hays' cordiality, and asked, "Switch off?"

"Switch off; gas on; throttle closed," Hays affirmed.

Phil pulled the propeller around a time or two and balanced it on compression, poising himself to swing it through, and called: "Contact; booster on 'Clear'!"—and Hays repeated the words.

Phil started to swing the prop down, putting all the drive he had into the movement. Before the prop had started to pick up speed, long before he had any intention of calling "Clear!" he heard a slight buzzing of the booster as Hays twisted the crank!

The prop kicked over viciously and the motor started just as Phil let go his hold upon it. He jumped back hastily, but not quickly enough, and the sharp blade caught the bag of his trousers at the knee and tore the cloth away as the metal flicked the kneecap. Phil looked up quickly—in time to see Hays jerk his head back behind the windshield.

To the casual observer the fault would have seemed with Phil for not getting away from the propeller quicker; no one, standing a hundred feet away, would have laid the blame on Hays. They would have said

the motor started quickly, and that Phil was still grasping the blade when it started. Even the line flunky did not grasp the significance of the "accident"—he had not heard the buzz of the booster.

But Phil had, and he knew instantly that Hays had attempted deliberately to kill him! He had seen men's heads bashed in like eggshells by whirling propellers. The method was quite effective; it just hadn't worked—this time! He cursed silently and strode around the wing-tip to the cockpit. He glared up over the cowling of the fuselage and yelled to Hays above the staccato cluck of the warming motor.

"Better luck next time, Hays!" And he added, as an afterthought: "Why don't you get a gun? I'm hard to kill!"

Hays' face blanched. "Get in that cockpit!" he shouted. And without waiting for Phil to get all the way in he released his brakes, swung around in a cloud of dust and took off with a cold motor.

CHAPTER VIII

THE two men started out at twelve-thirty. Phil had seen a weather forecast for the following day, and he knew that a change was due; but he did not know exactly what this change was to be. As the ship bore westward, he noted the fingers of high, lacy clouds that were pushing rapidly in from the northwest—the undeniable signs of heavy clouds and rain and probable fog on the day or two days following. He thought about the time he might have to spend in a two-by-four town in the hill country with two soldiers for company, if they ran into weather so bad that the return trip could not be made that day. But two soldiers would be better company than no companionship at all.

He wondered, grimly, if Hays had welcomed this chance to take him off into the hill country to the west. If he wanted to kill a man, there was the place to do it! It occurred to him that Hays might shoot him in the back while they were in the air, though he had some slight reassurance from the fact that there would be no way for Hays to dispose of him after he was dead. But he buckled his safety-belt a little tighter, and after that, when he felt Hays adjust himself in the rear cockpit, the back of his neck prickled sharply. . . . .

The T-10 was repaired and ready to go by four o'clock in the afternoon, and Slocum piled his fourteen passengers into the cabin.

Hays had mentioned the fact that Rand wanted him to complete the trip with the big-ship pilot, but at that time Slocum was being harassed by four old ladies who wanted very much to get to Los Angeles, and he hadn't paid much attention. Now, when Hays started to get into the plane, Slocum refused to let him.

"I've got me enough grief with this damn' airplane now!" he vociferated. "I gotta have a mechanic along—and I got the best one in Texas. There isn't an extra seat in the whole bus, and there isn't standin' room in the aisle."

"I'm going—by Rand's orders," Hays reminded him. "You'll have to leave your mechanic here."

"I *will* not!" Slocum denied. "My mechanic goes with me—Rand's orders or no orders. I'm the pilot of this ship, and I'm the boss of it, understand me there."

It seemed to Phil that Hays was not arguing very forcefully.

"You mean you're refusing to obey Rand's orders?" the factory manager asked.

"I'm not refusin' anythin', Hays—I'm just tellin' you. Rand sent me out with a load of passengers, and this isn't any time to run a service test on a set of brakes. I'm supposed to get these people to Frisco."

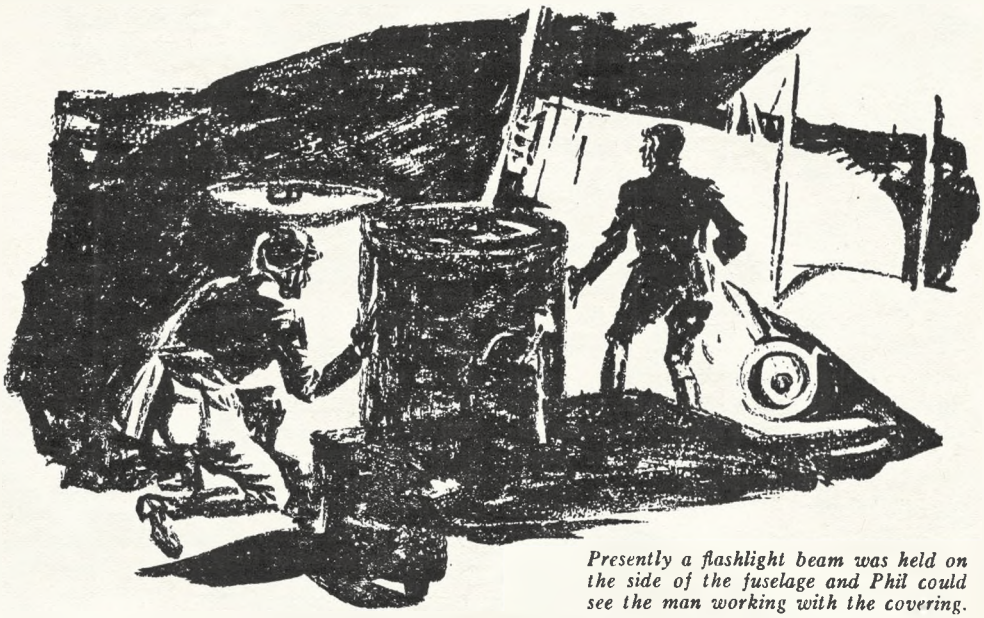
Hays shrugged. "All right—go ahead." He didn't seem very sorry.

So Slocum climbed into his cockpit and took off with a rush. He would gain almost an hour's daylight between Dryden and El Paso, and he was favored with a strong southeast wind, so he could push on through. But Phil and Hays had two hundred and twenty miles to go into the wind, losing daylight all the time. And they were flying in an airplane that would cruise at ninety miles an hour instead of a hundred and twenty. So Hays decided to stay in Dryden rather than attempt to come in the last fifty miles in the dark—the last fifty miles were over bad country if they flew an air-line course, and if they veered south and followed the railroad the way would be longer.

Phil did not argue. He believed that bad weather would hamper them or keep them on the ground, tomorrow; and if taking off had been left to his judgment he would have started back. As it was, however, he held his tongue. With the help of the two army mechanics he and Hays rolled the little ship into the lone hangar, then walked

the fifty yards to where the sergeant's quarters were. The soldier offered them beds for the night, and Phil accepted gladly; Hays, however, curtly announced that he would spend the night in the little town two miles away. One of the soldiers took him in, in a rattle-trap car.

The sergeant prepared a meal while his companion was gone, and when the man returned the three sat down to dinner. Phil was jumpy, nervous; his mind wandered continually to Hays.



Presently a flashlight beam was held on the side of the fuselage and Phil could see the man working with the covering.

"Anybody ever steal anything out of the hangar?" he asked his companions abruptly.

"Nope," said the private soldier. "Nothin' in it most the year round. Gotta watch that gasoline shed, though! Fellers come through here and try t' chisel high-test gas off'm us. They's a geologist works around here that likes to do that now and then; we had a crate crack up not long ago, and this guy wanted to get the altimeter off'm us to put on his car. Seems like he had to know the height of the ground where he was drivin'! He run around over the country lookin' fer oil."

"Slim give it to him, too!" the sergeant said. "Then 'long about two weeks later the inspector come out here checking up on property, and he missed that altimeter! Real sudden Slim took to looking for that guy that had it. Run him all over these hills out here!" He slapped the table-top in mirth. "Gosh, but that was funny! Slim thought he had bought him a G. I. altimeter, retail price."

"You don't keep the hangar locked at all?" Phil asked presently.

"Naw," the sergeant replied. "No need to. We're right here—everything's safe enough. Why? You worried about your ship?"

"Just wondered," said Phil. "I like to know everything's all right." He turned the conversation into other channels.

The meal finished, the three men played cards until nine o'clock; then the soldiers excused themselves and turned into bed. Phil explained that he was not sleepy, and announced his intention of walking in toward town.

"I'll try not to disturb you," he told them. "I'll just find my way inside when I come back. Don't bother to leave a light burning for me."

"Couldn't sleep with a light on," the sergeant said. "There's a switch on the wall by the door, there, and you can turn it on when you come in."

Phil stepped outside and walked a short distance down the road, his shoes crunching in the gravel. Abruptly he stopped. There was no sound except the soft sighing of the wind through the sagebrush near the road. It was impenetrably dark, and overhead the soft black fleece dripped fine mist settled clammily to his face. Quickly he retraced his steps.

He walked without noise now, stepping

softly on the balls of his feet. The light in the soldiers' quarters winked out as he passed, and the inky blackness settled down around him. He neared the hangar slowly, and paused to listen. Still there was no sound. He walked slower now, with infinite patience, and rounded the corner of the hangar. Again he paused to listen, guarding his breathing so that he might hear. When he was satisfied that no one was in the building he walked past the airplane and sought a far corner of the place. After a short search he found two empty gas drums and gently shoved them together, then crouched as comfortably as possible behind them. He was dressed in a heavy flying-suit and did not at first mind the cold dampness in the air.

THE minutes passed with unutterable slowness, dragging endlessly one after the other on the luminous dial of Phil's wrist-watch. At midnight, cramped and stiff, he stood up behind his barrels and stretched. He considered giving up his vigil, thinking perhaps he had been mistaken, but the knowledge that Hays had twice tried to kill him in the past gave him patience born of desperation. He was following a hunch, in coming here; he would wait all night if necessary.

The east wind continued throughout the night, whining eerily around the corner of the hangar. It was lonesome there, and the nervous strain of listening without making a sound was telling on Phil. A wolf mourned to its mate somewhere off in the southeast, and a pack of rancher's dogs replied. The air was sodden with wet gloom outside, and the chill dampness reached through Phil's clothes with icy fingers. His ears and eyes were attuned to catch the slightest sound or the faintest light; he could almost see through the black curtain, it seemed to him, yet when he held his gloved hand up before his face he could not distinguish it against the blackness of the background.

At two o'clock he thought he heard a sound. At first it was unintelligible, but later, as he listened, he was sure he heard the light grinding of gravel on the highway east of him. He held his breath in his excitement, and waited.

The footsteps drew slowly nearer, cautiously, stopping now and then, and then advancing. They left the road and struck out across the damp softness of the ground beside the soldiers' quarters, then reached the side of the hangar. They were fainter now, and Phil strained his ears to hear them. They proceeded to the corner of the building, came slowly inside.

Then, following a long silence, came the sound of a man's hand fumbling over the soggy fabric of the plane's wing. Phil crouched lower, shrinking himself behind the barrels and against the wall. He could see out between the two empty drums—if only there was something to see! The blackness hid whoever might be prowling near the plane.

Presently a flashlight flicked on, and the infinitesimal sound of the button on the torch seemed to crash through the silence of the building. A thin beam of light was held upon the side of the fuselage of the ship, and Phil could see the man's hand working with the fastenings of the cover. The owner of the hand was obliterated in the blackness.

The opening used ordinarily for inspection of the plane was revealed, and the flashlight and the hand and the man's head disappeared into this hole. Following that there came the thin squeaking rasp of a file at work. This continued for ten minutes, cautiously, the operator stopping now and again to listen, to pull his head from the hole and look around. Then the job was finished, evidently. He stopped his work now and, less cautiously than before, swung the beam of light around the hangar. Phil ducked his head just in time.

The intruder replaced the inspection cover and slipped noiselessly from the hangar. He made scarcely any sound until he reached the roadway, and then Phil heard his shoes crunching away into the distance, upon the gravel.

AFTER fifteen minutes' waiting, to make sure the man would not come back, Phil left his concealment and unlaced the inspection cover. He struck a soggy match and examined the inside of the ship. For a minute he could not find anything that had been cut, but presently he saw the "walking-beam," and upon it was a deep slit. Instead of a file, a hacksaw had been used—the beam was cut almost through! And the walking-beam of an airplane is vitally important, for it serves to connect, through cables, the control-stick* in the pilot's cockpit with the flippers on the tail. Thus the walking-beam is subjected to great strain during the landing of a plane, or when the ship is in almost any extreme

maneuver; breakage of the beam robs the pilot of all longitudinal control.

"He'll be sick in the morning!" Phil muttered to the night. "I'm to take this bus home alone! I will—oh, *certainly* I will!"

He hurried to the soldiers' quarters and aroused the sergeant. Briefly he explained the situation, and asked if the army had any welding equipment at the field. The soldier got up and dressed sleepily, went out into the hangar, and helped Phil connect the torch lines to the tanks of hydrogen and oxygen. For thirty minutes they worked. When they had finished they believed the walking-beam was as strong as ever.

They went back into the barracks, but Phil did not sleep. He talked to the sergeant earnestly for an hour; when daylight came they had breakfast, then the two soldiers went to town. An hour later they came back with Hays—a mean Hays now. The sergeant handed Phil a pistol.

"He pulled this on us!" he exclaimed. "I thought he was going to use it. He said he was sick, all right."

"He'll be sick, when we get back to San Antonio!" Phil snapped. And then to Hays: "Wont you?"

Dale Hays was surly. He did not reply. When Phil covered him with the gun and told him to climb into the airplane he was white and shaking.

"I'm sick, I tell you! I can't fly today! I didn't sleep a bit last night—ate something that made me sick!" he snarled. "Warner, you've got to fly that plane home. I'll come back later, with one of the transports. I tell you, I'm *sick!*"

"No doubt of that!" Phil said acidly. "Get into that cockpit!" He waved the gun at Hays, and Hays obeyed. The motor was started and Phil climbed in. "Now take me to San Antone!"

Phil didn't tell Hays that he knew about the walking-beam, or that he had fixed it. Hays thought the ship was unsafe; he was almost hysterical with fear. But he pulled himself together enough to taxy down the field and head into the wind. When he got that far, Phil thought he was going to collapse; he threw up his hands and begged to get out of the plane. He reiterated his declaration that he was sick.

Phil leveled the pistol on him and barked: "You'll *be* sick if you don't get into the air in ten seconds! This gun'll go off, sure as hell!"

And Hays, to his credit or discredit, pushed the throttle forward and raised the tail on the take-off. He got the ship into the air and headed east.

CHAPTER IX

JUST as Phil had expected, the sky was heavy with clouds that morning. Before they took off, a dribbling rain commenced. The clouds sank lower; visibility was poor.

Flying conditions were still passable, but Phil, from his experience in Texas flying, would never have taken off except for the need to act while he had the advantage of Hays.

East of Dryden—one hundred and eighty miles west of San Antonio—is the Devil's River country. It's bad flying over it at any altitude, and under low clouds it becomes a matter of dodging jutting hills and jagged peaks. A landing there is as impossible as it would be on one of the ridges of the Tetons; if the motor fails, you can count on a crack-up, and a nasty one. And fog—if you get caught in the Devil's River country in fog you have one chance in a hundred!

Hays started out from Dryden on an air-line course for home. He had a hundred feet over the highest hill near Dryden, and settled down to ride his motor in to San Antonio, hoping and praying that the walking-beam would stay together until he got there. He did not know how to take the turn of events that had befallen him; he was so frightened that he handled the controls as in a palsy; he expected any second to feel the walking-beam go out, leaving the ship helpless in the air above those gaping hills.

Phil was frightened too. He had never ridden with Hays until the day before, and because of his enmity for the man, he had little respect for Hays' flying ability. He had forced himself to put Hays in the air this morning; personally he would rather have been on the ground—*anywhere.* But he had planned this all last night; it was his one hope of wringing from Hays an admission of several facts of the past that were totally unknown to him. He had thrown everything into the balance in taking this step. He didn't have any intention of backing down now. It would be as well to die in a crash in the hills as it would by Hays' hand!

He sat in the front cockpit and tried to think of some philosophy that would relieve

his mind from worry about the motor quitting. He wasn't altogether successful; he couldn't be when he thought about Hays ramming the plane's nose into a hill or a mountain—if that happened he would get the motor back in his lap! Yet there was consolation of a sort in knowing that he wouldn't be aware of it when it happened!

As the ship bore into the hill country the clouds came down. Actually the level of the land went up and the clouds remained the same, but the net result, when Hays had been flying thirty minutes, was that the tops of the hills were buried in the fog; the valleys only remained in view. A pilot who has ever flown over hill country knows what that means.

Hays had pushed his ship beyond the river and over the highest ridge when the clouds came down. And when they did, they didn't hesitate about it; they dropped, within a mile of flight, from a hundred feet to ten, and the world was cut off from sight as effectively as if it had suddenly turned black night. Hays was flying in a little valley at the time. He knew that ahead of him there was another ridge; he knew that he had just passed the highest ridge in the scrubby range. He was in a pocket—the lowest point within ten miles—and the fog was down upon the ground right where he was! He had to go up or he would hit a hill!

And he had to go up, he thought, into a thick fog with a walking-beam that he himself had cut almost in two with a hacksaw! For a minute he thought he couldn't do it, he didn't have the nerve; but the ugly muzzle of his gun in Phil's hand made him change his mind.

He gunned the motor up two hundred revs and pulled back on his stick gently until the ship was climbing very slowly. The ground disappeared almost instantly; the wet, gray clouds enveloped the plane so closely that neither of the men could see ten feet beyond its wing-tips. Hays sat tense and rigid in the cockpit watching his altimeter and his compass and his airspeed meter. The tiny needle on his airspeed returned to normal climbing speed. The altimeter needle crept upward and showed three thousand feet while Hays flew through an infinity of time and agony. But since the altimeter was set to read zero at San Antonio Hays knew that the ship was only fifteen hundred feet above the ground.

He continued to climb, hoping to get out of the thick clouds and into bright sunshine above. If he could, he might be able to fly into San Antonio by compass. But he was shaking; in his mind was a horrible fear; he thought that one jerk, one rough movement of his stick would break the walking-beam behind him.

The sticky, wet mass around the plane did not decrease as Hays climbed. If anything, the clouds became thicker. Hays looked upward from time to time, hoping to see the area above him become lighter as he neared clear air; but the dark gloom of the wet blanket wrapped about the ship remained the same.

AT six thousand feet by the altimeter—forty-five hundred above the ground below them—Hays pulled the plane into too steep a climb and let the speed get low. He was not conscious of doing this; his "feel" of the plane was poor because of his tenseness on the controls; he was all nerves.

Phil, in the front cockpit without any instruments, felt the stall coming and started to take the spare control-stick from its rack on the wall of the fuselage and fit it in its socket—to take control if Hays spun the plane; but before he could do it he felt the ship whip off and plunge downward in mad gyrations!

Phil did not put his stick in the socket now, because to do it would interfere with Hays' effort to stop the spin and pull the nose up. He sat in the front seat and hoped; that was all he could do. The ship stopped turning presently and Hays snapped the nose up. He forgot the walking-beam, in his panic, and jerked the stick back with a vicious pull. It was all over just like that, but both men realized the narrowness of their escape. If the ship had "fallen off" at five hundred feet above the ground they would have crashed!

Hays, crazy with fear now, started climbing again after straightening the plane out upon its compass course. His altimeter told him that he had lost a thousand feet in the spin. Another time or two like that— He was so rigid on the controls that he had lost all semblance of his feel of the ship; he was impelled with a goading desire to hurry—to get into clear air where he could see the horizon and know what he was doing.

To put it mildly, Phil was frightened. He regretted having tried to trap Hays; he wished that he could go back down to Dryden and sit there until better weather. But he did not give up hope of carrying out

"Get into that cockpit!" Phil waved the gun at Hays--and Hays obeyed.

his purpose; he believed that Hays would eventually get himself into such a position that he would give up—from fear. When that happened Phil would have his chance.

Phil was tempted, each time he felt the plane waver in its climb and seem to pause before falling into another spin, to take the controls from Hays—forcibly if necessary. But he knew that Hays would have given them up gladly, and he wanted Hays to fly the ship as long as possible—to think about the walking-beam! Still, Phil knew if he waited until a time of an emergency to take the controls he might crash the ship. Two men flying one airplane have caused more than one crack-up.

The little plane climbed up again to six thousand feet before Hays let it wabble off and spin the second time. He got it out after some five turns, but he was so frantic with fright that he was violent on the controls. He kicked his rudder and snapped the stick forward and then back with a whiplike motion that racked the plane.

And as he did, Phil felt something break!

The plane shuddered for an instant and then went into a steep climb from its excess speed generated in the dive. It swooped up into the thick mat of fog. A wing dropped slightly, then more. The nose whipped downward and the ship went into a steep dive; and although Hays yanked his stick full back against his stomach the plane dived on! The wires shrieked as the speed increased.

"Controls broken!" Hays screamed to Phil in frenzy: *"Controls broken!"*

Phil cursed in horror. The thing that Hays had hoped would happen—while he was safely on the ground in Dryden—had occurred. But Hays was trapped too!

Phil turned around and nodded soberly. This was not Hays' doing; this was Fate. Phil seemed as in a dream; time passed in dragging seconds, his mind working furiously. He tapped his head with his forefinger to indicate to Hays to "get off" the controls and let him have the plane. At the same time he dropped the pistol to the floor and grabbed the control stick from its bracket and thrust it down into the socket in the floor of the cockpit. Then, slamming the throttle forward to the peg and feeling the ship out cautiously, he pulled back on his stick. Nothing happened! The stick came back into his stomach as it had with Hays—but the plane dived on, screaming at the blot of fog that enveloped it completely.

THERE was no altimeter in the front cockpit, therefore Phil had no way of knowing how far the ship had fallen—or how many seconds remained for him to right it. He knew they had lost two or three thousand feet in the two spins when Hays had the controls, but since he had not known how high they were when the plane spun the first time, he was afraid that they would plunge into a rocky hillside at any moment.

The ship was equipped with a movable horizontal stabilizer similar to the one on the T-10 that Phil had crashed, and, fortunately, there was a control wheel for its

use from either cockpit. Phil grabbed this wheel and turned it madly backward.

And slowly, almost unknown to him at first, the nose came up as the stabilizer depressed the tail. The screaming of the wires gradually subsided. The plane appeared to assume a level position, although Phil could not tell whether this was actually the case or not because of the fog. The whistling of the wind died down until it barely sighed through the wires. The motor beat its pulsations at the film of mist that was sucked back through the whirling propeller. The nose came up and the plane climbed. Suddenly it stalled, and Phil rolled the stabilizer wheel forward quickly to regain the level position. Then, easing back his throttle gently, he slowed his motor to cruising speed.

He tried to discover what about the plane had broken. The ailerons on the wings would still work; the rudder functioned satisfactorily; the flippers, however, were useless. A cable might have snapped, Phil thought, but when he looked down along the fuselage he saw that the cables had not broken. He checked everything that he could see. It finally resolved itself to one thing—the walking-beam! The weld, apparently, had cracked!

And although Phil had succeeded in pulling the plane out of the dive and back to a level position in the fog, the situation was hardly better now than before. There was no compass in the front cockpit; he had little or no idea of which way the ship was flying; he knew he must get down on the ground—and quickly -or the plane might spin again.

But he discovered, after a few moments of experimentation, that the ship was fairly manageable with the stabilizer and the portion of the controls that were still intact. If Hays could direct him by the compass in the rear seat, they might get home. He turned around and shouted out above the thunder of the motor:

"How high?"

Hays held up two fingers—two thousand feet. They had come out of the spin with less than five hundred feet to spare! Phil twisted the stabilizer wheel a little and began to climb.

"Point out the direction home!"

Hays pointed, and Phil turned the plane and continued in that direction. He knew that Hays was giving him the compass-reading that they had been following before the controls broke; how far they had wandered from their course during those few wild moments he did not know.

The main thing now was to get down—either at San Antonio or at any point after they had crossed the hills. With a ship that performed perfectly a fog was not a fatal thing; with a crippled plane the odds were all against them any way they turned.

And Phil knew that. He had forgotten for the time being his plan—his hope of overcoming Hays. His pistol lay on the floor of the cockpit where it had fallen. His whole attention was absorbed in flying the ship so it would not crash.

FOR thirty minutes Phil flew ahead into the endless wall of mist in front of him, following the compass reading that Hays pointed out to him from time to time. At first, until he discovered that he could fly the plane fairly well in spite of the broken controls, he had looked around at Hays and called out his questions without really seeing the man; his whole attention and mental energy were upon his flying.

But presently he became more at ease, and realized that their position was not as hopeless as it might be. They were getting out of the hill country, but just where they were he did not know.

He turned around to look at Hays, and realized that the man was in a complete funk—he was sitting tensely in his cockpit gripping the cowling until his knuckles showed white through the skin. He was staring ahead into the impenetrable fog. His lips worked convulsively; he wet them with his tongue; he swallowed rapidly.

Suddenly Phil cut the gun and turned around in his cockpit.

"Hays, how much lead did it take—in the nose of that T-10?" he called. And what he saw in the other's face removed the last doubt he had.

"Figured the lead would melt, eh?" he went on relentlessly, pressing his advantage. "Thought nobody'd ever find it out, eh? Tried twice to bump me off! *Why*, Hays?"

The big man had slumped down in his cockpit and his face had turned a pasty color. His jaw muscles worked ceaselessly through the reflexes of fear.

"Don't—*don't!*" he cried. "Let me alone!"

Phil turned back to his job of flying. He climbed the ship as rapidly as possible, handling the stabilizer wheel cautiously to guard against a stall and the resultant spin. When he had what he considered

enough altitude to glide some distance safely through the fog he cut the gun again and turned around.

"Hays," he screamed pitilessly, as the man looked at him in terror, "you put lead in the nose of that ship! *Why did you try to kill me?"*

Phil had suddenly realized that here was the *one* way to make Hays tell him everything. Despite his lack of physical brawn, here he had an undeniable advantage. He gunned the motor wide open and climbed again. When he had reached what he estimated to be six thousand feet above ground, while he was still in the heavy clouds, he cut the gun.

"Out with it!" he bellowed savagely. "You tried to kill me! *Why?"*

STILL Hays did not answer. He was leaning forward on his arms, his face down, his hands clinging desperately to the leather edges of the cowl. He was whipped, Phil knew, but he was trying to resist—with the courage of a cornered rat. Phil waited a moment and barked out the question once again: *"Why?"* and when Hays did not reply Phil deliberately rolled the stabilizer wheel all the way back and kicked right rudder. The nose of the ship whipped up and around, then plunged down in a sickening spin. And Phil, afraid himself, but forcing himself to hold the plane in the spin, turned around again and screamed the words:

"We're going in, Hays—unless you spill it! You tried to kill me! Why?"

Hays broke, as a wire will snap when pulled too tight.

"Stop!" he yelled in desperation.

But Phil, for answer, gunned his motor. The blurp of the exhaust blended with the scream of rushing wind. The spin increased in speed as the throttle blipped open. Phil snapped it back.

"Why?"

Hays looked up, his face a study of torment. He glanced at the altimeter, and the veins in his forehead seemed to stand out. He whipped off his safety-belt, leaped half to his feet in the cockpit, holding to the cowling with one hand. He waved his arm frantically toward the invisible ground.

"My God, stop—you're down to five hundred feet—*above the ground!"*

Phil thought he was bluffing—was trying to scare him. He looked back, and yelled, inflexibly: "We're going in! Tell me—*why?"*

And Hays gasped the words, trying to say it quickly: "I did it—I did it! Stop this spin—stop! My God, I'm *Melvin Hebling!* Stop—*we're down to two hundred feet!"*

Melvin Hebling! The name froze Phil in a flash-back of his memory. No wonder the man had tried to kill him!

But Phil had no time for thoughts of Hays now. He had been bluffing, believing that the other man *must* break if the thing were carried far enough. He had expected to spin down to within a few hundred feet of the ground and then come out—after Hays had admitted what he would. But the ship was too low now—two hundred feet, with a broken flipper control and in a fog! He'd never get the nose up before he struck the ground! He wouldn't even see the earth until a split second before the ship smashed into it!

The plane stopped spinning the instant Phil applied the rudder, and when the stabilizer was full up Phil slammed the throttle open. The thrust of the propeller helped to pick the nose up, but on down they plunged—waiting in tight-lipped, blear-eyed horror for the crash.

THE motor's roar drowned the howling wires, and Phil had no idea of the speed of the ship in the dive until he saw the blackish ground rush up at him as they plunged out of the fog at fifty feet. The nose was still down a little, but it was coming up! It climbed on the blurred horizon slowly—it still seemed that they would crash.

Phil had recovered the plane from the first dangerous spin at five hundred feet above the ground—comparatively close when you are being hurled down through a fog that goes clear on down to the earth below you. This time he had had less than fifteen feet which separated him from death or injury when the ship rocketed out of the low clouds and hit the bottom of its dive! He looked back at the slumped figure in the rear cockpit. Hays had passed out from fright!

It took Phil nearly twenty minutes to find his location. He had passed the hill country and was flying at forty feet over plowed fields that were black with moisture. Presently he passed over a highway, and he turned and followed it until he came to a small town through which a railroad ran. Then he followed the railroad on toward San Antonio.

Hays' confession startled him, now that he had the time to think of it. He saw the whole thing clearly; it came back to him with terrible force—those eyes behind the gun the night he had been shot down. How could he have forgotten it? How could he have failed to recognize Hays upon the first meeting with him? Melvin Hebling! He realized, now, that Hays would certainly have killed him sooner or later!

But how did Hebling get the name of Dale Hays? Hays was a wartime ace—while Hebling, when Phil knew him, was almost a novice at flying. That was yet to be explained.

He noticed, idly, as he flew along, that the pistol had been thrown up toward the front of the cockpit during the violent spin out of the clouds. As the flight progressed the gun worked back, because of vibration, until it was under Phil's feet. He could not pick it up because in doing so he would have had to lean over until his head was below the top of the cockpit; since he was fighting with the stabilizer wheel constantly, and had to observe the slightest movement of the nose a long time before a dive or climb began, in order to counteract it with the wheel, he did not dare to take his eyes from the plane and the horizon.

He had almost more than he could do, at times, to fly the ship safely at that altitude. He worked his stabilizer wheel constantly, rolling it back slightly when the plane tended to lose altitude, twisting it forward a notch when the ship started to climb into the clouds that scowled at him from just above.

After forty minutes of wild flying a few feet above the ground, Phil made it. He came into the field at San Antonio with the motor throttled down enough to maintain flying speed with the nose on the horizon. He rolled the stabilizer wheel full back and played with his throttle to get the wheels down on the field. And he made that, too. There was a moment when he thought he would wipe off his landing-gear; he started to gun the motor and go around again and make another trial, but the ship dropped to the ground with a violent jar and bounced roughly to a stop.

And in that bouncing, with the tail well below the nose, Phil saw the gun slide back toward Hays' compartment! But he thought Hays still "out," and believed that he could retrieve the gun when the ship stopped rolling.

He had not given much thought to what he would do with Hays—or Hebling—when he got home. He had been so relieved to obtain positive proof that the T-10 crash had not been his fault that he disregarded the danger of Hays when once they were on the ground. Of course, Rand and Burney would hear the story—direct. They'd hear about those new pursuit jobs too!

HE let the ship roll almost to a stop and kicked the rudder to head back toward the office in the first hangar of the line, but before the plane could answer to the controls Hays, with his greater strength, kicked the rudder straight and opened the throttle enough to taxi along the runway! Involuntarily Phil reached forward to cut the switches of the motor—Hays couldn't get away with a thing like that! But the switches were in the rear cockpit!

Leaving the ship to Hays, Phil hunted for the gun. He *had* to have it now! But he could not find it; apparently it had slipped into a hidden niche out of sight. He straightened up and looked around at Hays—and stared into the muzzle of the weapon! He saw Hays' eyes through narrowed lids. The bigger man said nothing.

Despite Phil's efforts to the contrary, Hays taxied the plane to the last hangar in the row, where it was ordinarily kept. He turned in a big circle and headed into the building; and once inside, instead of idling the motor until it drained the carburetor dry, he cut the switches.

He climbed down from the cockpit and walked to a wing-tip, where he waited in stony silence, holding the pistol carelessly at his side. And constantly, as Phil unbuckled his safety-belt and got down from the cockpit, Hays held that cold and flinty stare hard upon him.

"Well," Hays asked snarlingly, "what about it? Changed my looks, huh? Didn't know me! I didn't think you would. When a man gets to know me, Warner, I have to take care of him!"

But Phil was not awed by Hays' manner. He replied without hesitation, without glancing at the gun in Hays' hand:

"We're going down and talk to Rand." He thought the mechanics would be coming soon to take the plane in charge. He knew that he alone would be a match for Hays—without the pistol. He played for time.

"Where've you been these last three years?" he asked. "You're right clever to get that make-up—I used to hear of Dale

Hays in France occasionally. Did you kill him, too?"

"Shut up!" Hays snarled. "You little runt, you're always in the way. Can't anybody kill you?"

Phil looked him in the eye. "You ought to know how hard it is!" he said sardonically. "The first time you shot me—then you crashed me—then you tried to smash me with a prop. I watched you last night, Hebling. You probably would have gotten me—but I saw you at it. I welded that walking-beam. You were interesting—this morning. . . . . No, Hebling, I'm pretty hard to kill. You could shoot me now—but they'd hear you at it."

Why didn't those mechanics come?

Before Phil had time to dodge or think—almost before he had an inkling that there would be a physical encounter—Hays lunged forward and struck with his fist. The blow caught Phil unawares; it found its mark, and Phil went down. Dazedly, through eyes that could hardly see because of pain, he caught sight of the gun in Hays' hand. He saw the butt of it descending; he was powerless to move. . . . .

For hours, it seemed, the rain had beaten steadily on the sheet iron roof above with ceaseless regularity. The water, running from the eaves in tiny rivulets, trickled to the sodden ground in endless pattering. Consciousness was slow in coming back, and for a long time Phil did not realize that it was night. That realization, when it did come to him, surprised him. He pieced together fragments of his memory, and finally constructed the events leading up to the time he had seen the gun in Hays' hand.

He sat up, then. His head throbbed pulsingly; he felt unsteady, but staggered to his feet. He was in one corner of a hangar, he was sure, for he felt the dirt under his feet and heard the rain on the metal roof above his head. He felt his way along the wall, and presently came across a spare T-10 wing; this established his whereabouts beyond a doubt.

BUT where was Hays? He had a tinge of apprehension at the thought. He stumbled to a door and, after trying nearly every key upon his ring, opened it and stepped into the rain. He walked unsteadily down the line of hangars to Rand's office, went inside and called Rand on the telephone. As he sat there waiting he felt the lump on the right side of his head with his fingers. Hays had belted him a blow—probably thought he had killed him! Rand answered.

"This is Warner," Phil explained. "Have you seen Hays? He admitted tampering with that T-10 I crashed. I was trying to bring him in to you, and he knocked me out. That was this afternoon—I just came to."

"He admitted it? Where are you?"

Phil told him. "He's probably long gone by this time," he added. "He wouldn't stay around here now. I don't want that guy to get away. Can't we stop him—notify the police? He's wanted for murder!"

"Murder?" Rand cried.

Phil explained hurriedly.

"I'll fix it," Rand said. "I'll be after you as soon as I can drive it. Wait for me." He hung up.

PHIL sat by the telephone and waited impatiently. He wanted Hays; he wanted Rand to hear that story! Yet undoubtedly, while the police were still unaware of what had happened, Hays was putting miles between himself and San Antonio! Damn it all!

He couldn't sit still. Despite the pain of his injury, and its resultant weakening effect, he had to move about; he had to get into action. He walked out into the rain again.

He saw a car sitting back of the hangar, and without particular interest in it, wondered whose it was. He walked to it—a wave of understanding came to him—it was Hays' car! He hurried back inside the office and called Morgan on the 'phone. He asked the foreman if he had seen Hays.

"Yes," Morgan replied. "Yes, I seen him this afternoon. He come to me 'long about two o'clock and said he wanted some work done on that little biplane that you and him took out to Dryden—said there was somethin' wrong with the controls. I went down and fixed it—it had a broken walkin'-beam. Funny thing about that walkin'-beam—looked like it had been sawed part in two—and then welded—we welded it again. I says to him, I says: 'I don't see how you ever got that airplane back here in a shape like that, and this weather like it is.' And he says to me: 'Shut up, and git to work; I'm in a hurry—I got to go out on a trip before it gets too dark.' So I shut up, and fixed the airplane."

"When'd he leave?" Phil asked excitedly. "Where'd he say he was going?"

"He didn't say. Didn't seem like he was in a very good humor—seemed like he

was in an awful hurry. Why, is there something important?"

"Yes, it's important. I've got to find him. What time did he take off?"

"Well, it took me longer than I figgered to fix that airplane, and he didn't get away from here until maybe four o'clock. I wish I'd found out just where he was goin', so I coulda told you."

"I wish you had too!" said Phil.

One thing that encouraged him was that Hays could not fly all night, especially in the fog and rain that existed in all directions from San Antonio. But Hays didn't need to fly all night! An hour would put him nearly a hundred miles away, and with three hundred and sixty different directions to choose from, if he merely got away from town and put the plane down in a little field where people wouldn't see it, he could wait without danger of discovery until the weather cleared.

Phil tried to visualize himself in Hays' place. What would he do, if he were trying to escape? The best thing, for a man of Hays' reputation, would be to get into Mexico as quickly as possible. Still, Phil reasoned, that would be what everyone would expect him to do, and the Border, if he hadn't already crossed it, would be watched carefully henceforth. It would be safer to go up into the hills and put the plane down in a little field and wait awhile before trying to get across the Rio Grande. That seemed the probable course to follow.

RAND arrived at the office and announced his presence with screaming brakes. He rushed into the office.

"He got away," Phil said, before the financier had time to speak. "I just talked to Morgan on the telephone. Hays took the same ship we came in with, and got away about four o'clock. His car's outside. We'll probably never get him now."

"The police are working on the case," Rand reassured him. "They don't think he can get very far without being picked up. Tell me, how in God's name did you get him to admit it? A man'd *never* admit a thing like that!"

"He was scared crazy," Phil replied. He told of the flight, and how Hays thwarted him at the last minute. "I want him!" he added vehemently. "He tried to kill me three years ago, and he recognized me when he saw me. He's been trying to bump me off ever since I started working here. I saw him kill a man—I was the only witness; he had to get me out of the way."

"I never would have thought it!" Rand exclaimed. He shrugged. "You can't tell about a man—you never can. There's not much hope of finding him tonight, but we'll get him. He can't get far in weather like this."

"He'll probably head up into the hill country and land in a little field somewhere and wait for good weather," Phil suggested. "If I were in his place, I would; and then try to get across into Mexico."

CHAPTER X

NEXT morning Dorothy Rand drove to the field in curiosity to see what had happened, although her father had explained briefly the night before. She found Phil and Burney and her father together in the office. She was startled into quick anxiety at the bandage around Phil's head.

"Mercy!" she cried. "Phil, I didn't know he hurt you! —Daddy, why on earth didn't you tell me that?"

"He's all right," said Rand. "We're not interested in him right now. We ought to get a report about Hays pretty soon."

"I don't see how Hays managed it, but it looks like he got away," Burney declared. "That guy is a smooth one! I wired—"

"Who cares about Hays?" asked Dorothy acidly. "Phil, does it hurt you?"

"It's numb," Phil laughed. "I can't feel it."

They discussed Hays' quick escape, the chances for his apprehension. Presently they talked about the man himself.

"Phil," asked Burney, "just how much did you know—when you were asking me all those questions—and what were you driving at?"

"I knew he was a crook. And I thought he knew that I knew it—but I guess he didn't. He was doing the same thing when I knew him several years ago, except he was doing it a little more brazenly. . . . . You see, that pursuit job came to pieces on me in the air—that's how I learned what he was doing. The motor didn't conk; it darn' near jumped clear out of the airplane! I didn't go over the side because I wanted to get the ship down as nearly whole as possible—so I could see what had happened. Well, that plane looked as if it had been put together with baling-wire and matchwood. It was the rottenest pursuit

job I've ever seen in my life, bar none. It was built like the cheapest kind of commercial job you see on the market today—and it was supposed to come up to military specifications. Naturally I thought Mr. Rand was behind it—until I talked to you and Dorothy—then I knew Hays was. I did some investigating, and found out about it all—but I didn't tell you at first because I was afraid you'd jump Hays before I found out about my crash—I had a hunch he had something to do with it."

Burney pulled a telegram from his pocket.

"I got this in yesterday afternoon, Phil," he said. "Remember, I told you I didn't know anything about Hays, but I knew some friends of his. I didn't know what you were driving at, when you asked me about him, but I wired Charley Grubb, who was a real good friend of his." He handed Phil the message:

DALE HAYS HAS NOT WRITTEN TO ME SINCE 1927. LAST WORD I HAD WAS THAT HE WAS DUSTING TOMATOES IN MEXICO HAD SERIOUS CRASH SOON AFTER THAT AND KILLED PASSENGER OF PLANE STOP IF YOU HAVE HIS ADDRESS PLEASE SEND IT TO ME

CHARLEY GRUBB

"That explains it all," Phil exclaimed. "Hays' name was really Hebling—Melvin Hebling—he must have been with the real Dale Hays when Hays was killed—and he took Hays' name and papers and credentials. The 'passenger' in this telegram was really Hays—and Hebling was smashed up enough that it was impossible for anyone to identify him. He didn't look like the real Hays, but he could explain that because of the way he got mixed up with the motor end of an airplane."

PHIL explained all that he knew about Hebling, the killing of Lander, and his own narrow escape. He had told all this to Rand the night before, but Burney and Dorothy had not heard it.

The others had a hundred questions, but the telephone forestalled them. Rand answered it, and while waiting to get a better connection, turned to Burney:

"Police headquarters. We ought to get something— Hello. . . . . Yes. He did! . . . . . Last night, you say? You don't say! Well, thanks for getting on the case." He turned back to them, his face grave.

"That's the end of it," he said. "They've found him."

"Caught him?" Phil cried. "I knew he'd have a tough time in this weather! Where is he—I want that guy!" He jumped up in his excitement and started toward the door. "Where is he?"

"He's up in the hill country," Rand replied. "But you don't want him—he's dead. He crashed last night some time."

"Dead?" Burney ejaculated. "Probably got into a fog."

All of them relaxed. "He must have been crazy, to do everything he did," Phil observed. "I guess he was always in some kind of trouble."

OUTSIDE the office, the rain dripped steadily, while the men sat leisurely in the office and picked up the loose threads of the affair.

Suddenly Phil got up and started toward the door. "I'm going down and look at that T-10 wreck again," he said; then laughingly he added: "Just to reassure myself that I wasn't in it. The last ten days seem like a bad dream now."

"I'm going with you," Dorothy declared. "I haven't seen it."

They put on their raincoats and walked along the gravel road to the salvage hangar. They went inside and stood and looked at the wreckage a long time.

"Just think, Phil," Dorothy reminded him, "you might have been killed in that!" Her voice was husky.

Phil reached for her hand, and nodded.

"I love you," he blurted. "I've been waiting until I could tell you. Sometimes I thought maybe I would live that long—yesterday and the day before." He waited half expectantly. Dorothy looked up.

"Did you need to wait?" she asked softly. "I've told *you* that every time I've seen you, since the accident." She smiled, and chided him: "But you're so dumb, Phil, that you couldn't see it!"

"Am I?" They laughed happily together. . . . .

A long time afterward they strolled back to the office. As they entered the building, they heard Theodore Rand say to Burney:

"There's a fine boy, Phil Warner! I'm going to make him manager of the factory—" He stopped when he saw them.

"I'm making him chief pilot," Dorothy laughed, her eyes shining. "*My* chief pilot."

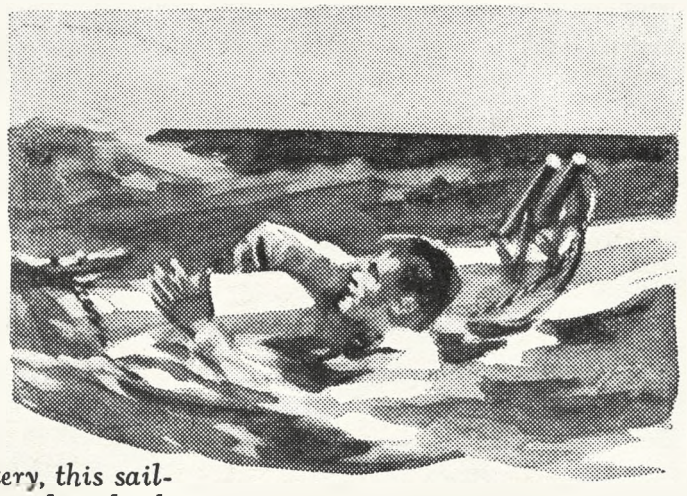
Phil smiled, and took her hand.

"If we fly straight," he said, "there's no need to worry."

THE END.

REAL EXPERIENCES

The Wreck of the Henry Smith



Wrecked off Cape Flattery, this sailor underwent perils real indeed.

By **Will Cullen**

BOUND north from San Pedro, California, to Puget Sound for a cargo of lumber, the steam schooner *Henry Smith* was making slight progress that mid-July. On the California coast the weather had been delightful, but at Cape Blanco a thick blanket of fog had enveloped us, and was still with us when we reached Cape Flattery. The siren had screeched *"Who—who-o—who-o-o?"* for unending hours, varied by an anxious *"Where—where—where-e?"* whenever some other ship's siren whispered, called, blared and sank into the distance. So constant and monotonous was the sound of our whistle that at last it was unnoticed, and only by consciously listening for it could I be convinced that it still shrieked its warning.

On the morning of the 16th, about six o'clock, I found myself roused out of a sound sleep. For a moment I listened, bewildered. The siren still wailed, but there was a note of hysteria in its sound as it cried: *"Who—who-o-o? Where, oh, where-e?"*

I realized that it was not the siren which had aroused me, but the raucous jangle of the telegraph, signaling "Full speed astern." I leaped to the open porthole of my room, and through the curtain of fog I saw the tremendous loom of a ship, almost touching ours. I braced myself for the impending collision, but there was not a very perceptible one. The prow of the vessel cut into us like a knife into cheese.

I screamed to my partner, who had slept through the commotion. I scrambled around my bunk, hunting my satchel, which contained, besides my clothing, the savings of my many years as able-bodied seaman and mate. In my excitement I could not lay my hands on it.

MY partner grabbed me by the neck, shouting, "Come on, Bill! We've got to get out of this. We're sinking." As I still tried to find my valise he shoved me out. "You'll have to let your money go, cully, or you'll lose your life," he cried.

I swiped up my coat, hat and shoes, and we started for the deck. As we passed through the alleyway by the engine-room we saw the chief engineer standing by the railing which surrounds the cylinders, watching for further signals from the pilot house.

"Come along—the water's fine," we shouted.

"Guess I'd better," he replied, and ran after us.

Before we got on deck we could feel our vessel turning sharply on its side, for the *Harry Luckenbach,* the oil-tanker with which we had been in collision, had withdrawn immediately from the gaping hole which she had sliced into our side and she

lost us in the fog. Tons of water were pouring into our doomed ship.

On deck the hands were trying to launch a boat, but the steamer listed suddenly, and the boat fell, crushing the mate, Nels Larson, and sweeping him overboard. It was then that Tom Spencer, the chief engineer, disappeared. God rest his soul! He was a splendid man. . . . .

As our ship turned over we crawled out onto the sides, then up onto the keel. She pointed her bows toward the bottom and shot downward, washing us off like flies. I still had my hat, coat and shoes in my hands, instead of the life-preserver I should have seized. I could not swim a stroke.

"Whoosh!" I cried as I struck the icy water and let go all hold of my possessions. Down, down, down I went, trying to hold my breath. My lungs seemed to be bursting. Fiery sparks whirled in my eyes. My head grew larger and larger. Before my inner vision passed pictures that I will not tell about, because you would think me crazed. Down—down—down! I never dreamed the ocean could be so deep. Far below me the boilers let go, and a mass of débris shot up around me. One piece struck me, tearing a gash under my chin, knocking out the teeth in my lower left jaw, and smashing three of my ribs. But it threw me up into the air, and I retched and gobbled for breath. I threw out my arm, and felt a piece of floating wood, around which I got one arm and the turn of my leg, before I lost consciousness. They found me an hour later, floating face upward, fortunately; otherwise I should have strangled with the oil that covered the water everywhere, for the collision had not only released the oil in our fuel tanks, but had emptied three tanks where the bow of the *Luckenbach* had crumpled with the collision.

I came to consciousness fifty-one hours later on the oil-tanker. The crew fitted us out as well as they were able with articles of clothing. To my lot fell a pair of trousers meant for a man twice my size, a sleeveless cotton shirt provided by a charitable fireman, and grass slippers given me by the cook. Owing to a fall from the mast of a sailing-ship when a boy, one of my legs is shorter than the other, and I was accustomed to wear specially made footwear—so the grass slippers were very inconvenient. But the men on the *Luckenbach* had done what they could, so we did not complain.

When we docked at Seattle there was a horde of reporters at the wharf to get our stories. We mentioned to them that we were without cash or clothing, and they replied casually that we would be taken care of.

One by one they drifted away, and we were left alone. We walked around, trying to find a place to eat, but we were too disreputable, and no one would allow us to come in, nor feed us without money. I got separated from the other men, and for three days wandered the street, shunned by everyone—for a great scab had formed on my chin, blood was caked on my shirt, and I was delirious from pneumonia. People thought I was drunk.

The secretary of the Sailor's Union of Seattle ran across me on the street. He tried to question me, and at once realized my condition. He tried to feed me, but I could not keep anything down. My torn throat pained me so that I could not swallow. The secretary sent me to the Marine Hospital at Port Townsend. Here I tried to "cash in my checks," but my time to depart this sphere had not arrived.

WHEN I was convalescent one of the nurses asked me if I would not like to ride around the town for an airing. The clothes I had arrived in, nicely laundered, were brought me by the orderly, who helped me to dress. I had borrowed a coat from the nurse, and the orderly assisted me into it also. While on the drive the nurse asked me why I had wanted the coat, and thus discovered that I possessed only those flimsy wisps of cotton clothing. She haled me to the rooms of the Red Cross, where I was given overalls, shirts and other necessary articles. I was also provided with money, with which I returned to Seattle and shipped out again. I have contributed my bit to all Red Cross roll-calls since that time.

Of the men who were lost on the *Henry Smith* besides the mate and Tom Spencer, there was one man whose name I do not recall, and a man by the name of Logan, a wonderful swimmer, who had been a life-guard at Long Beach at one time. Such is the irony of life—that he should be lost, and I, who cannot swim a stroke, should be saved! And the man in the pilot-house did not even get his feet wet, for the pilot-house was sent up intact by the explosion, and he was rescued, dry as a bone!

By
Jim Mc Farlane

A vividly set-forth experience from one of the Old Contemptibles who was at Mons.

One Gunless Night

A GUN more or less meant nothing to me, until one moonlight, gunless night in France. That was back in August, 1914, a few days after Britain and Germany had gone to war. I belonged to a kiltie outfit of regular infantry—a burly, hard-boiled bunch that thought they could whip any combination on earth with their bare hands and bare knees. The German machine-gun bullets drilled different ideas into our heads. Now I'm a strong supporter of the cowpuncher who made the front page with his historic remark: "When you need a gun, you need it bad!"

Out in France a few days after war was declared, we prepared to lick the Kaiser's cohorts by going through the manual of arms, by numbers, while billeted in a pleasant village in the valley of the Sambre.

The call came for fighting men, and we pushed up to the Belgian frontier, making forced marches over paved roads, under a blistering August sun, for five days. A bunch of disheveled German dragoons, prisoners, in a Belgian town, and a Taube flying over our billets that night, let us know that we were getting close to the war.

THE hoarse commands of sergeants, bawling in the blackness which preceded the dawn, turned us out of the barns in which we had bedded down for the night. It was August 23, the day of the battle of Mons.

Dawn found us busy digging trenches along a low range of hills facing east. There were veterans of South Africa and the Indian frontier among us, and by the time those rifle-pits were completed, a man could have walked right on to them before he could discover them. The main road between Mons and Paris ran immediately at the bottom of the hill; along this to the right another battalion of Scottish infantry was busy digging in the ditch along the front of the road. In the wooded and hilly country to our left the two battalions of English and Irish which completed our brigade were also busy seeking shelter against the storm of steel which was about to break. In front of the road the country lay flat and open; the grain had all been harvested from the fields. By ten o'clock we were ready, with guns hidden in the woods on the crest of the slope behind us.

From the left flank the rumble of gunfire drifted down our way, becoming louder and clearer; soon the crackling of rifle-fire and machine-guns betokened that the English and the Irish were busy. Shrapnel commenced to spray the woods behind us, and our guns took up the challenge. A fringe of woods ran along the far edge of the fields, about a mile away. Out of these we saw groups of lancers jogging toward us. The line of the Scots on our right ran at an angle from our line, toward the enemy,

and they disposed of the cavalry with a blast of machine-gun fire. Men and horses went down in tangled heaps.

There was a lull. Then out of the woods came milling mobs of men in gray-green, surging along in close formation. We let them enter the angle between the two regiments. Our guns fell silent. The Germans, thinking that they had been destroyed, came on confidently.

Then a single eighteen-pounder crashed in the woods behind our platoon's trench, and along a mile of hidden trenches the rifles and machine-guns joined in the chorus. Death swooped down savagely on those open fields. The gray cloud dissolved into fragments before that blizzard of lead. Groups of men, thinning every moment, milled around uncertainly. Others charged gallantly forward. They were beaten down by blasts of fire. Some squads lay down in the open, huddling helplessly together. From one of these a giant rose to his feet, striving by gestures to encourage the others to advance. Concentrated cones of fire centered on him, kicking up a haze of dust from the parched plain. He went down, twisting sideways slowly, slumping in death—a brave foe.

SO it went all through that hot afternoon. When night came, we had established a literal dead-line four hundred yards in front of our line. In our company, only one man had been wounded; a shell splinter had neatly pierced the lobe of one ear. The German artillery fell down on the job. Their fire was heavy, but they could never find our trenches.

An eerie silence succeeded the din of the afternoon. We watched for a surprise attack. The only sign of war was the glare of some burning buildings over to the left.

A chill ran down my spine when a messenger tumbled into the trench and told the lieutenant that the two battalions on our left had been snowed under by the weight of the enemy attack. Every alternate man faced around; we were told that the enemy was behind us. The dark woods from which our guns had blazed looked ominously close now. At any minute we expected a charging, steel-tipped wall of men in gray to come down on us. There was an air of mystery and unrest.

"You three men at the end of the trench —McFarlane, Clarke and Young—scout over to the left and get in touch with D Company," the lieutenant softly ordered. In those days we did not have continuous lines; each platoon dug its own. D Company was the one on our left, the left company of the battalion and was linked up with the right of the annihilated battalions.

WE walked softly down the hill, crawled over the road and found the trenches of the other company. It was bright moonlight. I have to grin now when I think of the courteous manner in which we all tried to let the other fellow take the lead; how we flinched with fear when a pile of empty cartridges tinkled under our feet in the bottom of the trench. At the end of the trench we found a dead man, the bright moon turning the dust on his thighs and face to silver. His kilt was crumpled up around his waist. I pulled it down. Not a living man could we find, however, and the discarded coats showed that the trench had been abandoned in haste. Later, we knew that they had gone to the help of the hard-pressed English and Irish; but then we were puzzled. Back to our own trench we went, in something of a mild panic, and reported to the officer.

By this time I was badly scared; but I was young, and my weariness got the better of my fear. Sentries had been posted along the trench; so I left my bayoneted and loaded rifle sticking out over the parapet in my place, and lay down in the loose earth at the back of the trench.

This was nearly fourteen years ago; I can't remember what I dreamed last night, but I can remember what I dreamed that night: I was in a train, running wild over open fields. Despite the fact that the train was going at a good speed, the Germans marching alongside had no trouble in keeping up with us and firing through the windows of the coaches. Then the clatter of rifle-fire awoke me. I came to myself in a panic as a result of the dream. I was standing then on a paved road, crushed among all the boys of the platoon. The firing grew heavier; it looked as though we were in a tight corner. I went to unsling my rifle.

It wasn't on my shoulder. I couldn't find it. It seems very foolish now, the way I pawed over the top of my pack—and even searched wildly through the pockets of my khaki tunic! I turned to the files next to me. None of them knew anything about my gun.

The firing stopped. A bugler boy lit a cigarette. A mounted officer whipped out a pistol and thrust it at the boy's head.

"Damn you!" he hissed. "Don't you know we're trying to sneak out from the middle of the whole damn' German Army?" And then the old familiar cry which followed a breach of the regulations went up: "Take that man's name, Sergeant; take his name."

All this made me more scared than ever.

Our lieutenant loomed up out of the darkness.

"Please, sir, can I go back for my rifle?" I begged.

The officer goggled at me. "Go back for your rifle! To the trenches we left? We're three miles from there now."

Visions of a court-martial and a firing squad, supposing some big German didn't disembowel as I stood unarmed, flashed through my mind. But the loss of my gun was only a mere detail to the officer; he had lots of other things to worry him.

"Pick up one from the first dead man you see," he snapped, turning away.

WE came to the edge of a village where an English regiment had suffered heavily in keeping the neck of the bottle open for us. I saw the fallen strung along a ditch in grotesque attitudes. Somehow, though, in spite of my bitter need, it seemed like desecration to take the guns from under one of those who had fallen with them hot in their hands. A little farther I saw one of our men, his feet sticking up out of the ditch, writhing and moaning in pain. I swept up his rifle without any hesitation.

Through the night we marched. At dawn we climbed a hill where engineers and French farmers had dug a long trench. There was not room for the whole battalion, however, so our company retired over the top of the hill. Here the lieutenant told us to get busy and dig. We were all tired; the hill was made of hard chalk, and our toy entrenching tools were useless. So we ignored the foreman of the construction gang, lying on our backs with cigarettes going. German shells wailed over the tops of our heads, curving over the crest in bursting in blobs of white smoke in the valley below. A battery of our guns firing down the valley. The Scotch battalion which had helped us commit assault and battery on the Germans the day before was eating breakfast from their chow wagons. Nobody seemed to know where our battalion transport had gone to. We went without breakfast, and commented in clear tones for the lieutenant's benefit, on the boneheads who handled us.

Next to me a pale, gaunt man asked for a match. I twisted over on my side to pull a box out of my pocket, shifting my gun toward him.

"By God, that's my gun!" he exulted.

"Like hell it is!" I snarled. "I took it off a stiff in that village we came through at night."

"Stiff, nothing!" he shot back. "I had cramps, and they put me on the colonel's horse until I was all right. I been without a gun all the time since. I know mine by the number on the butt."

With a groan I surrendered the gun. At this moment a messenger came over the hill, on his way down to the reserves. From the look in his eye, I knew that the battalion loitering over its breakfast down below was going to be told to quit eating in a hurry. My misery was intensified at this new loss.

"It's gettin' hot up there," he threw at us as he jogged down the hill.

A buzz of warning arose. "Hear that, boys? Aye, be ready; the Jerries will be comin' at us again soon."

Then hope welled up within as I saw a man limping on a bare and bloodied foot at the other end of the hill. The company quartermaster stood behind him in an undecided fashion, a spare pack and rifle trailing from one hand.

IN the British Army, the company Q. M. is always at war with the men of his company. He is responsible for the feeding, the clothing and the paying of his underlings; and he is always looked upon with suspicion. But at that moment that big Scot looked to me like an angel from heaven; his rough rasping voice sounded like the music of the spheres.

"Hey, give me that gun!" I shouted as I ran up. I suppose that he was secretly glad to be rid of the gun for which he was responsible—but he hated to admit it.

"Where's your own?" he barked.

"I lost it last night," I told him, omitting details.

He passed the gun to me, then jumped back as I threw back the bolt and loaded.

"Now what the hell? You goin' to shoot me in front of all these witnesses?"

"No, not yet," I told him. "I just wanted to make sure that it was a real gun; it looked to me as though there was a joker in it somewhere!"

A soldier of Fortune's startling experience in Portuguese Africa.

By
Dick Halliday

An Awkward Moment

I HAD always been interested in Africa; therefore when a chance was offered me, a few years before the World War broke loose, to go to Mozambique, Portuguese East Africa, I took it. The Government was just starting a little campaign against a native chief who objected to paying taxes by eliminating the tax-collectors in various unpleasant ways. I knew something about machine-guns and without quite understanding just how it came about, I found myself serving with the Fifth Native Infantry.

We were certainly a rather mixed lot. Under the command of a spike-mustached colonel, the dapper little major of the Fifth, and five white officers of as many different nationalities, we had three hundred native infantrymen, a machine-gun detachment from Laurenco Marques, and two hundred native porters.

Our objective was a cluster of native villages on the Pungwe, about six days' march from the railroad. Arriving close to the first village, we went into camp on a knoll, close to the river and sent out several small scouting parties. The major, who was an old hand at bush fighting, went out with one party and returned that afternoon with several prisoners. On questioning these, we learned that the natives had fortified the village ahead of us and also that they had white men helping them and machine-guns like ours.

"If that's true, the white men they've got with them will most likely be German deserters from the lake country," said Dr. O'Neill, our surgeon.

The major nodded agreement.

"Well," remarked the colonel, "we shall know tomorrow, for we advance at daybreak."

In the early dawn of the next morning, leaving a part of our men to guard the camp and porters, we filed quietly out of camp and headed up the river. After a short march through the jungle we came to a clearing; right in front of us were the pole walls and towers of a large native village.

WE wasted no time—our plans had been laid ahead the previous night. The officers' whistles shrilled, and with wild yells we ran swiftly forward across the open ground.

Almost instantly, the platforms behind the walls were filled with native warriors, and "pot-leg," arrows and spears whistled and screeched over our heads. Then we closed up against the solid wall and O'Neill, who was beside me, suddenly grabbed me by the arm and yelled:

"Down, Dick, quick—*down!*"

I didn't wait to ask why. I dropped to the ground and rolled up against the wall —none too soon. A machine-gun placed in the watch-tower at the corner of the

wall began its deadly rattle and the hail of bullets mowed down our men.

Our first attack had failed.

As we rounded the corner of the wall, crawling along the ground we found the other officers in a group, holding a council of war. The little major had a plan. The colonel approved of it, and gave us his orders. In small parties we retreated into the jungle, amidst triumphant yells from the villagers.

BUT we soon came back. Forming in open order, under cover of the timber, we rushed forward, alternating firing volleys and advancing. Immediately the hail of arrows and spears and whistling "pot-leg" began again, but very little damage was done to us. Then suddenly at a shrill blast from the colonel's whistle, we halted, our rush stopped.

We bunched together, wavered, and then began a slow retreat. Slowly at first, one man and then another and then small groups broke into a run, heading for the protecting fringe of jungle around the clearing. High-pitched yells of triumph came from the stockade wall; then the heavy, palisaded gate swung open and the natives poured out after us.

With their wild yells ringing in our ears, we dived headlong into the bush. Inside that protecting fringe, our machine-gun squad was in readiness under the command of a former English army officer. A whistle, and the little guns were wheeled forward to the edge of the clearing, the gunners dropped into place and the *rat-tat-tat* began. As the gunners got the right elevation, the rush of natives suddenly stopped. They were literally mowed down like grass before a scythe.

Another whistle, a shouted order, and the firing stopped. With fixed bayonets our men pelted madly forward in a race to reach the stockade gate before it could be closed.

A native gate is a cumbersome affair and before it could be swung to again, we poured through. Now the fighting was hand-to-hand. The discipline and training of our men told, and steadily we drove the natives toward the square in the middle of the village.

ONE never has a very clear recollection of hand-to-hand fighting. Faces appear in front of you and vanish, shots and yells echo in your ears, steel rings and flashes before you. It is cut and thrust and shoot, with the slithering jar of steel on steel!

I remember breaking from the line of huts into the square, with a mob of natives retreating in front of me. Then I saw a little group of three white men in solar topees and soiled whites run from one of the alleys into the square, dragging a machine-gun with them. They started swinging the gun round toward us before I quite grasped what they were up to.

One of the Portuguese sergeants was behind me. I gave a brief order to him; he rallied together what men we had, and we raced across the square as fast as we could leg it, succeeding in reaching the other side before the men at the gun had the weapon adjusted.

Just then a big native stepped up in front of me with his straight iron sword swinging high in the air over my head.

Beside my sword, I was armed with an automatic. I raised it full in line with his chest and fired. I missed his chest but saw a red furrow run round his ribs, so I pressed the trigger again. The report was followed by a dull, chugging jerk. The automatic had jammed!

INSTINCTIVELY I raised my sword in a parry to meet the native's blade. Down came the short, heavy sword against my own weapon with a rasping shock that numbed my arm clear up to the shoulder. As my sword arm dropped down, the point of the negro's steel bit deeply into my forearm. With a jammed gun and a wounded arm, I was helpless.

Swiftly the black man threw up his weapon for another cut at me, when suddenly a revolver was poked across my shoulder and a report right beside my ear momentarily deafened me. The negro in front of me spun around sideways, and slumped slowly to the ground.

The sergeant, standing behind me, had fired across my shoulder just in the nick of time—but it certainly was an awkward moment, and it will be many years before I forget it.

The end of the fight? Well, we eliminated the machine-gun renegades, captured the village and carried out our orders.

But I had learned that an automatic is not a reliable weapon; and I am reminded of that fact every time I see the little white scar where the point of that native's iron sword chopped into my arm!

By

P. R. Prince

A crack on the head from a pitched ball is no joke—as this contributor discovered.

The Bean Ball

WHILE playing with an amateur baseball team a couple years ago, I was unlucky enough to be hit in the head by a pitched ball. Eckler, the pitcher who hit me, was a fast ball-pitcher, and at times tried to throw his balls with such speed that he could not control them.

It was in the sixth inning of the game when I was beaned. Our opponents were leading us by a three-to-one score. We had men on first and second, and the count was one strike and two balls on me. Eckler was throwing his balls with tremendous speed. I could hardly see the balls as they sped towards the plate, and on one occasion I had to drop to the ground quickly to keep from being hit. Eckler glanced at the men on the bases; and as he did so, I thought I saw him finger the ball as if he were going to throw an out. With this in mind, I stepped a little nearer to the plate and just as he let go of the ball I stepped forward to swing at it. Too late, I saw the ball wasn't going to break out. I tried to step aside, but in my lunge forward to swing at the ball, I lost my balance and could not draw away from the ball quickly enough. The ball hit me squarely on the left side of my head and bounded back on to the ball diamond.

I fell heavily to the ground, and what happened during the next few minutes, I do not know. When I recovered consciousness, I was still lying on the ground near home plate, and some one was throwing water on my face and head. I could neither speak nor rise.

At first, it was thought that my skull had been fractured, but luckily, such was not the case. During my stay at the hospital, an ice-bag was kept on my head continuously and those moments were the most miserable of my life. I was dismissed from the hospital within a week, but did not attempt to play ball again that year.

I learned that our team had won the game by a six-to-four score, and that after Eckler beaned me, he blew up and walked the next two batters, forcing in two runs. The next batter crashed out a double and Eckler was removed from the box.

Well, the boys told me I had won a ball game for them. They told me I certainly used my head in that game. (A swell way to use my head, isn't it, letting the pitcher bean me so that he would blow up?)

NEXT year, our team got together again and held a meeting to elect a manager, captain, and discuss plans for the coming season. The boys certainly surprised me when they elected me manager.

We got off to a fine start, winning the first two games played. I secured two hits in each of the games and felt as if I was going to have a fine season. I was enthusiastic and full of pep and confidence instead of being uncertain about myself as I was before these games were played. The next team we were to play would be the team tied with us for the league leadership. Eckler was the star pitcher of this team and it was he who started in the box against us. I came to bat in the first inning with

men on second and third after two were out. As I walked towards the batters' box, my heart was beating a merry *thump-thump* and I felt as if I could hardly stand up to the plate.

Eckler wound up and the ball speed towards the plate. I stepped away and swung, but missed. Eckler again wound up, and once more I pulled away from the plate and swung. It was a heartless swing and I knew I had missed the ball again. The fans had already started calling me yellow, and even our own rooters razzed me. My anger arose. I gritted my teeth and determined to stand at the plate even though I would be beaned. The next ball was on the inside and I jumped away barely in time to avoid being nicked on the arm. Eckler wound up again, and as the ball left his hand I saw it was coming towards my head. I dropped to the earth hastily and swore under my breath that Eckler had purposely tried to bean me. At any rate, that pitch took the heart out of me and it is needless to say that I struck out on the next ball. The crowd hooted.

IN the fourth inning, I came to bat with a man on second and promptly whiffed on three successive strikes. Amid the jeers and hoots of the fans, I took myself out of the game and put in Bolton, a substitute, who played well, securing a double which accounted for our only runs, and in addition to that fielded in fine fashion.

However, Bolton was a grand-stand player, and as is the usual case with such players, he was also a sore-head. When everything was going along O. K., he was all right; but when anything went wrong or when anyone would say a harsh word to him about one of his misplays, he would go up in the air about it.

I let him start the next game while I sat on the bench; and from then on, he and I alternated in playing. He would play part of the game and I would play a part, but whenever we played Eckler's team I would let Bolton play the entire game. The team ran along nicely and we were in the thick of the fight for the pennant. Our closest rivals were the team Eckler pitched for, and it so happened that when the season came to a close, Eckler's team and ours were tied for the league leadership.

I shall never forget that game.

As was the usual case when we opposed this team, Bolton was at shortstop and I was on the bench. The game developed into a pitchers' duel and at the beginning of the eighth inning we were leading by the score of one to nothing. Everything was going along as well as could be expected when Bolton threw a ball over the first-baseman's head after making a good stop of a difficult grounder. The runner advanced to second base on the play. Scherer, our second baseman and captain, told Bolton to take his time and be a little more careful in making his throws, but Bolton, being a temperamental player and thinking Scherer was razzing him, threw his glove to the ground in disgust and wanted to walk off the field. However, we finally persuaded him to continue playing and the game was on again. The runner went to third on an infield out, and as there were two outs now, it appeared as if our pitcher would pull out of the hole. The next batter, with two strikes and three balls on him, hit a high fly directly over second base. Scherer ran towards the ball and shouted, "I'll take it, I'll take it!" and held up his hand to signify that he would make the catch. However, Bolton took no heed of him. The ball hit in Scherer's glove just as Bolton collided with him, and the ball, Scherer and Bolton went to the ground in a heap.

THE tying run had crossed the plate. Bolton arose from the ground, and what he said cannot be published. Well, he quit the team flat. I had to go in and play short-stop inasmuch as I was the only extra player we had, and believe me, I certainly dreaded it. The ninth inning passed without either team scoring.

Beginning the tenth, our first batter singled to center and was sacrificed to second. Our next batter, however, struck out. Then it was my turn to bat.

Eckler looked at me and grinned. That grin seemed to say: "Watch yourself, or you'll get beaned." I shuddered. Nervously I stood swinging my bat, waiting for Eckler to pitch. He threw the ball.

I saw it was coming toward the inside corner of the plate. I drew away and swung. The ball broke out and I had missed it. On the next pitch, although the ball was on the outside, I still had a tendency to jerk away from the plate.

"One and one!" shouted the umpire.

The next pitch was high and the next one was low and outside. Eckler then shot a fast one across and I let it pass.

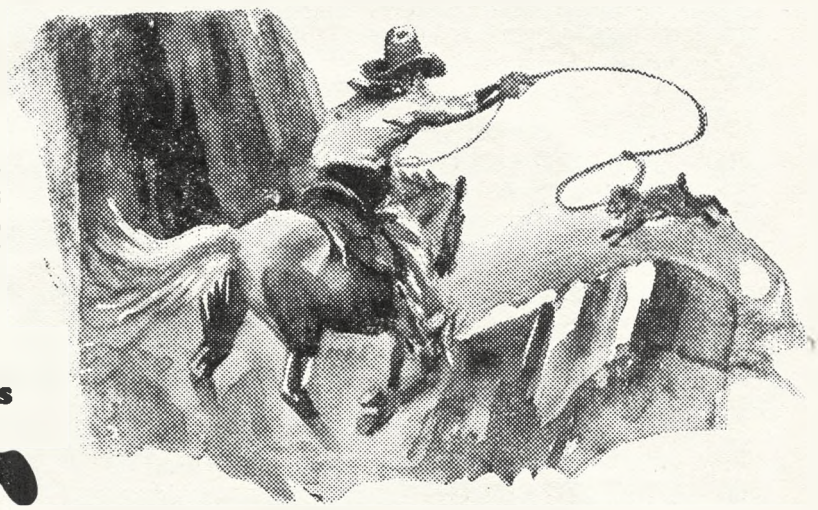
"Two and three!" the umpire bellowed.

ECKLER gave me that grin again, and I felt a sinking feeling in my heart. He picked up a handful of dirt, then threw it away, gripped the ball and let it go out of his hand. The ball was coming inside and I stepped away a trifle. As I did so, I noticed the ball break out and it was all I could do to poke my bat in front of the plate. The ball hit the bat rather than the bat hit the ball; and as I ran towards first base, I saw the third-baseman jump into the air and miss it. It was one of those slow, lazy liners, barely over the infield. Our man was now rounding third. The opposing left-fielder came in fast, picked up the ball and pegged it home. The peg was a little wide, and our man slid across the plate a second before the catcher tagged him. The next batter popped up to the second baseman.

Our pitcher held our opponents scoreless during their bat in the tenth inning, and we won the game two to one.

How I ever hit that ball, I do not know. All I remember is shoving the bat in front of the plate as I saw the ball shoot out.

I have never batted against Eckler since that time, although he is still pitching for one of the teams against us; and believe it or not, I don't intend to.



Wherein a wildcat whips five men — to say nothing of the dog.

By
Pink Simms

Tumble-weed

I WAS range representative for a Montana bank when I first met James Weed. At that time the banks were making large loans to stockmen and had need of cowboys, especially in case of a foreclosure.

I was on my way to the X round-up wagon to represent them at the tallying of a brand they had taken over. I had just come in sight of the outfit, when I saw a young puncher trying to get a big tumble-weed off a large five-year-old beef steer's horns.

This certain steer was a big one, strong and fat; in no case should it have been roped around the neck by a lone rider. But that is what he did, and was given a hard fall, as his cinch broke. The steer ran into the day-herd and caused a bad stampede.

The rider had not seen me, as I had just topped a small hill as he roped the steer. I spurred around the string of mounts that I was following, caught the steer after a hard run and threw him, roping his forelegs. I took the rope and the tumble-weed from his horns, and was examining the cowpuncher's saddle when the latter came up, riding bareback.

HE was a comical sight as he slid off his horse with a sheepish grin. He was just a boy, small, wouldn't weigh more than a hundred and ten, even if he was soaking wet. He had a shock of wild, unruly, straw-colored hair, an ever-present

grin that was much too wide for his face, the bluest eyes that I have ever seen, and a pair of ears that stuck out from his head like a pair of sails. Right then his face was pretty well peeled from the fall he'd just got, and he was spitting sand from his mouth and trying to dig it out of his eyes and ears.

"Thanks!" he called as he came toward me, and as he came closer: "My name's Weed."

"I'll bet your other name is 'Tumble,'" I retorted, and he chortled with glee, not realizing that was to be his nickname ever after.

Tumble-weed was passing through the mischievous stage of adolescence. Besides he had a bad case of roperitis—wanted to be a crack roper, and to realize that ambition he roped everything that moved. If given a chance he would have roped anything at all, from a field mouse to a bull elephant.

That summer he was in lots of trouble. Getting his saddle jerked off and losing ropes were common things. He "flagged" a bunch of antelope to him and roped one, only to nearly lose his life for his prank. His horse was badly gored.

It was not long after this that he roped a small grizzly, and if I hadn't happened along he would have been out of luck. His horse couldn't handle the animal, and he had no knife to cut the rope, or gun to shoot the bear; he had never learned to "dally," and his rope was tied fast to the horn.

But the little fellow was well liked by all of us, and I was rather sorry to part with him when my work was done and I had to go south.

THAT fall I was ordered to a line camp of a big outfit. Arriving there, I found Tumble-weed and a hard-bitten young man by the name of Charley Bates; they were glad to see me, for it was a wild, cold, lonesome place, far from any road.

Weed was still as careless with a rope as ever, and I was not in the least surprised when trouble arose.

We never rode alone, as both boys had been fired upon, and Bates had his horse shot from under him a few days before I arrived. It was the Association that sent me up there to find the answer.

Riding up a rocky slope, well studded with rocks and jack pine, with me in the lead, we were nearing the point where both boys had been fired upon and were keenly alert, silent and looking for trouble.

As we were rounding a sharp turn in an old game-trail where the rocks were thick, my horse shied, then with a terrified snort was gone in a mad race.

Down the steep hill he went at breakneck speed, dashing frenziedly in and out among the thickly strewn boulders and scrub growth.

Before my wild ride I had just a glimpse of an evil countenance, a devilish visage, demoniacal with its cruel slanting eyes and bloody jowls.

AS I quieted my bronc' I saw Tumble racing with his rope down—a short run, and he had a large bobcat, spitting cat cuss-words as he struggled at the end of his rope. I dismounted with the intention of shooting him, when I was stopped by Weed.

"Don't shoot him!" he yelled. "I want him for a pet."

"You crazy?" said I. The object of our discussion was lying, well tangled in the rope; he was a spitting, fighting fury—the meanest thing on four legs, and looked it.

"Go ahead," I told him. "I think you're nuts; but as long as you declare me out of it I'm game to watch you."

"How you figuring on getting him home?"—from Bates. I was wondering that too. My horse was a wild one—no use trying to pack anything on him; likewise the one Tumble had, which was a colt.

"You can pack him in for me," he said simply to Bates.

"What!" screamed Charley. "Not me—you guess again! I never did like to go around with a wildcat under my arm."

"Quit croaking; you're going to pack this cat," bullied Tumble. "I'll fix so he don't hurt you." He first tied the cat's head tight with a bandana, so that he could neither bite nor see. He near lost a finger while doing that. Then he cut a sapling, peeled it, stuck it through the cat's legs that had been tied together with a silk neckerchief. Bates reluctantly shouldered the stick, and we were off, with the cat dangling on the end of the stick and Charley's horse plainly nervous.

We had ridden maybe a mile when trouble started. Things were going good—too good, when the cat got one foot free and slapped the bronc' in the rump. He

had nails two inches long, and it was some slap.

Well, that bronc' just naturally went crazy. With a squeal of terror he swallowed his head, and with a buck jump worthy of Old Steam-boat himself he piled Bates into a wild rose bush. He was getting up when the cat landed right in front of his nose. Bates just rolled over and over to get away from that spitting devil. The cinch broke; the bronc' rid himself of the saddle, and had to be run down by Tumble and me, and roped.

SO far I was enjoying the show, not dreaming that my turn was to come yet. Not so Bates; he was mad, and wanted to kill the cat. But Tumble still wanted him. Bates took a kick at Kitty, who promptly hooked his claws into his boot, with his one free foot.

Tumble took off his chaps. They were of the batwing, snap-and-ring variety. He unsnapped one leg, rolled Kitty onto it, snapped it up again, tied both ends with a thong—and Kitty could do no harm; he carried him in on his shoulder.

When we arrived at the cabin we found visitors, two men from the breaks of the Big Muddy—neighbors, but not overly welcome—old Jake Konger and his man Lee Dill, who packed two guns and looked bad. I never did like a waddy that packed two guns, always in sight.

The cabin was a one-room affair and had been built of logs to house four men. Of course with bunks and all it was a bit crowded. Hewn poles for rafters were fitted overhead, but there was no ceiling. It was about eight feet from floor to the rafters.

There was a fire going in the kitchen stove as we all entered. A large dog of unclassified breed, the property of Konger, lay near the stove. He scented the cat, and arose growling, with hackles up, as we entered. After greetings Konger noted Tumble's happy grin and the bundle he was carrying.

"Now what you been up to, youngster?" he asked.

"I'll show you," replied Tumble, chuckling, and before I could stop him he had untied one thong and dumped the cat out on the floor.

I'VE often heard people say, "Then hell broke loose!" but I never knew its real meaning until I saw that crazy bobcat hit the floor. Folks, I want to tell you he hit it fighting! His head was wrapped up, but he had worked all four feet loose. He seemed to think that he could lick ten times his weight in dogs and men, and started in to prove it.

He could not bite or see—which was no serious handicap. He seemed to be all over the place at once in a slashing, ripping maniacal frenzy, doing considerable damage as he went.

The dog rushed forward to attack him but was afraid to close with him. I tried to get to the door but one look at that blind fury coming toward me, and I caught a rafter and pulled myself up, temporarily safe.

The others quickly followed suit, old Jake showing astonishing agility for his years.

The place was truly a madhouse. Pandemonium was raging in several forms—the dog barking, the cat emitting unearthly screeches, men cursing and yelling advice, while pans and pots were knocked from the walls, and every loose or movable thing was upturned as the frenzied animal charged about the cabin.

JUST as the clumsy Dill was trying to chin himself the demented animal made a flying leap from one of the bunks and landed in the middle of the hot stove. He was there but the split part of a second, and with the most unearthly yowl I ever heard he literally flew through the air and hooked himself firmly onto that portion of Dill's anatomy that is most used by all cowboys.

With a bellow of rage Dill bucked and squirmed. The dog grabbed the cat, and Kitty let go. Dill threw his feet in an arc and kicked Jake under the chin, who told him all about himself and his ancestors for several generations back. Both of Dill's guns fell to the floor as he pulled himself up.

As Kitty hit the floor the dog took courage and closed in and grabbed him by the face and pulled the handkerchief from his head. His reward was a half-dozen lightning right and left hooks to the head and a downward swipe on the nose that left his ears in shreds. Fido retreated in poor order underneath the bunk, howling piteously.

The cat now decided to look things over, and I decided that roosting on a rafter like a bunch of dang fool-hens wasn't a very

dignified position for a bunch of he-men to be in.

I got ready to kill that infernal lynx-cat. There was not a one of us but what had bad scratches, and everything in the house was scattered from hell to breakfast.

I pulled my gun. "Here goes your pet, Tumble," I called. "I'm getting sick of this."

"Let him have it," Tumble-weed answered. "I've just about decided not to raise him anyhow."

But that cat was on the move, and I was in a very precarious position. I shot and made three misses. Dill stood up with the intention of coming over to me.

"Give me that gun," he said. "You can't shoot."

Bates swore at Dill. "Sit down, or I'll break your neck." Dill only glared at Bates and stepped over to the rafter that held Bates—the center one that supported all of us.

THERE was a rending crash as the main support gave way, and we were all precipitated to the floor, taking the skeleton framework with us. Instantly the riot was on again—the only difference was, this time the cat could see!

It seemed to me that five men, a wildcat and a dog all were seized with the same idea at once—the door. We all got there at the same time, but being gentlemen of a sort, we stepped hastily back and let Kitty go first.

The dog, grown brave, chased his enemy toward some distant rocks, but did not get too close.

Jake, Tumble and myself staggered out. Jake sank dizzily to the ground.

I heard a sudden uproar inside, and I stepped in. Dill and Bates were fighting viciously, with Dill getting the worst of it. I picked up Dill's guns, dropped them down the flour-barrel and went out again without interfering.

Tumble-weed was a wreck. He had a bump over one eye from a fallen timber; blood dripped off the end of his nose from a deep scratch that run its length; his lip was all puffed up, and one ear looked like a raw steak.

But he grinned widely as he saw me eying him.

"Tumble," I said, "you're all through casting your loop promiscuously onto every innocent dumb brute that happens along. Not when you're with me, anyway. The next time you try it you're going to be a total loss."

Tumble nodded and raised his hand in mock solemnity.

"I'm for you, big boy," he announced. "If you ever catch me at it again you got my consent to wrap the barrel of your gun over my dome."

HE looked off in the distance to where a dog could be heard barking faintly.

" 'Innocent dumb brute!' " he quoted, a twinkle discernible in his remaining good eye. "Jake, do you think your steak-hound will catch him?"

Jake swore long and fluently.

"I hope he does—it would serve him right," he spat bitterly.

I don't know yet which one he meant. But I appreciated his feelings. Five men with guns, and a fighting dog, all properly whipped by a little animal that would not weigh over thirty-five pounds!

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Do Your Friends Feel Sorry for Your Wife?

Like it or not, your friends and neighbors size you up by what you EARN—judged by your home and family. Why not surprise them by making good in a big way? Tell them nothing, but on the quiet fit yourself for a bigger place!

ONLY a woman knows how much a wife can suffer when her husband fails to "make the grade"—

When she dreads to meet her old school friends—when she skimps on her own appearance "so John can make a good showing at the office"—when she can't give her children things as good as the other children have, *and they ask her why.*

Brave, loyal woman, she would be the last to reproach her husband because he doesn't earn as much as other men whose wives she is thrown with constantly.

"Money isn't everything," she tells him—yet how she longs for his promotion—for that bigger salary that means better clothes, greater advantages for the children, a new car, *more of the comforts and luxuries of life!*

What can you, as an ambitious husband, do to help?

No need to ask your wife to put up a brave front—she's already doing that. No use to ask for a "raise" on the ground that you "need more money"—"raises" aren't secured that way. No big gain in devoting longer hours to your work—chances are you are already giving loyal and conscientious service.

Only one thing, then, for you to do—so important that it may prove the very turning point in your career: *you can and should compel those opportunities that quickly lead to bigger income, real success!*

But let's get down to cases—so that you may see exactly what we mean—

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These Cases Not Exceptional

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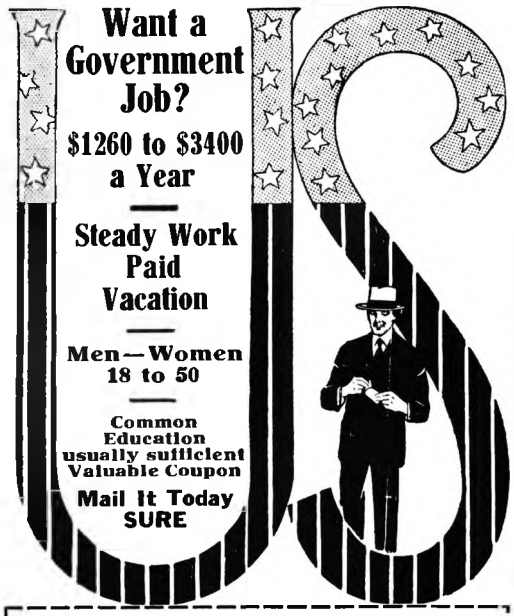

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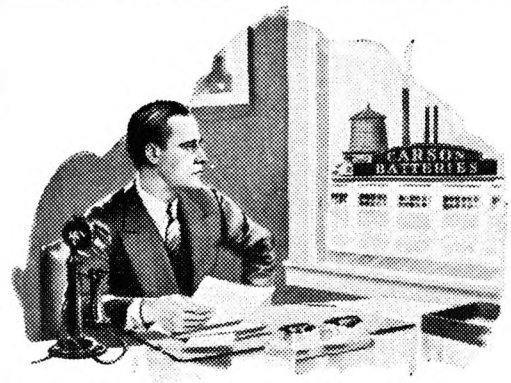

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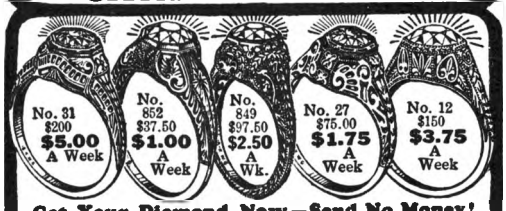

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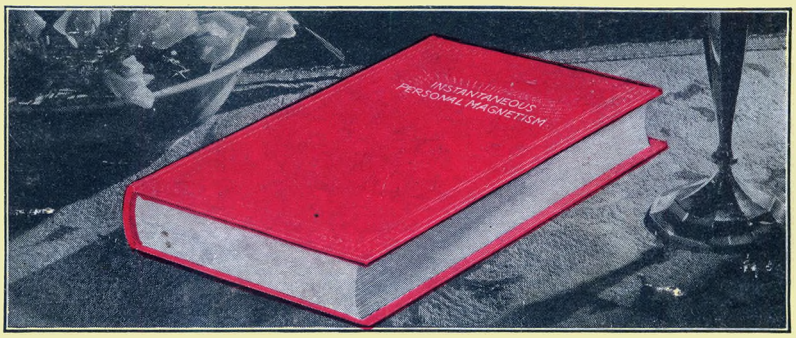

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