July

BLUE BOOK

Magazine

Now 15c

Painted by J. C. Chenoweth

Roy Chanslor • William Makin • Horatio Winslow

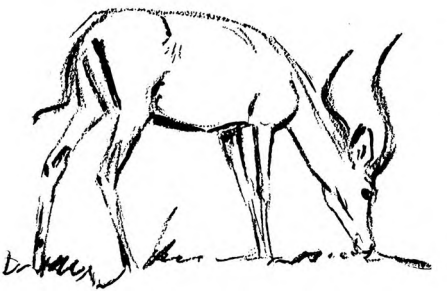
Leland Jamieson—and a complete novel by H. C. Wire:

The TREASURE of HANGING HOUSE

Prize Stories of Real Experience

From a Naturalist's

III—His Grace the Impalla



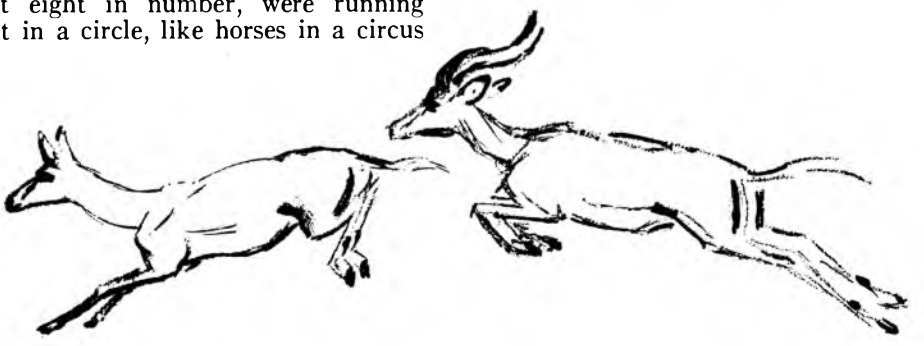
PICTURE a medium sized, deer-like animal, well proportioned, with lyre-shaped horns, large dark eyes and wearing a sleek coat of two-toned tan trimmed with snow-white and you have that personification of grace and beauty, the impalla of East and South Africa.

They stand and stare at you until you are quite close to the herd and then the warning signal (a blowing through the nostrils that sounds like *"prrrr"*) is given by one after the other. This is followed by a most beautiful exhibition of soaring through space, for they seem to soar instead of jump. When a herd of fifty or sixty impalla goes away on the jump it is a memorable sight.

My black cook called to me early one morning, telling me to get up and see the dance of the impalla. I wondered what he was talking about, but got out of bed to take a look. A short way from our camp, in a little grassy spot between acacia trees, a group of impalla bucks, about eight in number, were running about in a circle, like horses in a circus ring. Every now and then one would leap over the back of another. Since then I have often seen them at this game and wondered how they could play in such light-hearted manner in a land where death stalks them at every turn.

I once set up my easel in the very center of a game path, while I sketched a herd of impalla that were feeding near by. I was engrossed in the work, when I heard a bleating sound and the quick tapping of hurrying hoofs. Looking up, I saw an impalla doe running directly toward me, bleating in alarm at every jump. She didn't seem to worry about my presence and ran around my easel in her hurry. I could have reached out and caught her, but to my later sorrow, I did not, being too surprised to do anything.

Then, suddenly, another presence made itself apparent and I looked from the impalla to see a huge hyena-dog (which is not a hyena, but an African wild dog)



Sketchbook

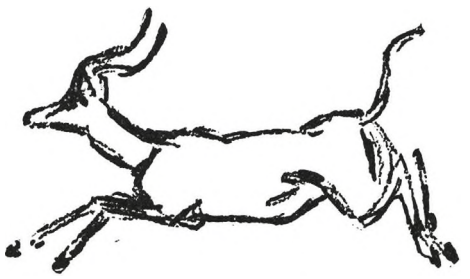
By WALTER J. WILWERDING

galloping along the trail after the impalla. The hyena-dog is a ruthless killer and fear of man, beast or devil is not in him.

I usually carried a forty-five for just such an emergency, but this day I had left it in camp and had only a shotgun with me, loaded with bird-shot. At once I started to spatter that black, white and yellow mottled hide with shot, but he looked at me disdainfully, growled a bit and swung into full gallop after his prey.

I had had but two shells in the gun; these I had fired and I now stood there cursing while the little impalla disappeared over a rise with that thing of disaster at her very heels.

We men are peculiar creatures. We go hunting to shoot deer, antelope and other timid things and yet when we see them pursued by some beast of prey, something inside urges us to come to their rescue. Perhaps it is some primitive instinct from that time long ago when beasts of prey were man's rivals in his hunt for meat.



BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

JULY, 1934 VOL. 59, NO. 3

A Complete Novel

Two Fine Serial Novels

Unusual Short Stories

Prize Stories of Real Experience

Except for stories of Real Experience, all stories and novels printed herein are fiction and are intended as such. They do not refer to real characters or to actual events.

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A PRIZE OFFER

THE truth that is stranger than fiction; the hour so crowded with excitement that it shines bright before all others in memory—these are tremendously interesting to everyone. For this reason The Blue Book Magazine prints each month in our Real Experience Department (beginning on Page 130 of this issue) a group of true stories contributed by our readers. And for this department we are glad to receive true stories of real experience, told in about 2,000 words; and for each of the five best of these we will pay fifty dollars.

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

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

Coming—the amazing story of
The MAN
WHO CONQUERED the WORLD!
By S. Andrew Wood
who wrote "RED TERROR"

So Long, Sawbones!

A deeply moving story by the gifted author of those well-remembered dramas "The Eternal Light" and "The Game of Death."

By ROY CHANSLOR

AS he stepped from the elevator into the lobby of St. James' Hospital, Felix—Dr. Felix Grainge, consulting surgeon to the hospital staff—pleasantly bade the operator good night. He was tired, dog tired, but at peace with himself and the world.

It was three o'clock of a brisk spring morning, and he had just successfully performed a difficult and dangerous emergency operation upon a distinguished and wealthy patient. He waved a cheery good night to the attendant on duty, buttoned his topcoat and stepped out into the bracing air.

His roadster was parked in front of the steps. He entered it and started for his home, half a dozen blocks away. He only hoped Helen had not waited up for him. It would be like her. But in her condition— The suggestion of a worried frown crossed his face. He increased his speed slightly.

"There's a man here—looking for you, Doctor," the door-man said, as Felix drew up in front of the apartment-building where he lived. The door-man indicated a thin fellow in a light gray topcoat who was hurrying toward the car.

"Dr. Grainge?" the man asked. He was young—he looked like a mere boy, but his face was corpse-like in its pallor. Eyes that were small, black and snake-like, stared at Felix.

"Yes?" said Felix.

A taxi drew up. The door-man looked at Felix hesitantly. Felix nodded, and the door-man hurried to the cab.

The young man with the white face said: "I was just askin' for you. There's been an accident—"

"I'm a surgeon," said Felix. "You'd best call an ambulance."

"We want a surgeon—and we want you," said the man, interrupting.

"Sorry, but I'm very tired—" Felix began.

The man came close to him as Felix got out of the car.

"It's important," he said. "An emergency—just down the street."

"Afraid you'll have to call St. James'," said Felix with finality. He started to turn away.

"Look, Doc," the man said. "This'll be worth your while."

Felix stiffened. He was not used to being called "Doc," and he didn't like it. The man had taken hold of his arm. Without even turning around, Felix removed his hand brusquely. "I said call an ambulance," he said.

Then he felt something hard in the small of his back.

"You'll come, Doc," the man said very softly.

This was preposterous! The door-man, a taxi-driver, and a swaying drunken fare were not twenty feet away. The object dug deeper into his back.

"We'll be goin' now," the man said.

There was something in his tone that kept Felix from calling out. He shrugged.

"Very well," he said quietly.

He turned. The man stood with both hands in the pockets of his double-breasted jacket. There was no gun in evidence. He nodded toward the car. Felix got in. The man walked around the front of the car, his eyes never leaving Felix, his hands still in his pockets. Felix waited for him to take his seat beside him.

"Drive," the man said.

Felix started the car. The door-man waved to him. Mechanically Felix waved back. At the next corner the man jerked his thumb to the left. Felix turned. A block and a half west, the man nodded toward the curb. They drew up before an old-style house of good appearance.

Illustrated by Austin Briggs

The man motioned him out. Felix picked up his bag and obeyed. The man took his arm. Felix did not remove it. Together they mounted the steps. The man opened the door. Felix stepped into a high-ceilinged hallway, followed the white-faced man up broad curving stairs. They stopped before a door in the front of the house. The man knocked softly, twice.

"Chalky?" a voice called.

"Yeh," said Chalky.

The door opened. A tall, tight-lipped fellow in his early thirties stood on the threshold. There was a small crescent-shaped scar high up on his left cheek.

"The sawbones, Bart," said Chalky.

The man called Bart nodded to Felix, who stepped into a well-furnished large room. Bart indicated a figure lying on a black-velvet-covered couch. It was the figure of a woman, her face white, pain-racked.

She opened her eyes, stared at Felix pleadingly.

The tight-lipped man with the scar nodded again to Felix.

"All right, Doc," he said. "There's the patient. Do your stuff."

Felix turned, looked keenly at the woman.

She said, in a voice hoarse with suffering: "Better make it fast, croaker."

Felix bent over her. Some one had cut away the clothing on her left side. Blood oozed slowly from a bluish hole. Felix gave a little exclamation. Then he was coolly professional. He dropped to one knee. Gently, with his sensitive tapering fingers, he examined the wound.

She shrank slightly but then controlled herself. Felix stood up. She was looking up at him anxiously. "Well, Doc?" She was young and had been beautiful. Now she was pitifully afraid of death. Felix turned to the tall man with the scar.

"One chance in a hundred," he said, "if we rush her to St. James' Hospital."

The man shook his head.

"She don't like hospitals," he said.

"She ought to have ether—and I need a nurse," said Felix.

"I'll be nurse," said Bart.

The woman moaned: "Won't you gimme a break?"

"You'll be okay, Rose," said Bart. "The Doc'll fix you up fine, right here. Won't you, Doc?"

His tone as well as the expression of his face told Felix there was no use of argument. He shrugged.

"Very well," he said. "It's your responsibility. I'll do the best I can."

"That's all I'm askin'," said Bart. "We'll get you what you need." He turned to the youth with the white face. "Chalky, you're takin' orders from the sawbones."

Chalky did his bidding swiftly, efficiently. Felix gave the woman a local anesthetic and set to work. He did the best he could, but he soon saw it was hopeless. Life receded from her swiftly. . . . . In a short time she was dead.

Felix sighed and stood up. The two men looked at him.

"She's dead," said Felix.

"A tough break," said Bart.

Chalky said nothing, merely nodding.

"Well, we done all we could," said Bart, shrugging.

"Not quite," said Felix quietly.

"I said we done all we could," said the other significantly.

Felix shrugged.

"That woman had been shot," said he.

"Uh-uh," said Bart, shaking his head slowly. "It was pneumonia, Doc."

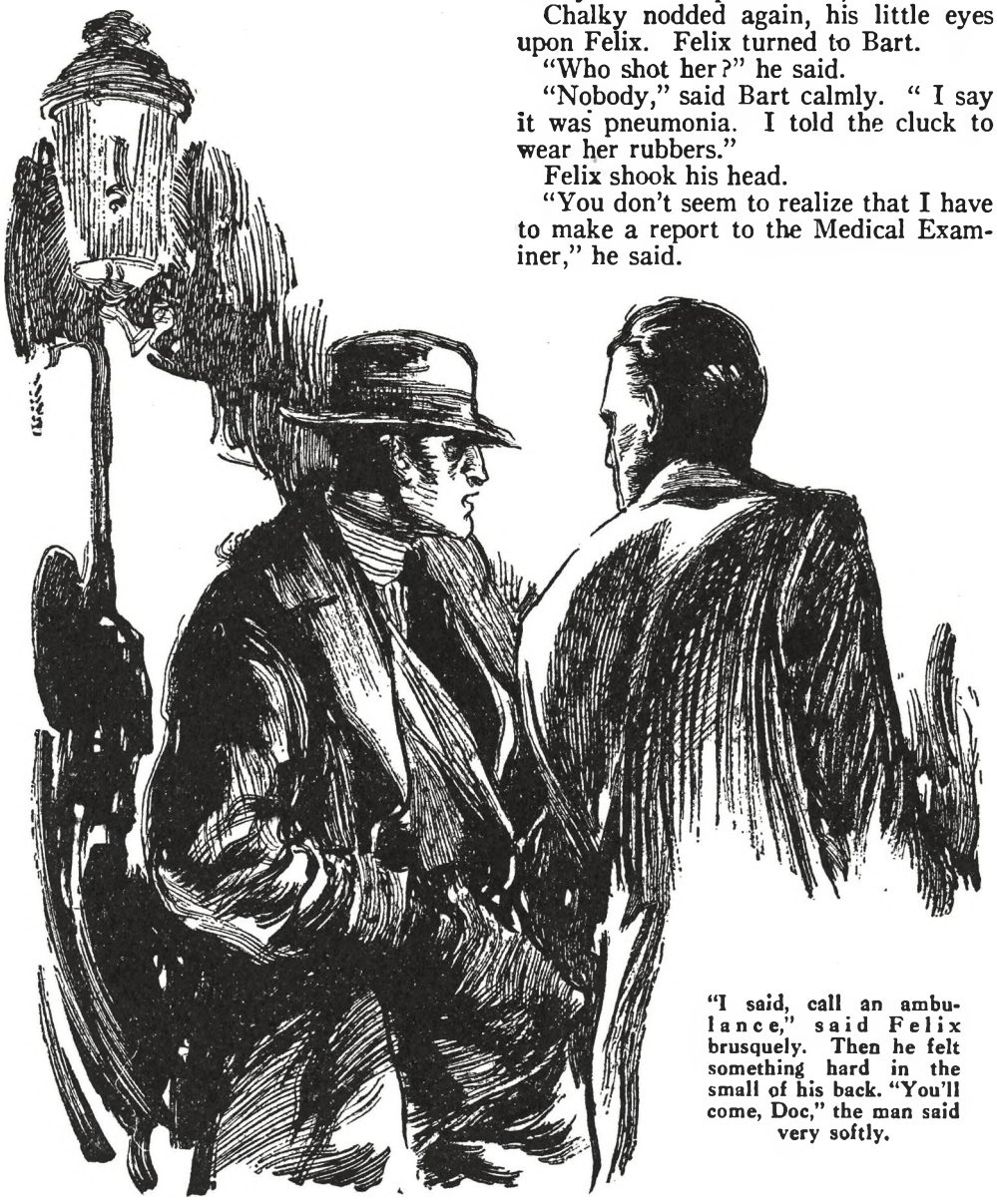
Chalky nodded again, his little eyes upon Felix. Felix turned to Bart.

"Who shot her?" he said.

"Nobody," said Bart calmly. " I say it was pneumonia. I told the cluck to wear her rubbers."

Felix shook his head.

"You don't seem to realize that I have to make a report to the Medical Examiner," he said.



"I said, call an ambulance," said Felix brusquely. Then he felt something hard in the small of his back. "You'll come, Doc," the man said very softly.

"Sure, I do," said Bart. "I told you what to say, didn't I?"

"My report," said Felix grimly, "will be death by gunshot wound."

"I don't think so," said the man with the scar. "I'm Bart Crescent."

With the tip of one finger he barely touched the scar on his cheek.

FELIX looked at him steadily. "So—you're Bart Crescent?" he said.

"Uh-huh," said Crescent, smiling.

"I see," said Felix.

"I thought you would," said Crescent.

"How did this happen?" Felix asked.

"I must of lost my temper," said Crescent. "I thought she was chiselin'—and, well—I got an awful temper. I'm sorry I croaked her, Doc. I was sorry the minute I let her have it. That's why I called you in. I kinda hoped you'd be able to save her."

He shrugged.

"But she ups and dies anyhow," he concluded. "So what?"

"Yes," said Felix. "So what?"

The man smiled.

"So you're a good little boy, and Rose Coogan died of pneumonia," he said. "She wasn't really bad—just foolish. I'd of liked to bring her around. It just didn't work out. She'll have a fine funeral."

"No doubt," said Felix.

"You wouldn't be carin' for one of the same?" asked Crescent mildly.

Felix looked the man squarely in the eyes.

"You can't intimidate me," he said.

"Don't be like that, Doc," said Crescent. "It's kind of silly. I hear that when you die, you're a long time dead."

"Murder's been done," said Felix. "I'm a physician, not a policeman. But my duty is quite clear. I shall report to the Medical Examiner—the facts. Now, if you'll excuse me—"

He turned composedly and began to pack his bag. No one spoke. When he had finished, Felix straightened up. Crescent was regarding him with a reluctantly admiring grin. At the door stood Chalky. He held an automatic close to his side.

"Put it away, Chalky," said Crescent. "The Doc and I are going to have a little talk."

As if regretfully, Chalky pocketed the automatic. Felix picked up his hat, put it on, nodded curtly and brushed past Chalky into the hall. Crescent was beside him. Together they descended the stairs. In the large foyer Crescent touched his arm.

"I kind of like you, Doc," he said. "You got guts. I want to have a little talk with you—alone. I'm ridin' along in your car. I wouldn't like to have you do anything foolish, Doc. So, I'm tellin' you: Don't do any yellin' when we get outside."

He smiled, and brought his face close to Felix's.

"Not until we had our talk," he went on. "Because look, if you was to yell—and it happened to draw a flatfoot—well, Doc, it'd be the big rap for me, of course. But they tell me they can only burn you once—and you wouldn't be around to enjoy it."

Felix nodded. Crescent linked his arm in his then, and they went out together. Felix took his place at the wheel and waited until the man was beside him. He turned to him inquiringly.

"Well?" he said. "What am I supposed to do?"

CRESCENT said: "I'm kind of thirsty. Got a drink at your place?"

"It's quite likely," said Felix. "But it's a bit late for a social call."

"Oh, I don't know," said Crescent.

"My wife has gone to bed," said Felix stiffly.

"Wake her up, and we'll have a little party," said Crescent.

Felix took his hands off the wheel. He looked at Crescent squarely.

"My wife," he said, "is going to have a baby. You will say what you have to say right here. She is not going to be disturbed. Is that clear?"

"Sure," said Crescent. "I wouldn't want to disturb a lady—under those circumstances. Let's forget about the drink."

"Just what I was suggesting," said Felix coldly. "Now you can say your piece, Crescent, and I'll be bidding you good night."

Crescent shrugged.

"Kayo, Doc," he said. "I just wanted to say that if you play ball with Bart Crescent, you can do yourself a lot of good. I could use a man like you."

"Thanks," said Felix stiffly. "Is that all?"

"Uh-huh," said Crescent. "I guess I'll climb out, then, Doc. Here comes a copper; you can tell him your sad story."

He got out of the car. Half a block away, sauntering, Felix saw a patrolman. Crescent leaned against the door of the

car casually, and began to drum with his fingers. "Doc," he said softly, "you wouldn't want anything to happen—to your wife?"

Felix stiffened. He knew fear then, for the first time. Crescent was smiling again.

"I mean—you wouldn't like to see her took—with pneumonia?" he said.

Felix clenched his hands on the wheel. His knuckles were white.

"A terrible thing, pneumonia," said Crescent. "Look how it got poor Rose. Just like that—she went."

He snapped his fingers. The patrolman, fifty feet away, was eying them curiously. Crescent raised his voice.

"Thanks for the lift, Doc," he said. "I'll be seein' you."

He waved, turned and strode toward the approaching policeman. Felix stared after him. He saw him give the patrolman a little mock salute and heard his cheery: "How's business, Officer?"

Then, mechanically, Felix stepped on the accelerator.

Crescent waved to him as he passed.

Felix let himself into his apartment very quietly, hoping that Helen was asleep. But her voice came to him immediately: "Felix?"

"Yes, dear," he said.

He went to the door of the bedroom. She was propped up in bed, a book in her hand. Her silky cloud of hair fell about her shoulders. He went to her swiftly, kissed her, held her close. She lifted her head, after a moment.

"Darling," she said, "what's the matter? The operation?"

Her voice was full of worried concern. He was looking at her so oddly. "Felix," she cried. "The operation!" Felix started. He ran his hand across his face. "Oh, yes," he murmured. "The operation—a complete success."

Gently she reached up and touched his face. It was cold, clammy.

"Felix!" she cried. "Something's happened!"

"It—it's nothing," he said huskily. "I—I'm just a bit upset. I—I just saw a woman die. It—it was an emergency case. . . . I happened to be just leaving the hospital."

"Poor thing," said Helen. "Appendix?"

Felix shook his head.

"Pneumonia," he said.

IN the early morning of a day in December, 1933, more than seven years later, Dr. Felix Grainge leaned across a table and fixed rimmed and bloodshot eyes upon the blandly smiling face of Bart Crescent.

"Bart," he said hoarsely, "I've got to get out of it, I tell you; I've got to!"

His hand trembled as he drew it across his gray face.

Crescent looked bored.

"Don't be that way, Doc," he said wearily. "You're sittin' pretty."

"I can't stand it any longer, Bart," said Felix desperately. "I've just been hanging on, these last months, hoping it'd soon be over. God, I thought when Repeal came—"

"That the rackets would be washed up?" interrupted Bart.

FELIX nodded. Bart Crescent merely laughed.

"Hell," he said then contemptuously, "booze! It's only been a side-line with me for years. We'll hardly miss it, Doc. We're goin' places, Doc; and you're going with us."

Felix gulped down a glass of brandy.

"Look, Bart," he pleaded. "Give me a break. This thing gets worse and worse. Everybody knows me now for what I am—a cheap racket sawbones! I, Felix Grainge, who had a great surgical career ahead of me! It's damnable. I've lost all my old friends. . . . It's got me down, Bart!"

"You got plenty new friends," said Crescent calmly.

"Hoodlums!" Felix cried. "Hot rods! Drug-addicts! Tarts!"

Crescent shrugged.

"Well, Doc, you always got your work," he said with a grin.

"My work!" Felix snorted. "Gangsters with lead poisoning . . . . Phony prescriptions—phonier death-certificates! Heroin, cocaine—"

Crescent's hand shot across the table, closed Felix's mouth.

"That'll be all of that, Doc," he said sharply.

He took his hand away. Felix glared at him resentfully.

"You've got your cut," said Crescent. "You've made plenty."

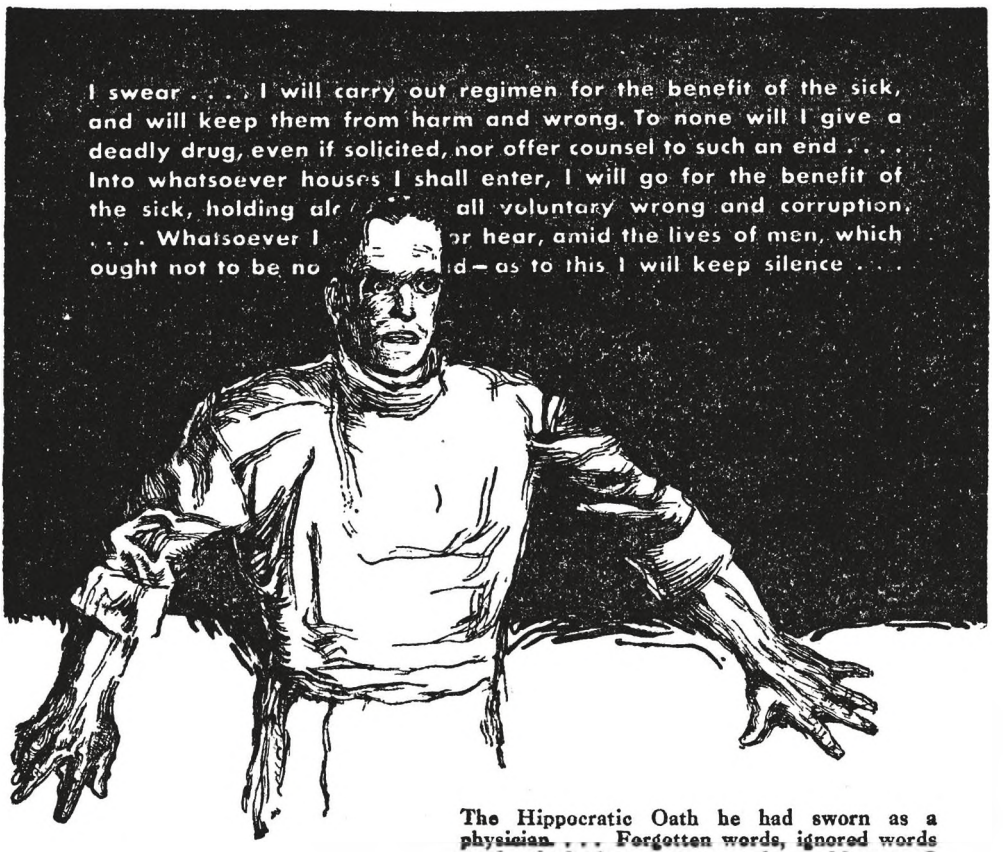
"Money!" said Felix bitterly.

"Yeh, just money," said Crescent softly. "Just what it takes, Doc."

Desperately Felix leaned across the table again.

"Bart," he said, "you've got to give me a break. You've got to let me quit! I can go away somewhere, start over."

Crescent shook his head slowly.



The Hippocratic Oath he had sworn as a physician. . . . Forgotten words, ignored words —why had they come to plague him now?

"No can do," he said. "I need you, Doc."

Felix's eyes were pleading.

"Bart," he said, "it's my wife again. She—she means it this time. She won't go on like this any more. She told me so. Said I had to get away. Bart, she'll leave me!"

Crescent drooped his shoulders and extended his hands, palms up.

"You're too soft with her, Doc," he said. "You can't be that way with women. You got to tell her she'll stick —and *like* it!"

Felix shook his head dispiritedly.

"Guess I'm not built that way, Bart," he said. "I can't blame Helen. She's got the little girl to think of. . . . It's for Vesta's sake."

"That's *your* problem," said Crescent. "But you're stickin' along with us, Doc —or *else*."

For a long moment Felix regarded the man across the table. Then, slowly, he took an automatic from his pocket, rested it on the table. Crescent eyed it indifferently.

"I could kill you, now, Bart," Felix said huskily.

"Sure you could, Doc," said Crescent calmly. "But you won't."

"I know Chalky would get me," said Felix. "But maybe it's worth it, Bart."

He narrowed his eyes and moved the pistol slightly. Crescent ran his tongue around his lower lip.

"Don't be a Joe Grimm, Doc," he said softly. "I got life-insurance—meaning your wife and kid. Sure, you could give me the old business. Maybe you could even take it as well as dish it out. But what about them?"

"They'd be safe from you—at last," said Felix bitterly.

Crescent smiled wearily.

"And from Chalky?" he asked significantly.

Felix stared at him. The hand holding the gun began to shake.

"Don't you think Chalky's got his orders?" Crescent asked.

Felix let go of the automatic; it fell over on the table. He buried his face in both hands. Crescent shrugged. He picked up the pistol, put it into his own pocket. Felix raised his face. He saw the brandy-bottle, reached for it. Crescent stopped his hand.

"Guess you had about enough of that tonight, Doc," he said. "Don't try to drink it all, just because it's legal now."

Felix withdrew the hand. He nodded resignedly.

"You win, Bart," he said.

Crescent grinned and lightly touched the crescent-shaped scar with the tips of his fingers.

"Uh-huh," he said. "Guess you better toddle along now, Doc."

Felix nodded again. He stood up, his eyes going longingly to the brandy-bottle. At Crescent's look he turned away, mumbled good night and walked slowly from the room. Crescent looked after him speculatively. He shrugged, poured himself a drink.

Felix signaled with his stick from the steps. A long and rakish phaëton, a sleek and smart imported car, started up, pulled in at the curb. A uniformed chauffeur got out, held the door open. Felix got in. In a moment the big car shot away from the curb.

Felix spoke to the chauffeur. "Jack and Charley's," he said. The chauffeur inclined his head slightly. "Sorry, sir," he said. "Against orders. Afraid you're going home."

FELIX said no more. He sank back, closed his eyes. He did not open them until the chauffeur spoke to him, quietly. "Here we are, Doctor." Felix nodded good night, got out of the car, entered the apartment-building.

At the elevator he glanced back. The car was pulling away. He hesitated. How could he face Helen now? He could slip away, grab a couple of drinks— He turned, took a few steps. Then he stopped, shook his head.

Bart would be sure to find out. He had ways of finding out everything. There'd be hell to pay tomorrow. He turned back, entered the elevator. If only Helen were asleep!

Very quietly he let himself into the apartment. Johnson, the butler, entered the hallway quickly. "Good evening, Doctor," he said pleasantly. Felix handed him his hat and stick, his topcoat. He looked at his watch. Two-thirty. Hours before he could sleep, if at all.

"Mrs. Grainge?" he asked, in a low voice.

"She's retired, sir," said Johnson.

Felix felt relieved.

"Get me a Scotch-and-soda, Johnson," he said. "Make it a double."

The man shook his head regretfully.

Felix took a step toward him. "It's worth a sawbuck to me," he said.

Johnson was shaking his head again. "Sorry, sir," he said.

"My God!" Felix cried. "He won't know!"

"He might," Johnson said. "Anything else, sir?"

"Never mind," Felix said tonelessly. "Good night."

"Good night, sir," Johnson said.

Felix entered the living-room softly, his eyes going to his wife's door. It began to open. He stiffened, then relaxed. There was no help for it. He had to face it sooner or later. She came into the room. She was fully dressed. She walked toward him. Felix turned a misery-filled face toward her.

"Well, Felix?" she said gently.

He shook his head.

"It—it was no use, Helen," he said huskily. "I—I've got to stick."

Her lips tightened. She looked at him for a long moment, until he turned his face away. She came close to him, put her hand under his chin, turned his face to her again.

"Felix!" she said. "You didn't tell them!"

"Of course I did," he said. "It's—it's just no use. I can't do it. I'm in too deep. They—won't let me quit. I know too much."

"But we can go away," she said. "San Francisco, Los Angeles, anywhere. You told them we'd go away?"

"Honey," he said, "I told them. They won't hear of it. They—they need me."

She took her hand away from him, quickly.

"And we don't?" she said quietly.

He took her hands.

"Felix," she said, "you don't know how it's hurt to feel that you had drifted into this because you were weak— I can't stand it any longer —your being a coward! You can't quit; you're afraid!"

"Helen," he said, "try to understand—"

"I've been trying to—for seven years," she said. "I—I'm afraid I do, now."

His voice was pleading.

"It won't be forever," he said. "We'll be all right. After all, they never come here. It isn't as if you actually had to put up with them."

"Felix," she said desperately, "we can go now, tonight. We'll slip away, with Vesta—go to a hotel. In the morning we'll take the first train—"

She broke off suddenly, chilled at the look in his face.

"Honey, we can't do that," he said miserably.

"My God!" she cried. "Why not?"

"Johnson," he said, hoarsely. "He—he'd know. He'd phone them. . . . They'd be watching."

"Johnson!" she said. "Your own butler!" There was hard contempt in her voice now.

"What can I do?" he said helplessly.

"Felix," she said, "I've stood this for seven years. You don't know how it's hurt to feel that you had drifted into this—because you were weak, because you didn't have the moral courage. . . . Oh, Felix, I can't stand it any longer! I can't stand your being a coward!"

The blood rushed hotly to his temples. So she thought he was a coward! Because he was protecting her,—Vesta,—he was a coward! Well, by God, she'd know, now, the truth! Angrily he seized her hand. The words were ready—but he held them back. No he couldn't speak them defensively, in anger.

She was looking at him, a changed expression in her face, an expression of hope. He dropped her hand, drooped his shoulders and turned away.

"That's it, isn't it, Felix," she said in a low voice. "That's why you can't quit —why you won't even cut and run for it with us: you're *afraid*."

There was no contempt in her voice now. Only pity. He kept his head averted. All of his anger had gone. He felt as if manhood were slipping from him, as if he must lay his head on her breast—and try to tell her, try to make her understand.

If he told her the truth, now, she could never leave him. With a word he could hold her, forever. And he needed her so. Afraid! My God! Of course he was afraid! For them! He had lived with his fear too long alone. Now he could share it. With a word he could share it.

He turned and looked at her. And then he realized, suddenly just what it would mean to her—and to Vesta. He was caught—could never hope to get free now. And they—they would be caught too. And this life was intolerable for them. It would get worse, no doubt of that. For him there was no escape. But it would be chaining them to it, irrevocably, if he spoke.

From some inner spring he found the courage that he needed. He raised his head.

"Yes, Helen," he said, "I'm afraid."

She clenched her hands. Her face was bleak.

"This is the end for us, Felix," she said. "I'm going now—tonight—with Vesta."

He nodded, slowly.

"Perhaps—it's best," he said.

Her eyes were on his. He must not weaken now.

"Good-by, Felix," she said.

"Good-by, Helen," he said steadily.

THE big phaëton drew up in front of the apartment-building. Felix stepped out as the chauffeur opened the door. "That'll be all for tonight, Grant," he said. "At least I hope it will. I'll ring if I need you."

The chauffeur nodded and touched his cap. Felix strode toward the entrance to the building. He heard his car pull away from the curb. *His* car, he thought suddenly, bitterly. *His* chauffeur! What a joke! He entered the foyer and glanced at his watch. Five minutes past three.

He kept his wrist extended, looking at it. Steady as a rock. Well, why shouldn't it be steady? He hadn't had a drink since that night, months ago,

"— Death by deliberate malpractice on the part of the attending surgeon," he wrote on the death-certificate.

when Helen. . . . Suddenly his mind seemed to stop.

Helen—drink—Helen—drink. . . .

And suddenly, terribly, he wanted a drink. Lots of drinks. On his face was the old pain—and in his heart. What was the use of trying to keep up? They were gone, would never come back. Without them life had no meaning.

Hadn't he earned at least a little forgetfulness?

He glanced back to the street. Yes, Grant and the car were gone. Swiftly Felix turned, retraced his steps, was on the sidewalk. He stepped into the shadows, looking down the street, apprehensively. Grant might turn back. He saw no one.

He began to walk, rapidly, up the street, staying close to the building-line. At the corner he turned, abruptly. A cruising taxi was crossing the street, headed eastward. He hailed it, climbed in, looking behind him nervously.

"Where to?" the driver was asking.

No good going to Jack and Charley's. It was past the closing hour now.

"You tell me," he said. "I want a drink."

The driver looked at him, grinned, made a U turn and started back toward Broadway. Felix shrank back into the cab until they had crossed the street. Then he leaned forward. No good going anywhere he might be recognized. Somebody might tell Bart—or Chalky.

"None of these midtown spots," he said. "Downtown."

Near the bend in the "L" at Third Street and Sixth Avenue the cab stopped. Felix smiled grimly. A "clip joint," of course. Well, what of it? He followed the driver up narrow stairs, was identified as "a friend," handed the driver a bill and stepped into an almost deserted room with a bar, a few tables, three or four blondes, a small dance-floor and a weary-looking piano-player. He was shown to a table, waved one of the blondes away boredly, and ordered a double brandy-and-soda.

AT four o'clock the waiter brought the check. Felix peered at it blurrily. It was for ninety-seven dollars. He laid a ten-dollar bill on the table.

The waiter stared at it. "Listen," he said. "That's only a sawbuck."

"Chalky says it's a C note," Felix said.

The waiter looked at him sharply. Felix chuckled. The waiter left the bill on the table and walked away. A large man in a tight-fitting dinner-jacket came up to the table. He looked at Felix doubtfully.

"What's this about Chalky?" he said.

Felix handed him his card. The man looked at it.

"Oh," he said. "Doc Grainge!"

His manner had changed completely. He radiated cordiality.

"Why didn't you say who you was, Doc?" he boomed. "Jeze, I'd of come up for air long ago! What'll it be?"

He was tearing the check in half.

Felix grinned and got to his feet unsteadily. He cackled. "Didn't want comp'ny," he said thickly.

He rose, swaying, pressed the ten-dollar bill into the waiter's hand, airily waved the apologetic manager aside and walked out. He teetered perilously on the edge of the top step, still cackling to himself.

They hadn't known who he was, eh? Thought he was just another sucker! That comical look on the manager's face at sight of his card! It sure paid to be a pal of Bart and Chalky. . . . He felt some one take his arm, heard a purring soothing voice.

"You'll be all right, Doc," the manager was saying.

And suddenly he felt ill. Not from the liquor—it was something else: the steep descent from childish drunken vanity to a flash of realization. Proud, he'd been, of his cheap eminence in the racket—proud of Bart and Chalky . . . . God!

Doc Grainge, he was—Doc Grainge, to every snide sharpshooter in Manhat-

tan. . . . Bart Crescent's pet sawbones—and *proud* of it. He shuddered, flung the meant-to-be helpful hand from him, began to walk swiftly down the stairs.

The manager, worried now, and servile, pattered along behind him. Felix did not look back. He hailed a cab. Behind him he heard the manager saying to his cab-driver:

"Doc Grainge . . . . Sure . . . . Pal of mine . . . . Take good care of him."

This was the final degradation. For years he had done exactly what Bart Crescent said. But he had done it to protect Helen and Vesta. He had always had the grace to be ashamed . . . . until tonight. He got into the cab without looking back, buried his face in his hands and wept.

Presently he was dimly aware that some one was shaking him. Oh, very gently, very respectfully, as befitted a pal of Bart Crescent. It was the driver. He was home. The driver was trying to help him out of the cab.

Felix waved away the proffered assistance, climbed stiffly out of the cab. He pressed a bill on the driver, who sang out a cheery, "Night, Doc." Felix did not answer. He walked slowly into the building. Home! He smiled bitterly. No place like home! He felt acutely sorry for himself.

HE let himself into the apartment quietly. But Johnson was in the foyer, hurrying toward him. Felix stopped, swaying, and peered at the man. He had never before seen him so agitated. Even his voice, when he spoke, was not like the voice he was used to; it was harder.

"My God," he heard Johnson say, "you would pick tonight! Grant's been looking for you all over town. Chalky phoned."

Felix felt sullen and defiant.

"So what?" he said.

He tried to pass Johnson but the man stopped him with a firm hand.

"So the Boss has been in an auto accident," he said harshly. "So somebody's got to operate; so he won't let anybody touch him but you; so you'd better get the hell over to St. James' Hospital before Chalky comes after you! Grant and I've covered you, so far. They don't know you've been on a bender. Think you were out on a case."

Felix raised a hand slowly to his forehead, a hand which was trembling violently. Johnson stared at the hand. And suddenly Felix, conquering his rioting nerves, held the hand steady. For Johnson's inspection then, he held it out slowly. Johnson kept his eyes on it.

"You're sure you're all right to operate?" he asked, a trifle doubtfully.

"Of course I'm all right," said Felix crisply. "Call my car. I'll see Bart through."

FELIX stood still in the foyer. He heard Johnson call St. James' and announce that he was on his way; then heard him calling his car. Felix stretched out his hand again and looked at it. By a tremendous effort he could hold it firm. He'd have to keep it thus under the keen eyes of Dr. Jeffry Small, night superintendent at St. James'.

Otherwise the superintendent would never let him operate. And he *had* to operate! This was his chance, his heaven-sent opportunity to free himself—yes, and free Helen and Vesta, forever.

He smiled at his steady hand with satisfaction. No one would ever know. His hand still retained enough of its old cunning for that. Yes, he could make that tiny thrust, the lightning thrust of steel which would destroy Bart Crescent, and even the nurse, even the anesthetician would never know.

Nor would Chalky. He would convince Chalky that he had tried desperately to save Bart. And then he would be free—and Helen—and Vesta. Perhaps—perhaps sometime he could return to them—after he had got away for a while and had rehabilitated himself . . . .Perhaps!

And then a disquieting emotion. After he had rehabilitated himself! Could he ever rehabilitate himself, to himself, if he killed a man in cold blood, a man under anesthetic, a man who trusted him, a patient?

Well, why not? One fought fire with fire. This was the underworld way: the knife in the back, the handshake and then the gun, the sub-machine-gun from ambush. Yes, the underworld way! Bart Crescent's way. *His* way now!

But through his mind phrases flashed—phrases he had not heard nor read nor spoken for a long, long time. He shook his head, puzzled; the phrases recurred: *"The regimen I adopt shall be for the benefit of my patients, according to my ability and judgment, and not for their hurt or for any wrong."*

And suddenly he knew where those phrases came from.

The Hippocratic Oath! The Oath of

Hippocrates, Father of Medicine. The Oath he had sworn as a physician . . . . He laughed shortly, bitterly. To hell with Hippocrates! What had the ancient Greek to do with Doc Grainge, racket sawbones?

The house phone rang. Johnson appeared, answered it. He seemed like the old Johnson again.

"Your car, Doctor," he said politely.

BART CRESCENT smiled up at him wanly.

"Well, Doc," he said, "you sure took your time."

"Sorry, Bart," said Felix. "I was out on a case. But we're all set now."

"Okay," said Crescent. "Let's get goin'."

Felix stepped into the anteroom, gave crisp orders. Chalky pushed forward anxiously. "Well, Doc?" he asked. Felix smiled and patted him on the shoulder. "He'll be all right, Chalky," he said. "His insides are a bit scrambled; but he's going to be all right."

"I'll stick around," said Chalky.

When the time had come, Felix, gowned and masked, stood over the unconscious figure of Bart Crescent. His mind was keen and cold, cold as the steel which gleamed in his hand. What he was about to do, he told himself grimly, was like cutting out a cancer. . . . Bart Crescent was a cancer: skillfully he would remove him.

He began to work, swiftly, surely. He must simulate complete efficiency, utter confidence . . . . It was like a game. Elation filled him. He worked on.

Suddenly the nurse said: "Doctor—pulse failing."

He stared at the unconscious man. It would be so easy now just to let him die. Omission rather than commission. Safer too. Just let the rat die. Utterly no risk. Unnecessary now for that quick deadly thrust.

Phrases were assembling again in his mind. He tried to shut them out, but they persisted. The words of the Hippocratic Oath went on from where he had repulsed them: *"Whatsoever house I enter, there will I go for the benefit of the sick, refraining from all wrongdoing."*

Those words were doing something to him. Forgotten words, ignored words, why had they come to plague him now? *"For the benefit of the sick . . . . according to my ability . . . . not for their hurt."*

God! He couldn't.

"More oxygen!" he cried hoarsely. "More oxygen!"

Feverishly he bent over the man on the operating-table. Then suddenly he was cool, calm. He was a surgeon, a professional. A human life was at stake; and he—he was again that young Felix Grainge who had sworn the Oath of Hippocrates.

Desperately, yet with his old skill, his old sureness, he fought for the life of Bart Crescent. Fought for it—and yet saw it slipping away, draining from the helpless man before him. Presently he felt a gentle pressure on his arm. He stared at the nurse, then at the patient.

The man was dead. In spite of everything, he was dead.

Felix turned away from the still body, walked blindly from the room. Dr. Small, the night superintendent, threw an arm about his shoulder. Felix, white and shaking now, looked into his eyes. It was good to look a man in the eye, like that.

The time would come soon, he suddenly felt, when he could look any man in the eye—when he could look Helen in the eye, and Vesta. He had done his best; he had fulfilled the long-forgotten oath. . . . And now he was free—and they were free.

AT a sound he turned. Chalky had come into the room, was coming toward him. Dr. Small withdrew. Chalky came close to him, put out his hand. Felix took it.

"Tough, Doc," said Chalky. "Tough. You done all you could. I won't forget it, either."

"Yes," said Felix. "I did the best I could."

He dropped the thin white hand and looked into the man's hard little eyes.

"I did the best I could," he repeated. "I tried to save him. Now, I'm through. He was all that kept me . . . . Now I'm getting out, Chalky. I'm going away."

Chalky was staring at him. He was shaking his head slowly.

"Uh-*uh*," he said emphatically. "I'm the boss now. I'm gonna need you plenty."

"No," said Felix. "I'm through now, Chalky. Nothing can force me —"

Chalky interrupted: "Nothing? Don't be that way. I'm playin' Bart's hand now, Doc. And I got the same cards — your wife and kid."

Felix seized his arm. "Chalky," he cried hoarsely, "you can't—"

But he knew that Chalky could. Abruptly he stopped. He shrugged, threw out his hands with a gesture of resignation. "Okay, Chalky," he said, "if that's the way you feel about it."

"Now you're talkin'," said Chalky. "Come on. Let's get goin'. We got plenty to do."

Felix nodded.

"Wait here," he said. "I have to make out—the death-certificate."

"Okay, but make it fast," said Chalky.

IN the superintendent's office Felix sat at a desk, alone, staring at the blank death-certificate before him. Well, he could sign this one honestly, for a change. His shoulders slumped, and he sank his face in his hands.

There had to be some way out!

Bart was gone; only Chalky stood in the way. If only he had a gun! By God, he'd walk into that room and let him have it! The underworld way—a shot in the back. But he had no gun; and the underworld way—he was through with that. It might have been the way for Doc Grainge; it wasn't the way for Dr. Felix Grainge.

And suddenly he saw it—the way out! And not the underworld way. Most emphatically not the underworld way!

He raised his head, held out his clenched fists. Then he dropped them, seized a pen and began to fill out the death-certificate.

". . . . *death by deliberate malpractice on the part of the attending surgeon, Dr. Grainge,*" he wrote, and laughed aloud.

Then he signed it firmly and read it over. When he had done so, he reached for the telephone, called the Homicide Bureau.

"This is Doc Grainge," he said crisply. "The Inspector, please, and hurry. Hello, Inspector? Yes, Doc Grainge. I don't suppose you'd be interested in slapping Chalky White into the hot seat?"

The Inspector gave an exclamation.

"A bump-off?"

"Yeh," said Felix, "a bump-off. You can grab him cold. Listen: Play it as I say—or you won't get him. Be at the entrance to St. James' Hospital at exactly seven. Keep your boys out of sight. At seven-ten—you'll know what there is to do."

He hung up abruptly, waited. He knew they'd trace the call back, confirm it. He looked at his watch. Twelve minutes to seven. He'd have to stall a little while. The phone rang. It was the Inspector. Felix repeated what he had said. Then he sat looking at his watch. When it was exactly seven, he stood up, folded the death-certificate, placed it in his pocket.

He found Chalky impatiently pacing up and down the corridor. He came toward Felix, growling: "My God, does it take all day?"

Felix interrupted: "It's all set, Chalky." He drew the death-certificate from his pocket, handed it to Chalky.

The man stared at it without opening it.

"Have a look," said Felix.

Chalky opened the certificate, began to read. Felix saw the hard little eyes narrow. Beyond that there was utterly no expression on his face. He dropped the certificate to the floor, suddenly, gave Felix a slow, deliberate stare. His hands went to his coat, smoothed it out on his lean body. Without a word he strode from the room. Felix leaned down and picked up the death-certificate.

He looked at it almost affectionately.

"The way out," he half-whispered.

HE slowly tore the paper through the middle, tore it again, then again and again. He dropped it into the wastebasket and glanced at his watch. It was nine minutes past seven o'clock. He straightened his tie, buttoned his coat, set his hat at its accustomed angle.

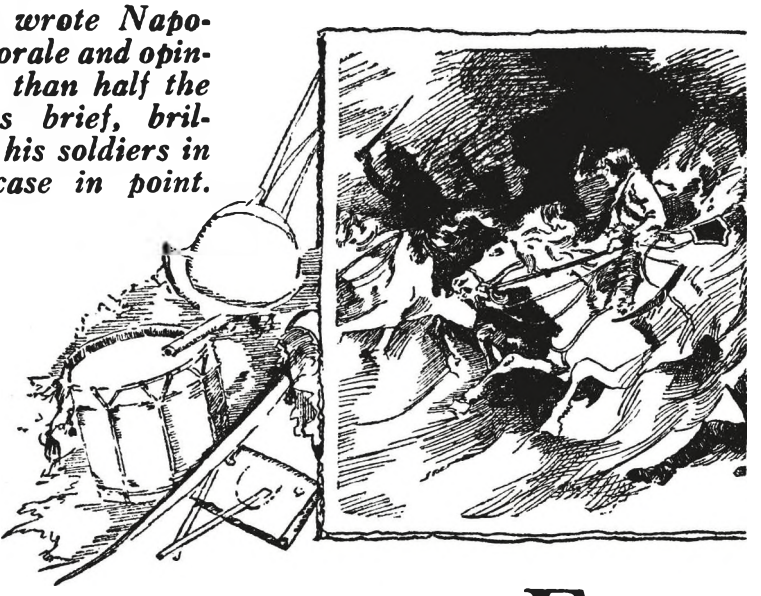
At the exit door he turned and waved good morning to the attendant. Then he glanced quickly into the street. There it was, Chalky's black car, parked directly in front of the steps. Felix smiled grimly. He could picture Chalky sitting there, behind those drawn blinds, the sawed-off shotgun in his lap, waiting, patiently waiting. And also he could picture the detectives from the Homicide Squad, from their points of vantage, probably wondering what it was all about, their eyes glued on that black car, waiting too.

Well, the stage was set. It was exactly ten minutes past seven. The waiting was over for them all. Felix took hold of the edge of the revolving door. In the glass as it came around he saw his reflection, the drawn and haggard face, black with stubble. He stared at it for an instant. Then he smiled, almost gayly.

"So long—sawbones!" he whispered.

Briskly he went through the revolving doors, into the morning sunshine.

"IN war," wrote Napoleon, "morale and opinion are more than half the reality." This brief, brilliant story of his soldiers in battle is a case in point.



The Eagle

"THE FLAG!"

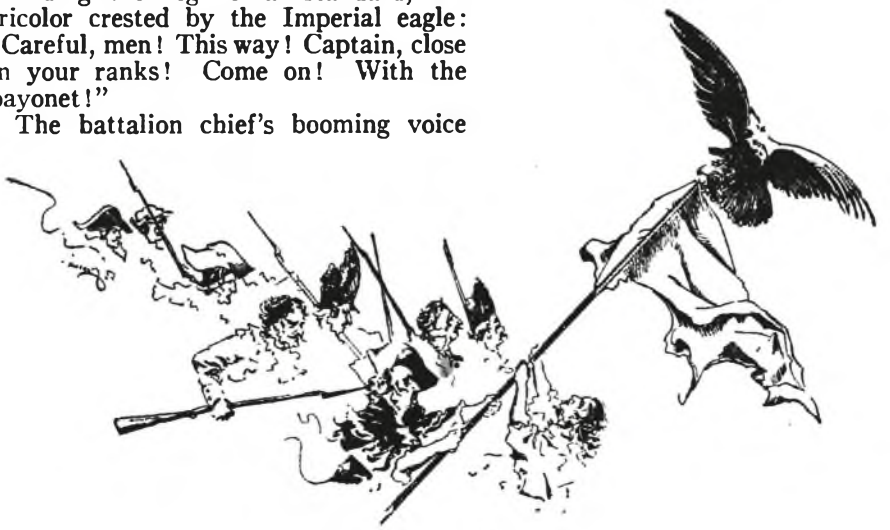
Marshal Lannes' grenadiers were pushing their bloody path through the village of Essling at the point of the bayonet. On that twenty-first of May, 1809, the plain of the Danube for several square leagues was covered with struggling troops. It was early in the afternoon; and the Austrian troopers of General Rosenberg's column were still full of fight. Every inch of pavement in the town had to be won with the steel.

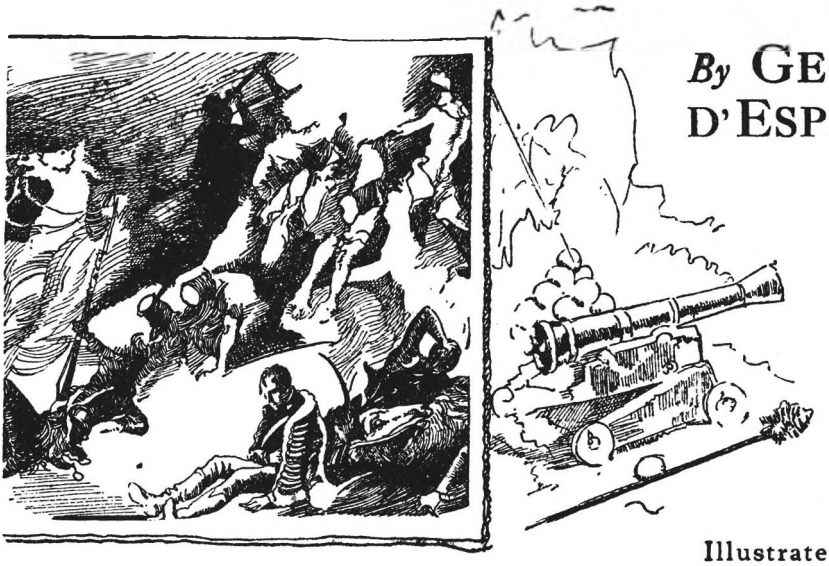
"The eagle! The eagle! Come on, pikemen, come on! Face to the left, and fight for the flag! There are four men bearing down on you, Massouille. Watch out!" The Major's horse plowed through the struggling men, toward the swirl surrounding the regimental standard, the tricolor crested by the Imperial eagle: "Careful, men! This way! Captain, close in your ranks! Come on! With the bayonet!"

The battalion chief's booming voice dominated the cannonade crashing on all sides, from Essling and from Aspern. And the French grenadiers heard it, and drove through after the mounted officer.

"Massouille! Watch out, Massouille!" The voice grew hoarse, but continued: "Hold on! Don't let them get the flag. This is your major. Hold on—don't let go! I shall speak of you to the Emperor!"

But Massouille, the flag-bearer, paid no heed. He was a huge red-faced fellow, and bore the colors through the





By GEORGES D'ESPARBÈS

Illustrated by Alexander De Leslie

of Essling

enemy's mass, to draw the mad charge behind him. The eagle was held high in his right fist; and in the left hand, he held an empty pistol by the barrel, using the heavy butt to crush skulls. His blue greatcoat was in rags—a saber's edge had torn it across the chest; stabbing points had rent the sleeves. He was bloody, sweaty, happy!

The four color-guards, armed with long pikes, surrounded him, parried some of the blows launched at his body, smashed a face, caved in a chest. The street was filled with tumult, shouts, shots, screams, and the resounding thumps of gun-butts against locked doors. Every house was turned into a small fort, stubbornly defended, and had to be stormed separately.

The Major was fearful, not for his life or that of Massouille, but for the flag. The Emperor of the French accepted no excuses for the loss of the colors. A regiment losing its eagle was a regiment dishonored. And that insane Massouille was taking too many chances. Were he to be killed, the staff would be torn from his grasp, carried away.

"You have no right to expose the eagle, Massouille! I'll have you court-martialed for this! Come back here—"

Massouille did not even turn. His gigantic body lunged onward, and the pikemen made a breach for him in the Austrian soldiery. He literally walked on corpses. He was drunk with fighting rage. But he came to a stop at last, with his little group completely shut in by enemies. Then he shouted defiance, and the tricolor swung aloft, lashed by bullets. The white-clad sharpshooters were shooting from the street-level, from the grilled loopholes opening into cellars, from windows above.

Massouille threw his worthless pistol into the nearest man's face, drew his sword. His wrist swung, and the long blade slashed out. The butt of the flagstaff was propped on a dead man's body. A heavy slug tore Massouille's shako from his head, fired so near that the man's thick hair flamed like straw for a second; and in the whipping wind his skull appeared to be ablaze. Another bullet cut into his throat, and red blood flowed down his white flesh to the belt.

"Massouille, you'll get yourself killed!" the Major howled. "Cut that stuff out,

A division of shock cavalry was on the enemy like an avalanche.

do you hear? Look out on the right! Look out! Left—watch out. Hold on a minute! I'm coming—"

But there were masses of soldiers between the battalion chief and Massouille. The horse, pricked by bayonets, reared and plunged, could not advance. The Austrians wanted that flag—they felt that they were losing the fight, but a French eagle would be some compensation. They were like madmen in their eagerness, turning their backs to other danger to attack the color-guards.

The powder-smoke rolled in the street, chokingly thick, and the flag would vanish from sight. Then the old Major would rave, scream for his men to push on, to clear the colors. Massouille would reappear, still standing, laughing savagely as he fought. The blades slashing at him had cut all clothing from his body. He bled from several wounds, and stood naked from the knees up. His singed hair made his face sinister.

"Long live the Emperor!" he shouted at intervals.

The grenadiers finally cleared him, and the Austrians broke. In the plain beyond the village their drums rolled, calling for retreat. The day was won. And the Major sought Massouille. But the color-bearer had vanished with his guards.

After night had fallen, five men left one of the ruined houses of Essling. A cold moonlight illuminated the streets, the plain—the dead. Massouille was in the lead. He was somber and disgruntled. Somewhere he had found a pair of breeches, a coat. And he held the flag, a flag mutilated and glorified by lead, but a flag he did not dare present to the Major, *for it had lost the eagle!*

A FLAG without the eagle! Sometime, somewhere, no one had seen, no one remembered, a bullet had struck the staff and knocked off the golden emblem. Massouille was in despair.

"The Major was right," he said. "I should have been more careful." He addressed his men: "What is it? Did you find my eagle?"

"No," said one of them, looking up. "I just recognized this stiff. Noel, who used to be my corporal when I was with the Tenth Regiment."

"Never mind that," Massouille snapped. "We must find it. Use your pikes—and be careful."

The four pikes plied into the scattered heaps of bodies. Corpse after corpse was

turned over. From time to time one of the pikeman would recognize an old friend, a comrade, mention the name. But they searched the length of the street, and did not find the eagle. They handled two hundred bodies without success.

"Must be here," Massouille insisted. "That's the path of our charge. No eagle—it's impossible, what will the Emperor say? What can I say, with this flag shorn of the eagle? The Emperor will hear of it tomorrow. Then what will happen?"

"We'll find it," the pikemen promised.

They continued the search. Once they lifted a bloody mass. It was the body of the Major, who had been killed just at the end of the action.

"Drop him—never mind." Massouille was gloomy. "We go into action tomorrow, and we have no eagle! What's that, shining over there?" He stooped, fingered a broken purse. "Only gold coins! What's that?"

He started, leaped back. Something huge and monstrous had lifted from a heap of bodies, was off in a flapping of wings. The five men rushed after it. For a moment their heavy boots thumped on the pavement; then the village was left to the night, to pestilence and to death.

MAY 22nd, 1809:
At break of day all cannon crashed out at once, sounding the start of the new battle. Napoleon had received reinforcements, and was in a good position. Marshal Massena had stormed the village of Aspern, Marshal Lannes that of Essling, the preceding afternoon. Between the villages Marshal Bessières' cavalry was waiting to charge; and the Old Guard was massed behind, ready to give the finishing blow.

Archduke Charles of Austria resumed the attack, striving to pierce the French lines between Aspern and Essling. A division of cuirassiers, shock cavalry, was on the enemy like an avalanche of glittering breastplates and helmets. Massena's regiments marched into the plain, attacked with the bayonet. And the Emperor sent an order to Essling:

"Your turn, Lannes!"

And Lannes' grenadiers advanced magnificently, deployed to face the Austrians. In the center marched the brigade in which served Massouille. This movement of troops was carried out silently, at a steady step. It resembled the calm, remorseless approach of Death. Then, along that orderly front, a storm seemed to break. Files were dislocated; tumult arose. A raucous, strident clamor lifted, a shrill scream that reached the marrow and caused hearts to tighten in chests.

Massouille appeared.

Drawn along, pulled, almost dragged off his feet, his fists were clenched on the staff of the flag, which raced toward the Austrians. And the shrill cries that had spread riotous shouts along the battalion fronts were the battle-calls of an enormous eagle caught by Massouille and his pikemen during the night—not the golden eagle of the Empire, but a *live* eagle fastened by one leg to the flagstaff!

The tips of the pikes prodded the huge bird, urged him in the right direction. At the sight, a tremendous hurrah lifted from the ranks of France, and the regiments broke into a headlong charge.

Infuriated by the uproar, the glorious eagle shook his chain. With a straight lunge he drew the torn battle-standard onward, the color-bearer, the four pikemen, and the regiments themselves, straight for the enemy. Wounded men scattered on the plain propped themselves up to behold the sight.

His beak gilded by the new sun, Massouille's eagle shrilled his call, which proclaimed already the great victory of Essling!

The Trouble

Amusing indeed is this sprightly tale of a young man whose suppressed sinful impulses take human form to bedevil him.

"Every jail in the land is filled with poor creatures like that," said my Suppressed Comrade to Julie.

The Story Thus Far:

IT all began, I suppose, with that infernal professor's lecture on the secret of success: all the great men of history won out, he claimed, by getting in touch with their suppressed impulses; and he sold me a book for ten dollars ($10.) that told how to do it:

In Exercise One, you placed yourself flat on your back, arms at sides, right leg over left to prevent the cosmic current from escaping, at the same time breathing so as to bear down on the diaphragm. After seven extremely rapid breaths, followed by seven slow and profound respirations, you repeated: *"I want to get in touch with my Suppressed Comrade. I want to enjoy the guidance furnished by his superior wisdom. I want to attain success through the aid of his friendly understanding. I want to meet my Suppressed Comrade face to face."*

Well, I carried out the exercises faithfully; and—one morning I woke up in my room at Mrs. Lammick's where I lodged, and there was another party in bed with me!

He was asleep. I got up and was half dressed when he awoke. There was something familiar about his features. "I demand to know who you are," I said.

Stretching his arms and yawning, the party replied, "I'm Young Excelsior's Double, or the Mystery Man of the Second Floor Back."

"That is no answer," I said coldly.

He kicked back the covers, thus revealing the fact that he was wearing one of my night-shirts. "Elroy," he said, "why not buy us pajajamas instead of flour-sacks?"

Whereupon he got up, and in spite of my protests dressed himself in my best blue serge suit. He had gradually backed toward the window, and the morning sun threw his shadow onto the carpet. But though the serge suit and hat cast the usual black silhouette, the head and the two hands cast nothing at all. Where there ought to have been a shadow, there was not even a film. "Now I understand," I exclaimed. "You are just an optical illusion, probably the result of indigestion, and I can prove it because you have not even got a shadow. Ha-ha!"

"Ha-ha yourself, Elroy," he replied in a grating voice. "Ha-ha while the ha-ha-ing is good. I'll get your shadow the same as I've already got your goat. Listen, did you ever hear of an optical illusion borrowing lunch-money? Watch me. There's a ten-dollar bill in the old wallet. Let's have it."

That was the dreadful beginning; and my Suppressed Comrade—or Suppy, as he called himself, proceeded to make my life a nightmare. For example:

He astonished (and, I regret to say delighted) a church sociable by offering to sell kisses to the girls at a quarter apiece; and he actually got by with it, and turned in quite a bit of money—all this, of course, being laid at my door.

He borrowed money from my office friend Ray Buckbee and lost it at poker.

He pestered me for money and spent it on a spree at a road-house—in the course of which he pilfered a banjo from the musicians and proposed marriage (in

with my Double

By HORATIO WINSLOW

Illustrated by Henry Thiede

my name, of course) to two unknown girls whom he met at that tavern!

I was already engaged, I must explain, to Miss Mullet of Elm Center; but Suppy wrecked that too. He met Miss Mullet and her mother at the railroad station—and here's his explanation of what happened:

"Miss Mullet and her mother got off the train—and just then an inspiration came. Ten feet away was an anonymous little girl who didn't seem to be having much fun. I went over and kissed her. . . . The Mullets are on their way back to Elm Center."

And then he committed an even more serious crime. He met Mr. Van Hulsteyn, my employer, who intrusted him (as he often intrusted me) with over a thousand dollars to deposit at the bank. But he disappeared without ever depositing that money. And when I went in search of him, I learned he had gone to attend a cock-fight. Mr. Van Hulsteyn found the deposit had not been made, and discharged me. He gave me until Friday to restore the money or—go to prison. *(The story continues in detail:)*

IN the course of a futile search for my Suppressed Comrade, I had met a friendly truck-driver of sporting tendencies. Thus fifteen minutes past midnight found me at the secluded farm where the chicken-fight was to be held. But as a result of having spent my last cent on a muffler and a pair of smoked glasses, I came near being left out. I had not thought of the necessity of paying to see the spectacle, and the admission charge turned out to be five dollars. I was altogether stumped.

Mechanically I had removed my disguise—when the door-tender said:

"Gee, I didn't recognize yuh, Suppy. When did yuh duck out? Listen, yuh can breeze back this once; but the next time yuh beat it out the winda, yuh'll pay five bucks more to crash by me."

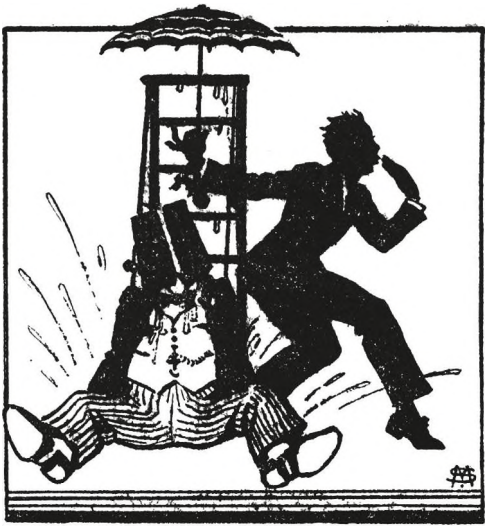
Without stopping to question the door-tender's mistake and my own good fortune, I replaced my glasses and muffler and hurried into the barn.

At first I could make out nothing but a great jam of men. By the hay-cutter, in one corner, stood a block of wood. I carried this to the outer edge of spectators and climbed up.

The crowd was grouped about a cleared space in the middle of the floor. This was the "ring." It was maybe ten feet square, and enclosed by a continuous wall of canvas about a foot in height. Two electric lights with reflectors dropped from the ceiling to shed a white glare. In the ring a pair of skinny roosters, whose legs carried long steel spurs, circled and jumped at each other.

I was just absorbing the details when, from a bench by the side of the ring, a party jumped up, yelling, "Pererforate him! Pererforate him!" It was none other than my Suppressed Comrade, though now minus the Santa Claus mask.

What I had better do next was a question. I was looking at the matter from all angles, when behind me, a large hand closed on my coat collar and I was pulled back and down to the floor. As



the hand shifted to grab hold of the front of my coat, I perceived I had been taken in charge by one of those characters seldom found except in cartoons, and labeled "Organized Crime" or "Lawless Thuggery."

Though not much taller than I, if any, this party gave the impression of being bigger because of his shoulders, and also because of being dressed in evening clothes several sizes too small for him. But the most remarkable peculiarity was his features. A long scar on one cheek gave him a standing leer. Both ears had been swollen till they looked like vegetables.

His first words, including the breath in which they were uttered, showed his condition.

"Didja see 'im, Peewee?"

"Did I see who?"

He shook me a little. "Don't stall, Peewee. Didja see 'im? She comes here to dis hick town. I allows, las' night she's at Peek Inn. Dat's where he musta copped her out. I'm askin' ya once more —didja see him?"

A cry of *"Handle!"* came from the ring. Without waiting for me to reply, the party placed his right arm around my shoulder and continued his remarks:

"She aint no tiger, Peewee—only a little vi'let in a big city. But she's got wrong ideas, Peewee. De newspaper boys talks to her, and she b'lieves 'em."

"She ought not to," I said.

From the ring behind me a hoarse voice shouted: *"On the line!"* This was followed by a scraping of benches and feet, and a sudden quieting of the boisterous conversation. I wanted to see what was taking place, but I was being held so closely that it was impossible to move.

"Respec' for womanhood, Peewee—dat's me. When I finds dis guy, I steps back like dis. Den de old one-two. Bam! *Bam!"*

Involuntarily I backed away, stumbled over the block of wood, and fell heavily just as a subdued cheer came from those about the ring.

I WAS preparing to struggle to my feet when a well-known voice remarked: "What's the trouble, Elroy? Brawling again?"

"I have never brawled, as you call it," I answered heatedly to this charge of my Suppressed Comrade. "Never in my life. So how could I be brawling *again?"* I sat up and tried to brush the dust from the shoulders.

"Then you shouldn't begin, Elroy. Remember, one step leads to another. I thought I could believe you. What are you doing here?"

This speech, delivered as it was, irritated me to the point of what amounted to a blind rage.

"Give me that hundred-dollar certificate of deposit," I said in a peremptory manner.

My Suppressed Comrade placed his hand on my shoulder. "Elroy," he said, "think. Think hard. Was there any other way?"

"Was there any other— What do you mean?"

He patted me a couple of times on the back. "I want you to look on me as your friend, Elroy. I am your friend. We are bound together by ties that reach back farther than we can remember."

"Your actions have not shown it, and I demand my certificate of deposit at once," I said.

"I may have done wrong, Elroy. But even before our conversation on the street this afternoon, I've wanted to make up for it. Old Whiffletree has to be paid. I'm here to get the money for you."

I did not attempt to conceal my bitterness. "That is what you say. You took my certificate of deposit, my last dollar, came here and lost it all."

He shook his head, smiling. "Wrong, Elroy. Wrong again." Slipping his hand into his right trouser pocket, he pulled out a roll of notes that made me gasp. "Here are three hundred and sixty-eight dollars, Elroy. Count them

if you want to. Before the evening ends, we'll have better than a thousand. This main, as the boys say, is 'in the bag.' The last two times I've deliberately picked the wrong birds. Strategy, Elroy. A lot of people are beginning to think I'm a hoodoo. The next time the smoke clears away, the little old roll will be tripled and maybe more. Watch me. The money's going on Doc Linnahan's black-and-white bird, known in these circles as Pinto Pete."

It was not only the change in manner of my Suppressed Comrade which took me by surprise; it was the fact that he had multiplied the original one hundred dollars into three hundred and sixty-eight. For the first time since my interview with Mr. Van Hulsteyn, I began to feel a ray of hope.

"Is the black-and-white rooster surely going to win?" I asked.

"It's as sure as sunrise tomorrow. Have a little confidence, Elroy. I'm not simply your best friend, but the only friend you've got." With a final pat on my shoulder he plunged into the crowd about the ring.

With my heart beating violently, I followed. It was impossible to squeeze into a seat on the benches where my Suppressed Comrade seemed to have a place reserved, but by jumping and stretching, I got a view of the preliminaries to the combat.

On one side of the ring Doc Linnahan, coat off, held in his arms a black-and-white chicken; on the other side a gentleman, as thin as Doc Linnahan was fat, cuddled a grayish bird. Pinto Pete seemed smaller than the other, but according to the official at the scales, they weighed exactly the same.

DURING this weighing and after, spectators got off such remarks as: "It's Pinto Pete's last fight. . . . How old is Pete, Doc—hundred and two? . . . Right out o' Doc Linnahan's Home for Aged and Decrepit Roosters." But my Suppressed Comrade, flourishing the money in his right hand, was looking for bets.

"Two to one—who's giving the village idiot two to one?" my Suppressed Comrade kept shouting, at the same time shaking his head at any lesser odds. "Boys, I'm just distributing a few souvenir bills I made myself. Two to one as an evidence of good faith. Pinto was a sweet little fighter back in 1896. He won his last battle during the Spanish-American

war. Who says two to one? The old gentleman won't fight unless he gets insulted first. Two to one against him, and he'll be sore. How about it, boys?"

Every last dollar my Suppressed Comrade offered was accepted and placed in the hands of a stake-holder. I could feel my entire interior quiver as I realized that my life's happiness depended on the evidently aged rooster tucked under Doc Linnahan's right arm. If Pinto Pete won, I would be more than able to pay back Mr. Van Hulsteyn. If he lost, there was nothing ahead but disaster.

Doc Linnahan and the Pell City party brought the two birds together in the center of the ring, and still holding them, allowed each to peck viciously at the other.

Then the referee motioned the two handlers back behind chalk-marks at opposite sides, while he himself crouched on his haunches at one end of a line which divided the ring into two equal parts.

"*Ready!*" he said.

I could not help doubling my fists, as if I were going to do the fighting myself.

"Let go!"

With an energy which I would not have suspected in so old a rooster, Pinto Pete dashed forward. The gray shot out at the same instant. Together they flew into the air, pecking and flourishing their steel spurs.

I was standing there with my eyes frozen open, when a hand closed on my collar and yanked me back out of the circle of onlookers. At the same time the hoarse voice said:

"Listen, Peewee, and get me right—the newspaper boys done it."

There was no more use struggling than if I had been caught in a bear-trap.

"Done what?" I snapped, forgetting my grammar in exasperation.

"Listen, Peewee, I wancha to listen."

OFTEN I have tried to recall details of the exciting quarter-hour that followed, but it is still mixed in my mind. Sometimes, I remember, I was looking at the two roosters as they fought or as they were sponged and handled by the backers. Sometimes, and generally at the most exciting moments, I was being pulled and hauled by the party in the undersized dress clothes while he sobbed his troubles in my ear. I would escape from him momentarily, only to be recaptured.

The worst of the situation was that, even to my untrained eye, Pinto Pete was steadily growing weaker. As the old black-and-white rooster began taking a beating, the Quantus gang hunched their shoulders, while the Pell City delegation emitted a stream of sarcastic remarks:

"You're some picker, Suppy! I got a rubber hen home I'd like to sell you. . . . Hey, Doc, what'll you take for the remains? Baby needs some chicken soup."

"On the line!"

"Shuffling Pete's game. He'll need it all."

"Let go!"

"Watch that Pete bird—he's dying of old age. . . . All right, Pell City: let him have it. . . . Boy, what a slap!"

("Respec' for womanhood, Peewee. I learned it on me mudder's knee." *Sniff-sniff.*)

"Handle!"

"Smile, Suppy, smile. . . . Doc Linnahan aint gonna pay the rent this month. . . . Even money that Pinto Pete can't stand up. . . . Attaboy, Doc! Suck the blood out of his throat."

"On the line!"

("Get down, Peewee. De mug mus' be right here in dis barn. It stands to reason. And when I find him—a fift'-class fun'ral.")

"Good night, Pinto Pete. . . . No money in Quantus tomorrow. . . . Suppy, wanta borrow a little change for breakfast? . . . Give the birds a chance."

("When I ast her to marry me, Peewee, what does she do? She picks up a gat.")

"Go on home, Doc, and buy yourself some good eggs this time. . . . Pinto's done. Take him out."

("She picks up a gat, Peewee, a rod, a hot-box, a gun. And she smokes me out. One troo my sleeve—*bam!* One acrost my hair—*bam!* And she's just a little vi'let—")

"Call the undertaker for Pinto Pete! . . . Shut up—he's got a chance."

("A little vi'let, Peewee.")

"Yo-o-o-ow!"

"Cut out the noise!"

"Come on, Pell City!"

A moment of silence, and then a mighty roar.

"He's won!"

A feeble crow came from the ring.

For the last time I managed to hop onto the block of wood as a rousing cheer came from the spectators.

One glance was enough. Feet in the air, the black-and-white Pinto Pete was lying on his back, dead.

CHAPTER X

AS my Suppressed Comrade worked through the crowd, the expression on his face confirmed my worst fears.

"Well," I remarked bitingly as I elbowed to a spot directly in front of him, "so this is the result of your plan! You have lost everything."

He looked at me for a moment, and then, shaking his head, smiled.

"The old poker-face, that's all, Elroy. On the contrary, I bring good tidings. We won."

"But I saw—"

"Maybe you did, Elroy, but not till after he crowed first. Not a streak of yellow in old Pinto. One last flutter, and he sent the gray to the roost where good chickens go. Then Pinto celebrated by standing on the other bird's neck and cock-a-doodle-doing twice before he died. Dry those tears, Elroy. Pete got you a neat little roll of more than a thousand dollars. How's that?"

It was so exactly the opposite of what I had dreaded, that my legs began to buckle at the knees. No doubt my Suppressed Comrade noticed this.

"Brace up, my boy," he said in a kindly voice. "And come over here, where they won't see us. Some rough characters are on hand tonight, and I don't care to have them stick their noses into our business."

I followed into a deserted corner.

"What do you want me to do?"

"I want you to check me, Elroy, as I count over the money."

I was standing with my eyes frozen open, when a hand closed on my collar and yanked me back. "Listen, Peewee!" said a hoarse voice. "I wancha to listen."

Deliberately he drew from his trousers pocket a large roll of notes and counted them into his left hand.

There was a total of one thousand and thirty-six dollars.

"Does that make it or not, Elroy?"

"That is more than enough," I admitted.

He nodded. "I don't suppose you'd mind, Elroy, if I held out, say, ten dollars of this for my personal use?"

"I ask for nothing," I replied, "except the sum necessary to repay Mr. Van Hulsteyn."

"I'm glad to hear you talk that way," he said in the most serious tones he had so far used. "No good comes from money earned by betting. But we've got to get you out of trouble, Elroy. Tomorrow morning bright and early, I'll call on Mr. Van Hulsteyn and pay him the money. It won't be pleasant for me, but it's my job, and I'm not going to duck it. Now, Elroy, I want you to leave right now."

There seemed something suspicious about this.

"I will be glad to pay back Mr. Van Hulsteyn myself," I said coldly. "I can start immediately and carry the money with me."

"In that case, Elroy—"

My Suppressed Comrade cut his remarks in the middle, to stare toward the main entrance of the barn. A broad-shouldered person with a wide-brimmed felt hat seemed to be occupying most of the doorway. As I turned, the newcomer threw back his left coat lapel.

"Boys," he shouted, "I'm the sheriff. This place is raided for bein' a gamblin' joint and an illegal gatherin' as pervided under the statutes. You're all under arrest. Don't pull no monkeyshines, because I got plenty deppities out front."

"Elroy," my Suppressed Comrade whispered in my ear, "whether I like it or not, you'll have to beat it with the money. One man can get away. Two can't. Don't look down, but drop your left hand behind you."

I did as directed.

"Here's the roll. Close your fingers tight around it, and then slip it in your pocket. Pretend you're looking for a handkerchief."

As I secreted the roll in my trousers, I took a long breath of relief.

"You'll pay him tomorrow sure, won't you, Elroy? You promise?"

"I promise."

My Suppressed Comrade spoke in a tense low voice. "You're elected, Elroy. Your first job is to get away from

the barn here before they begin rounding up the crowd. Being here is a State's prison offense in itself. If they nab you, they'll take the roll away, and you'll never get it back; they'll say it was money won at gambling."

"What had I better do, Suppy?"

"I'm going to sacrifice myself for you, Elroy. It's my duty. I want to do what I can to make up for the trouble I've got you into. Don't try that open window—there'll be a deputy outside. Swarm up the ladder to the old hayloft and slam out to the roof of the woodshed."

I nodded to show I understood.

"It's safe and sure. I investigated. Slide along to the foot of the ladder, and I'll slip over across and switch off the lights. Scram back to town. Pay Van Hulsteyn and look him in the eye."

I had a moment of hesitation. "Are you going to stay here and allow yourself to be arrested?"

"We'll hope for the best, Elroy; but if the worst comes to the worst, I'll be happy in knowing that at last I saw my duty and gladly made the sacrifice. Good-by, Elroy."

SILENTLY I wrung his hand, and left. I had hardly reached the foot of the ladder when the lights were extinguished, leaving the barn in absolute blackness. Above the tumult I could hear the sheriff shouting that it was no use because his deputies were all around the barn. As I worked frantically up the ladder, somebody grabbed at my legs. I kicked out. The voice that responded showed I had landed on the party in the undersized dress suit.

But there was no time to worry about his profane outburst. In a trice I had reached the old hayloft and crawled through an opening to the roof of the woodshed. Three waiting figures guarded the exposed sides of the smaller building, but at the sound of a whistle blown within the barn, all three hurried to the open window on the ground floor.

I jumped, and crouching low, cut across a wheat-field in the direction of Highway 76, a quarter-mile distant.

Though I was prepared to walk the eight miles that lay between me and Quantus, the sight of a car coming down the road filled me with a sudden and profound relief. It was a belated taxi which stopped at my signal.

"You're on, guy," said the chauffeur when I bargained to pay him five dollars for a lift to my room. "On'y remember—no comical stuff. Two days ago I bring a guy all the way from Pell City, and he don't have no money. He aint doin' a t'ing but sixteen days in the cooler."

Laughing light-heartedly, I slapped the bulge made by the roll in my pocket.

"You don't have to worry about that with me," I said, as I climbed in.

The taxi rattled along at a good clip. From time to time I patted my trousers pocket to make sure the money due Mr. Van Hulsteyn was still there. We were approaching the outskirts of Quantus when I decided to peel off a convenient note so that the chauffeur would not have to make change for a large sum. Placing my hand in my pocket, I pulled out the roll my Suppressed Comrade had given me.

In the dim light of the taxi I must have studied it for a couple of minutes before I realized the tragic truth.

It was not money at all. It was a bundle of inspirational clippings from the *Quantus Inter-Ocean* newspaper which I had kept in the middle bureau drawer, and which my Suppressed Comrade had appropriated to his own use. And the outside clipping was the short and helpful message entitled, *"Pay As You Go."*

The taxi stopped under a light at the corner of Main and Otis Streets. A policeman was standing diagonally across the road.

"All right, buddy," said the chauffeur, coming round and opening the door. "Here's a good place to slip me 'at five dollars. The cop over there's a friend of mine."

CHAPTER XI

IT was the rattling of heavy wheels on cobblestones that woke me up. The sun shining through the bars of the little window on the front of the street made a striped pattern on the floor. A moment or two passed before I realized I was locked up in a prison cell.

I was stiff and full of cricks. As a result of the hard cot, I had only slept by fits and starts. What caused me the most anguish, however, was not my physical state, but the approaching noon reunion of the Young People's Advancement Society.

The idea of their meeting without my being present to deliver the address of welcome, and later discovering that the

president was confined in a common jail, made me feel worse than as if somebody had stuck a knife in me and slowly turned same around.

But even though all seemed lost, I had not yet reached the point where I was willing to abandon hope. Clearing my throat, I uttered in a controlled but vibrant voice the first words and also the keynote of my address of welcome to be delivered at noon:

"This is a solemn occasion."

BEFORE I had a chance to rehearse any further portion of the speech, a big red-faced man rattled the lock on the barred door and then came into the cell with a tin cup full of coffee and a hunk of bread without any butter.

"Did ye sleep good, me lad?" he asked. "It aint the Quantus House hotel, but we aims to give safe lodging to them as patronize us."

"I demand to be released at once," I said, starting up from the hard cot. "It was all a mistake. Moreover, I have an important engagement at twelve-fifteen sharp."

"Tell it to the judge, me bucko."

"When?" I asked eagerly.

"Tomorrow morning at nine o'clock."

"But I've got to get out right off."

"That's what they all say. Better for ye, me lad, if ye'd been caught at the chicken-fight—instead of tryin' to chate a poor shoofer out of his lawful fare."

There seemed to be no easy way in which I could explain that the misdeed he mentioned was not my fault.

"What happened to the other people at the cocking-main who were arrested last night? Are they here too?"

He turned loose a smile that divided his face into halves. "Arrested, says you? Me poor b'y, don't ye know the sheriff's a sport himself, he is? He wouldn't be too hard on them as likes to watch a couple of game roosters scratch at each other. Maybe at Pell City the laddybucks put up a matter of ten dollars bail or the like, and out they went. A rale sport is the sheriff. Well, enjoy your breakfast, me b'y. If ye've any complaints, I'll fire the chef."

As a result of my nervous state it was impossible to do more than taste the coffee, which did not resemble any coffee I had ever drunk before. The bread was coarse and stale, and after two mouthfuls I gave up trying to force it down, though even if I had been served a hotel breakfast, I do not think I could have eaten

with appetite, because the more I considered my present fix, the more depressed I felt.

It was possible I might in some way obtain my release without the Y. P. A. S. crowd being the wiser, since when called upon to give my name the night before I had mumbled it so that the police officer in charge had written *"Elmer Semmels."* But unless I was free in time to address the big reunion at twelve-fifteen sharp, I would lose the only chance I had of making a favorable impression on Mr. Davenanter. And I had secretly hoped that, if I did as well in public as in private rehearsals, I might later persuade the Master Mind of Wall Street to say a word in my behalf to Mr. Van Hulsteyn.

Clamping my teeth together, I said to myself: "No, I will not give up hope."

I breathed abdominally three times in a concentrative manner, and then, after a rapid walk up and down the cell, launched into that part of my address of welcome which referred to Mr. Davenanter.

"This is a solemn occasion," I began, gesturing toward the wooden stool behind me and to the right. "My friends, we have with us today a man whom all Quantus delight to honor. I do not have to tell you his name. As I look into your eyes, my friends, as I look—"

At this moment I glanced out of the barred window, to be met with a sight across the street that drove the strength from my legs.

Julie Van Hulsteyn! And walking by her side and talking familiarly as though he had known her all his life, was my Suppressed Comrade!

The spectacle dashed my self-control

"Alexander the Great, getting ready to discover Niagara Falls!" announced my Suppressed Comrade. Just whether Mr. Davenanter lost his balance, or tried to jump, I am unable to say.

into little bits. I rushed forward, and squeezing my face halfway through the bars, yelled:

"Hey, there!"

The two of them stopped. My Suppressed Comrade turned toward Julie as though to say, "Well, here is something curious. What can it be?" Then looking up, he remarked in a loud voice: "What is it, my friend?"

Instead of making a carefully guarded appeal, I was unable to keep myself from saying in what practically amounted to a scream: "You know well enough what it is!"

"It seems to be a jail," he answered in a calm voice, "and from all appearances, you are on the inside looking out."

This left me in such a speechless condition that for the moment I could only thrust my face between the bars and gibber.

My Suppressed Comrade shook his head. "If every young man in America could see this sight," he said to Julie, but in such a loud voice I could not mistake the words, "it would do him good. Every jail in the land is filled with poor creatures like that. No will-power. 'One drink won't hurt me,' he probably told himself. I trust this will be a lesson to him."

"It will be a lesson to you!" I yelled, shaking the bars so violently they rattled. "If I ever get out, it will be a lesson to you!"

My Suppressed Comrade shook his head again. "Poor fellow, poor fellow! Probably delirium tremens. If I could only help him, extend to him the right hand of good-fellowship—"

"It is *not* delirium tremens!" I cried with all my remaining strength as the two of them started on down the street, Julie's hands over her ears. "It is not anything of the kind! You know who I am—"

At this moment I felt a pair of hands grasp my legs, and with considerable violence I was pulled away from the window and back into my cell.

It was the big red-faced man who had brought me the alleged breakfast.

"Ye'd better stop it, Caruso," he said calmly. "If the jailer hears ye calling to them outside, he'll tuck ye away in a nice room without any windows at all."

With an effort I managed to choose my words. "If I am excited, it is not my fault. I have an important engagement at twelve-fifteen. It is impossible for me to wait. I would kindly ask you if there is any way things can be fixed up so I can get out by noon sharp?"

He scratched his head. "Ye seem a decent sort of a lad. Listen, now: have ye friends outside?"

I mentioned Ray Buckbee.

"And ye say he's working in the Van Hulsteyn office? Listen again, now, and with both long ears: If I do something for ye, would ye be rememberin' favors—rememberin' them with two silver dollars, and a half dollar more for good luck?"

"I would," I said.

"Then, me lad, instead of bawlin' and squallin' like a drunk, ease me your friend's telephone-number. I'll have him come down, say a good word for ye to the desk-sergeant, pay the shoofer and costs, and three minutes after, ye'll be free as an ould tomcat."

AS the door clanged behind him, I dropped down on the cot to wipe the perspiration from my forehead. For the first time since my arrest the night before, I sighed with relief. It was merely a case of keeping myself under control until Ray Buckbee should come to get me out.

There was no use wasting precious minutes. I stood up again to finish the greeting to Mr. Davenanter.

"As I look into your eyes, I see that I do not have to name our honored guest to this assembly. He is known not only in this city but from one end of our broad country to the other. *(Wait for applause.)* Whenever a member of the Young People's Advancement Society grows down-hearted, he has only to think of the triumphant achievements of this man who began his career here in Quantus. *(Wait for continued applause.)* Some of us may not have piled up a fortune of fifty million dollars *(Wait for laughter and applause)*, but that cannot cause us to withhold our sincere appreciation of a man who has. Need I say, friends and fellow-members, that I refer to the man who made Quantus famous, William F. Davenanter, the Master Mind of Wall Street? *(Wait for continued applause ending in an ovation.)"*

I rehearsed this several times with gestures. Often I had watched the minute hand of a clock crawl slowly around the dial. This time the opposite was the case. It revolved like a greased windmill.

Twelve o'clock noon was ringing, and I had bitten my nails down to the quick, when the bolt in the door rattled and Ray burst into my prison-cell.

"Hello, Elroy! *We have your letter of the 32nd inst. enclosing expense account."*

"Ray," I said desperately, "please don't waste any time. Minutes are precious."

Costs and incidentals amounted to $14.85. But though Ray had the money, I was obliged to listen to a long lecture by the desk-sergeant on the evils of bad company. It was twelve-seven by the church clock when I walked out into the sunlight a free man.

Ray had his father's car outside.

"Hop in, Elroy, and I'll get you there on the dot."

But there was something the matter with the starter. Five minutes slipped past before the motor turned over.

"There are only three minutes left, Ray."

"Cheer up. You'll be there by return mail."

"That stop sign is going to hold us up."

"Don't worry, Elroy. *Leave it to the old bus. Cordially yours, Ray Buckbee."*

As I looked at my watch, which the desk-sergeant had returned, I could feel my face go white. The church clock had been four minutes slow. According to the correct hour, it was already nineteen minutes past twelve.

As the car pulled up with a bump before the stairway leading to Odd Fellows' Hall, I jumped out and with strength born of desperation, bounded up the steps just as the harmonium started, and voices joined in the favorite Y. P. A. S. chorus:

"Let a little sunshine in!
Let a little sunshine in!
Laugh and make success worth while.
Be a winner with a smile
And let a little sunshine in!"

After all, I was not yet too late. I felt like a man who has been reprieved from a death-sentence.

MANY times I had seen the hall crowded, but never jammed to the doors as it was today. There were even people on tiptoes outside. By jumping a little, I could see Willis Meecham leading the singing. I tried to signal him. On the platform, in the seats of honor, were Dr. Spalsbury, Mr. Schimmelpfennig, other well-known citizens of Quantus, and a well-built man of middle-age whom I recognized at once from his photographs as Mr. William F. Davenanter, the Master Mind of Wall Street.

Also seated on the platform were Buck Wilmot, Nate Cullen, and Doc Linna-

han. This was a surprise to me, as they had never belonged to the Y. P. A. S. Forty years before, they had been boys along with Mr. Davenanter, but they had never shown much respect for him—in fact, had often gone out of their way to tell belittling anecdotes about him.

By shoving and squirming I had just worked halfway down the middle aisle when the chorus ended. At this, Willis Meecham, who, I was afraid, had not seen my signals, raised his right hand for silence and announced: "The address of welcome by Mr. Elroy Simmons, President of the Young People's Advancement Society."

With a friendly feeling for Willis, such as I had never before experienced, I started forward again. But I had just taken two steps when I stopped.

Out from the twelfth row a party catapulted into the aisle, and began turning handsprings in the direction of the platform. Once there, without pausing, he vaulted to the top of the speaker's table, and standing up, shook his two hands together over his head, the way prize-fighters do in the movies.

"*Poppus woloppus!*" he yelled out. "An old Latin proverb meaning, 'The gang's all here.' Howdy—and howdy! If the old rheumatiz bars you from handsprings, remember I've done 'em for you. Call me Suppy."

As I stood there, turning up my coat-collar and cramming my hat down over my eyes in an effort to disguise myself, just one thought was uppermost in mind: I wished the floor of Odd Fellows' Hall would give way and tumble everybody, including myself, into Mr. Cohen's Fair Store below—a confused heap of corpses!

CHAPTER XII

OPENING my eyes, I waited breathlessly, expecting to see the past and present members of the Y. P. A. S. rise in a body and throw the speaker off the platform. Nothing of the kind happened.

The room, as you might say, rocked. Though I had attended plenty of lectures and meetings in Odd Fellows' Hall, never had I heard so much laughter and applause. Even Mr. Davenanter was smiling and patting his hands together.

Arranging a lock of hair down the middle of his forehead, thrusting his right hand between the buttons of his coat, setting his features in a heavy frown, my Suppressed Comrade began:

"Past and present members and friends of the Young People's Advancement Society of Quantus: This is a very sololemn occasion and—suffering quotas! Look who's here! It's our distinguished foreign delegation. Stand up, Spinny, if you're able to get on your feet, and let the boys and girls look at you. Where's your old man—still digging 'em in Bermuda?"

IN the tenth row a man of frail build, his face red with embarrassment or something, stood up and laughed nervously. He wore eyeglasses, and his upper teeth protruded. With a peculiar horror I realized that this insult must have been directed at young Mr. Spinford, son of the Bermuda Onion King, who was evidently representing his father during Old Home Week. He had hardly straightened up when my Suppressed Comrade said:

"All right, Spinny. Now you can sit down. Believe it or not, you're no work of art. Don't tell anybody, boys and girls, but the United States Secret Service is after Spinny. He slipped into New York without paying any duty—the big Bermuda Onion!"

You would have thought my Suppressed Comrade had just sprung the most comical joke in the world. Reserved and dignified business men slapped each other on the back, while refined old ladies giggled and snickered into their handkerchiefs.

Once more placing his right hand between his coat buttons, the same as Napoleon, my Suppressed Comrade arranged the lock of hair on his forehead and continued as before:

"This is a very sololemn occasion, and when I say sololemn I mean sololemn, and— Hello, Lottie! When did you boop-a-doop in?"

Yanking his right hand out of his coat, my Suppressed Comrade began blowing kisses at some one near the front of the hall.

"A big hand, boys and girls, for little Lottie, now Carlotta, Chicago's favor*yte* and everybody's favor*yte*. And can she sing a torch song! She makes you laugh—she makes you weep—she makes you mutter in your sleep. So stand up, Lottie, and take a bow—you're a wow."

From the fourth row a slim girl in a red coat stood up and bowed several times. As she did not face toward the back, I was unable to get any further idea of her appearance. Beyond ques-

tion, however, the lady was a certain Miss Hackett who had left Quantus before I made it my home, and who was known on the front pages of sensational newspapers as Carlotta, the Tiger Girl torch-singer.

My Suppressed Comrade replaced his right hand inside his coat and resumed:

"This is a very sololemn occasion, and before giving my imitation of eight Arab acrobats playing 'My Old Kentucky Home' on a giant xylophone— For the love of green apples, if it isn't Davvy!" He had turned, and to my horror, was slapping Mr. Davenanter familiarly on the back. "Say, Davvy, do you remember when you initiated Doc Linnahan into the Royal Order of the Hot Paddle, and when you took Nate Cullen on that snipe hunt, and when you made Buck Wilmot think that the leading lady of the Parisian Queens Company was crazy about him?"

I had expected Mr. Davenanter to rise up in righteous indignation and maybe leave the hall altogether. Words cannot describe my relief when, instead, he broke out in a hearty laugh, which the three mentioned friends of his boyhood joined, together with the rest of those present.

My Suppressed Comrade turned to the audience.

"It is a sololemn occasion," he continued, "but I'm going to let a little sunshine in by announcing that the Y. P. A. S. needs one hundred and fifty dollars to resurface its tennis-courts."

This was news to me. To my knowledge—and as president I ought to know —the Y. P. A. S. had no tennis-courts.

"Mr. Davenanter has generously contributed this check for seventy-five dollars, which I hold in my hand. The balance of the fund will be forfeited by one or all of these three local gentlemen: Mr. Cullen, Mr. Wilmot, Mr. Doc Linnahan."

ANOTHER wave of applause swept over the audience.

"It's a little contest between these three old-timers, based on an athletic feat suggested by Mr. Van Hulsteyn, well-known fellow-citizen. It will be refereed by Mr. Davenanter himself. More than that, thanks to his splendid physical condition, Mr. Davenanter, our old swimming champion, has kindly consented to demonstrate Mr. Van Hulsteyn's test, which these three venerable ice-wagons will later attempt on their own account. Here is the trick: Stand on the stepladder with a weight supported by the upraised right arm, then bend down, and with the left hand touch the heel of the right foot. If you please, Mr. Davenanter."

Smiling genially, Mr. Davenanter got up from his chair and mounted to the platform at the top of a stepladder that had been brought forward by Willis Meecham. My Suppressed Comrade climbed nimbly to his side, carrying in one hand a bucket full of water, and in the other a broom-handle with a disk nailed across the top.

In answer to the repeated applause of those present, Mr. Davenanter bowed twice in an extremely friendly way.

"WHEN Quantus lost Davvy," announced my Suppressed Comrade from his perch, "it lost the best pracactical joker the town ever turned out. Nobody ever got the better of Davvy, and if he's known as the Master Mind of Wall Street, it's because he's played a few pracactical jokes on some of the wolves and cutthroats who were looking for a chance to pull something on him."

The laughter became hearty applause, which lasted for at least two minutes. Mr. Davenanter was obviously pleased, his appearance being so affable that I could have wished for nothing better than the immediate opportunity of selling him my ideas on the subject of rechargeable dry-batteries.

"To speak seriously," my Suppressed Comrade resumed, "even though Mr. Davenanter is not above enjoying our informal fun today, we must never forget that he is one Quantus boy who has made good in a big way because of his outstanding intelligence. Wherever you go in the United States, the name Davenanter recalls to you those identifying words, the Master Mind of Wall Street."

During this eulogy Mr. Davenanter, balancing on the top of the stepladder, bowed and smiled to suggest how deeply he was touched. While speaking, my Suppressed Comrade had raised the pail on the end of the broomstick so that the upper rim was tight against the ceiling. As he pronounced the last words, he lifted Mr. Davenanter's right hand into the air, slipped the end of the broomstick into the waiting fingers, and then leaped lightly to the floor.

All eyes were now on Mr. Davenanter as he stood there smiling, his right arm raised the same as the Statue of Liberty,

though as stated, instead of holding a lamp, he was crowding a pail of water against the ceiling by the aid of a long broomstick.

While everybody applauded, he very cleverly raised his right heel and touched it with his left hand.

Mr. Davenanter now nodded in a satisfied way to my Suppressed Comrade, who immediately said: "Would you just as soon do it again, Mr. Davenanter? Mr. Cullen didn't see you."

"Simplest thing in the world," said Mr. Davenanter, genially, and he smilingly repeated the feat.

SOMEBODY in the back of the room began to snicker.

Coming to the foot of the stepladder, my Suppressed Comrade said in a respectful voice: "Mr. Wilmot wishes you would demonstrate that movement once more. He's a little near-sighted, Mr. Davenanter. He thinks you didn't touch your heel."

"Thinks I didn't touch it!" said Mr. Davenanter with a short laugh. "Come closer, Buck, and you'll see there's no trick about it."

Snickers, so far as I could see for no particular reason, now began breaking out all over the room.

Leaving his chair, Buck Wilmot approached Mr. Davenanter, and placing his face about six inches from the latter's right foot, watched the third successful demonstration.

"Well, Buck," said Mr. Davenanter in a friendly voice, "are you satisfied?"

Placing his hands in his pockets, Buck Wilmot swaggered to the front of the platform. "I'm satisfied, Davvy," he bellowed. "Is everybody else satisfied?"

The answer to this was a roar of laughter in which practically all present except myself joined. It was only then I grasped the horror of the situation.

Mr. Davenanter stood on top of the ladder, with the pail of water jammed against the ceiling. By himself he was unable to get down from his position without being doused from head to foot.

At the moment I realized this it also apparently dawned on Willis Meecham, who up to this time had doubtless been the unwitting tool of my Suppressed Comrade. Willis sprang forward to aid Mr. Davenanter.

With a violent shove my Suppressed Comrade thrust him back among the ushers, while at the same time Nate Cullen, Buck Wilmot and Doc Linnahan joined hands in a semicircle to keep anyone from getting near the stepladder, though to tell the disgraceful truth, there was no particular effort to rescue the Master Mind of Wall Street.

Instead of a shout of reprobation, the older crowd let out a joyful yell. Never in my whole life have I seen people laugh so much as that crowd of past members of the Y. P. A. S.

Personally, I had started forward to save Mr. Davenanter or perish in the attempt, but it was impossible to break through the crowd.

His face, which had become first white and then brick-red, was one of the most agonized I had ever seen in my entire life. Sometimes he looked at the pail; sometimes he looked down to the stepladder and floor. And as often as he made any movement whatever, my Suppressed Comrade, acting as though Mr. Davenanter were a piece of living statuary, would yell out titles to the audience, such as, *"Washington Crossing the Delaware. . . . The Dying Gladiator. . . . Russian Spring Dance. . . . Liberty Enlightening the World. . . . Alexander the Great Getting Ready to Discover Niagara Falls!"*

THOUGH this distressing scene could not have lasted more than a few minutes, to me it seemed hours. Just how it ended, whether Mr. Davenanter lost his balance or whether he tried to jump, I am unable to say. Anyhow when that happened which was bound to happen, not only did the water descend full force on the upper part of Mr. Davenanter's body, but as he left the stepladder to land in a seated position on the platform, the bucket took advantage of the opportunity to slip down over his head like a helmet.

I had not supposed that the noise, which had been gradually growing louder, could possibly increase in volume. But it did. There was hardly an individual in the hall who was not on his feet, waving his arms and alternating between screams of laughter and shrieks of burlesque advice to the Master Mind of Wall Street.

While Mr. Davenanter sat there with the bucket over his head, my Suppressed Comrade seized a parasol from one of the ladies on the platform, and began imitating the antics of a tight-rope walker, bowing, almost losing his balance, turning on his toes, pretending to be about to fall, and finally throwing seven kisses to Miss Hackett, as he repeated:

"This is a sololemn occasion."

The whole scene ended when Mr. Davenanter succeeded in prying himself loose from the bucket, which he immediately hurled into the audience. Snatching up his check, he tore it into bits. Finally, with a ferocious twist to his mouth, he jumped off the platform and plowed his way through the crowd.

With the energy born of despair, I worked my way after him and out of the main entrance to the corridor. But my explanation was never to be made.

Mr. Van Hulsteyn, who evidently had not attended the reunion, appeared at the top of the stairway as Mr. Davenanter started down.

"Well, well, Davenanter," Mr. Van Hulsteyn said in a genial voice. "Well, well— Why, what's happened? What's the matter?"

"Matter!" said Mr. Davenanter in a horrible way between clenched teeth. "There's nothing the matter. I've been laughing so hard over your athletic feat and your bright young man that I've broken out into perspiration. A wonderful sense of humor you've got, Van Hulsteyn. Wonderful!"

Mr. Van Hulsteyn stood amazed.

"What athletic feat?" he asked. "What young man do you mean?"

Bringing his face close to Mr. Van Hulsteyn's, Mr. Davenanter yelled out in a voice like a raging bull:

"Oh, looking for information, are you? All right, jot this down in your notebook: Davenanter isn't interested in your fake rechargeable dry-battery. Davenanter won't help you put it on the market. Davenanter won't even talk it over with you. Get out of my way!"

Shoving Mr. Van Hulsteyn to one side, he rushed drippingly down the stairway to the street.

CHAPTER XIII

WHEN I slammed into the house after an hour and a half of frenzied walking, it was with the hope of finding that my Suppressed Comrade had returned to his room. I was not disappointed. I had hardly come in the hall when I heard him moving overhead.

At the foot of the stairs I paused a moment to breathe abdominally three times in a concentrative manner, and as far as possible, to draw into my lungs drafts of cosmic courage as recommended in Lesson 15 of the Correspondence course entitled, "Super-Success by Super-Psychology." Then I rushed upstairs and threw open the door.

Coat off, collar unbuttoned, my Suppressed Comrade was sitting on the bed eating sardines and crackers—doubtless stolen from Mrs. Lammick's pantry.

"Hello, Elroy," he said. "When did you get out? You should have seen what happened at the Y. P. A. S."

"I saw what happened at the Y. P. A. S.," I replied in an ominous voice. "That is one of the things we are going to discuss together."

Saying that, I reached into the closet and took out my umbrella, which had a weighted handle.

APPARENTLY unaware of the significance of this gesture, my Suppressed Comrade rolled over on his back, chuckling and kicking his legs into the air.

"Did we wow 'em, Elroy! Are we good! The Master Mind of Wall Street! Boy, from now on—"

I rapped the floor with the end of the umbrella. "This is going to stop," I said severely. "This is going to stop at once. I have had all the double dealing and equivocation from you I can stand. Turn over the money to me, sir. Then explain, if you can, your disgraceful actions, which have queered me permanently, not only with Mr. Van Hulsteyn but with Mr. Davenanter as well."

He sat up on the bed, a hurt expression on his face.

"But Elroy, I don't see why you take that attitude."

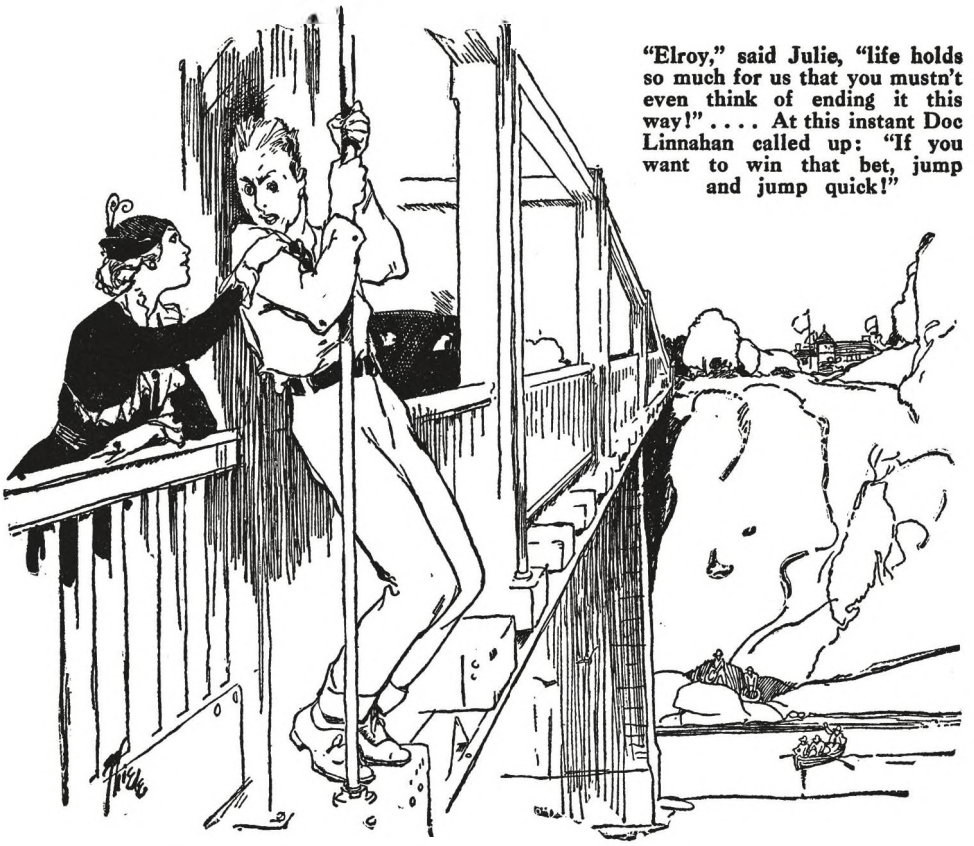
"You do not have to see why," I retorted dryly. "Your first move is to turn over to me the one thousand and more dollars you won last night."

Before answering, my Suppressed Comrade placed a sardine between two crackers, ate the sandwich to the last crumb, and wiped his hands on the bedspread.

"Elroy, I don't understand your attitude. We're pals, Elroy—chums, comrades. In my poor way I've done my best for you."

I laughed gratingly. "'Poor way' is right."

But in a plaintive voice he went on: "You know yourself, Elroy, I'm not altogether responsible. I only do the things you've always wanted to do. You can't deny you used to have a secret hankering to play around in the spotlight. And as for upsetting some pom-



"Elroy," said Julie, "life holds so much for us that you mustn't even think of ending it this way!" .... At this instant Doc Linnahan called up: "If you want to win that bet, jump and jump quick!"

pous ass—well, everybody's wanted to do that, Elroy."

Raising the umbrella, I shook it at him. "I don't care to listen to excuses, sir. I have come here for that one thousand and eleven dollars you bamboozled from Mr. Van Hulsteyn. I shall not leave the room until I get it."

FOR the first time he seemed to realize I was in earnest.

"Elroy," he said in a hushed voice, "something's happened. You're different. I'm afraid of you when you look at me that way."

"You have every reason to be afraid of me, my fine fellow, though I shall not resort to physical violence unless you force me to it."

"I like you, Elroy; you know I do." His voice quavered. "From the first, I've been working in your interests."

"In what way, if I may ask?"

"The regular people in Quantus had never heard of you. Now they know you're a hot potato."

"A hot potato?"

"Bermuda slang *via* Spinny. Definition: a white-haired boy willing to try anything once."

"There's such a thing as criminal libel, sir."

"Why, Elroy, you always wanted to have the reputation of being full of vitamins. You'll admit that?"

"I will admit nothing," I said. "We have hemmed and hawed long enough. I am here for a sole and single purpose, which is to get the money you won last night, and to get it without delay of any sort whatever."

"All right, Elroy, all right. But as Julie said to me this morning—"

"I forbid you to mention the lady's name," I interrupted, taking a step toward him menacingly.

"As you like, Elroy. But we got confidential, and—"

Unconsciously sidetracked, I said hoarsely: "Did you or did you not force your unwelcome attentions on Julie? Remember, you are passing as Elroy Simmons. I demand to know if you tried to kiss her?"

"A gentleman doesn't discuss such things, Elroy."

"You are not a gentlemen," I snapped, raising the umbrella. "You are not even a human being. I will not lower myself to discuss etiquette with you," I added,

wrenching my thoughts away from Julie. "I want that money. I demand that you produce it at once."

"O. K., Elroy. One thing first. You know what I said about wanting to give you a reputation as a hot potato. All right. Bear the phrase in mind."

"Where is that money?"

"We're coming to that, Elroy, we're coming to that. Ray Buckbee—met him on the street—bet me a dollar we couldn't make things up with—well, I won't mention names. You won, Elroy."

"So I observed," I said hoarsely.

"Doc Linnahan bet me twenty-five we weren't enough of a torrid tuber to pull a fast one on old Davvy. We not only won that too, but did you see how we got even with old Van Hemanhaw? Elroy, you scored twice."

For a minute I thought I had lockjaw.

"Right now, Elroy, you're known from one end of Quantus to the other as Bet-You-a-Million-Simmons."

"Where—is—that—money?"

"We've exhibited more real nerve in the last three days than the average man shows in a lifetime. And it's all to your credit, Elroy."

BY a tremendous effort I kept myself from speaking.

"Last night at the cocking-main you stood out like the purple shirt on Mr. Antonio (Spaghetti) Antonopolous. Remember? Bets here, there, everywhere. And you won, Elroy. You cleaned up."

"Yes, and what did you do with the money?"

"Little mistake, Elroy. Might have happened to anybody. Clippings in one pocket—roll in the other. By the time I realized what I'd done, you were over the hills and far away. It was just a mistake, an honest mistake. And this morning I had to use all my self-control to keep from bursting into tears, Elroy, when I saw you locked up in a cell, screaming in drunken delirium."

"Stop calling me Elroy!" I snapped. "You—"

"All right, Mr. Simmons. When I thought how much I'd done to give you a reputation as a hot potato, and then saw you gibbering and shaking the bars like a chimpanzee—well, it made me sick, Mr. Simmons. It hurt me."

I started to set him right, but stopped, realizing that any such effort would be wasted.

"I am waiting," I said hoarsely as soon as I found my voice, "for you to turn over that one thousand and eleven dollars. And I have waited just as long as I am going to. If you wish physical violence, you can have it."

"Please, Mr. Simmons, you don't understand! Last night at Peek Inn—"

I COULD not keep from interrupting. "Oh, you were at Peek Inn again, were you?"

"Just on your account, Mr. Simmons. Spinny said—you know, young Mr. Spinford, the son of the big Bermuda Onion—he said you didn't have the nerve to come back to the Inn. Thought you weren't a hot potato. I proved you were. You see, he still thinks we're the same person. Good joke on Spinny, isn't it, Mr. Simmons?"

In spite of best efforts my nerves were frazzling. "Come to the point," I said. "I don't need all these explanations."

"That makes things easy, Mr. Simmons. I'll tell everything just the way it happened, Mr. Simmons. You see, Spinny and I were matching stories about pluck. He was skeptical. That's why I bet him all the money in my pants that at three-thirty this afternoon, in the presence of selected witnesses, I'd jump off the bridge into Wolf River. Antonio (Spaghetti) Antonopolous, the genial proprietor of Peek Inn, is the stakeholder."

"You bet all that money? And Mr. Antonio (Spaghetti) Antonopolous has it now?" I gasped incredulously.

"That's right, Mr. Simmons."

I was still incredulous. "Do you know the drop from the bridge to the water below is seventy-four feet?"

"So they said, Mr. Simmons."

"And that the current is fast and treacherous, and that the bottom shifts?"

"Yes, Elroy—I mean, Mr. Simmons."

"Then why did you make such an insane bet?"

"In your interests, Mr. Simmons. Only on your account. You need more than a thousand to pay off your debt. Isn't that right?"

I took a step forward. "But you won more than that at the chicken-fight."

"You forget I had to put up bail, Mr. Simmons. And then I had to prove you were a hundred-per-cent hot potato by helping out some of the boys who were broke. By the time I reached Peek Inn, Mr. Simmons, the roll was badly nicked."

I reviewed the situation. It occurred to me that perhaps I had judged my Suppressed Comrade too harshly.

"So you are going to jump off the bridge into Wolf River at three-thirty this afternoon?" I observed.

"What was that crack?"

I repeated the question.

"Buddy, what makes you think I'm going to jump off any bridge this afternoon or any other afternoon?" he asked sharply.

"You don't expect me to lose all the money you bet, I hope."

My Suppressed Comrade got up from the bed.

"Elroy," he said, "I believe that in your heart you're a hot potato. Anyhow, for your own sake, I hope so. Me, I may be reckless, but not as to life or limb. I may jump at conclusions, but I don't jump off bridges. The only way of winning the bet, Elroy, is to jump off that bridge yourself."

I DID not bound to my feet, because I was there already, but the shock of this astounding revelation, made in the coolest voice imaginable, stiffened every muscle in my entire body.

"You mean you expect me to jump off the middle of the bridge into Wolf River and take my chances of being swept away by the current and drowned, or running into that shifting quicksand? I will never risk life and limb in such a crazy attempt."

He stretched his arms and yawned. "You might be a dentist, Elroy, the way you pull the words out of my very mouth. A caterpillar tractor couldn't push me off the bridge into the river. I'd let old Van Hassenpfeffer starve to death before I'd get his money that way. My idea was simply to establish your reputation for rare courage. 'Spinny, old sportsman,' I said last night, 'to show you I'm a sizzling spud, I'll make the leap before half-past three tomorrow afternoon. And here's all the money in my pants to back it up.' Then we sealed the bets in an envelope, and turned 'em over to the genial host of Peek Inn, Mr. Antonio (Spaghetti) Antonopolous."

"I will certainly never jump off the bridge into Wolf River," I declared with emphasis.

"You're absolutely and posositively right, Elroy. Live your own life. Don't let anybody bully you. Now beat it. I'm going to sleep."

Saying this, my Suppressed Comrade flattened out on the bed, and pulling the comforter up over his face, rolled over on his back and began to snore.

CHAPTER XIV

THOUGH on the way over to the bridge I had not paid any attention to the matter, now, as I stood waiting outside the guardrail with Wolf River seventy-four feet below, I thought that nature had never looked so attractive. On both sides the green banks were decorated with lanterns, flags and bunting in preparation for the evening's Venetian Fête. The afternoon sun, falling on the various amusement structures of Pavilion Island, made them shine like so many palaces. It seemed the sort of a world where you would like to keep on living forever.

"All right, Suppy," said Doc Linnahan, finishing remarks which he had begun when Buck Wilmot and the rest had picked me up in the car. "Got everything straight now?"

Because of a growing dryness in my throat, all I could do was to nod.

"Don't forget. This is the spot. Right here! Hang onto this stay till you're ready to jump. Remember the rocky ledge is to the right, and on the left watch out for those old piles five feet under water. The channel's directly underneath, and it's safe unless that bar has shifted since spring. If you get into the quicksand, try to kick out—that's all you can do. Understand, Suppy?"

I nodded again.

"Fine and dandy. Me and Nate and Buck'll be in the boat, and Spinny and Tony'll stay on the bank with life-preservers in case you come that way. Look out for the current. If y'aint careful, it'll drown you without a Chinaman's chance."

One by one the five persons present walked past me, shook me by the hand, and at the same time wished me luck. Young Mr. Spinford stated that I was a good egg and also a hot potato, and that he would be glad to lose his bet. The genial proprietor of Peek Inn, Mr. Antonio (Spaghetti) Antonopolous, smiled in a way exhibiting all his teeth, and waved a large white envelope which presumably contained the amount at stake.

"Wait till we're all set below," finished Doc Linnahan, who had remained for a last word, "and then play safe. Jump —don't try any trick diving. There's nothing to be scared of, because if you don't land right, the odds are you'll never know what hit you."

So far I had carefully refrained from regarding the surface of the river. Now

for the first time I looked directly down to the roily yellow water far below. As I straightened up, I knew I could not actually attempt such a piece of foolhardiness for love, money or fishhooks.

From the very beginning it had been nothing but a big mistake. The garage gang had stumbled onto me when I was slipping out of Mrs. Lammick's. They had kept calling me a hot potato until I had felt ashamed to admit I was nothing of the kind. In fact, after listening to them, I had begun to have a sneaking hope that maybe I might be able to go through with the jump after all.

But it was no use.

I had started figuring on some simple and natural way by which I could put my ankle out of commission and thus get the wager postponed, when I was startled by the squeal of brakes on the bridge. At the same time a voice I had no difficulty in distinguishing cried out:

"Stop, Elroy, *stop!*"

It was Julie Van Hulsteyn.

I faced about, still grasping the stay.

NEVER before had I seen her look so lovely. There were tears in her eyes, and her lips were quivering. "Stop, before it's too late, Elroy!" she begged.

"I am not doing anything now," I answered, taking firmer hold of the stay.

"It's what you're *going* to do, Elroy. Don't try to fib. I know." She placed her two hands on the rail and looked at me. "No, Elroy. Don't you remember what I said this morning? You mustn't even think of such a thing."

"Three twenty-four! You got six minutes!"

This bellow from Doc Linnahan below brought me back abruptly to my unpleasant situation.

Apparently Julie did not suspect the remark was addressed to me. "Just because you've made one mistake in your life, Elroy, that's no reason for losing hope in the future. There's so much to live for." She laid her right hand on mine. "This morning when you were so desperate, I thought at least I'd made you understand. Don't you remember what I said when we were passing the jail, and that horrible person began screaming through his barred window?"

It was a bitter moment, but I nodded as though answering in the affirmative.

"It is a terrible dilemma for me," I said slowly.

"But think, Elroy. You were just a boy when you met her. I don't doubt that Miss Mullet is a charming and lovely girl. But that's no reason for wishing to end all because she's stopped caring for you."

In a flash I saw what my Suppressed Comrade had been up to. He had been playing on Julie's sympathies by telling her that Miss Mullet had broken his heart, and that he was going to plunge off the Wolf River Bridge because life was no longer worth living.

I could think of nothing but to repeat that I was in a very difficult position.

"Elroy!" she cried, stepping back and taking her hand from mine. "Why do you keep changing? This morning you were so nice. Sometimes I couldn't help feeling you had your tongue in your cheek; but after all, you were so sweet. Now you're sincere, and I know it, but you're not—not nice at all."

She covered her face with her hands.

"Three minutes to go!" yelled Doc Linnahan.

"Julie—listen. You think I am jumping from the bridge because Miss Mullet broke her engagement. Is that it?"

"You practically said so this morning, Elroy. You told me that when you smiled or laughed, it was just a mask to cover a breaking heart. And I told you then that—that life holds so much for us."

"It was kind of you, Julie." The last thing I wanted to do was to encourage the cheap trickery evidently employed by my Suppressed Comrade, but I was at a loss as to the method I should use.

"You didn't say outright what you were going to do but you remember, I suspected. I thought I made you understand that life held so much for all of us, you mustn't even think of ending it this way. And—and you remember what you answered, Elroy."

I HAD known my Suppressed Comrade long enough to be practically certain of what he had answered.

"Didn't I tell you, Julie, that if I were sure you really cared for me, maybe I would continue living?"

"Not in those words, Elroy," she sobbed. "But—something like that."

I summoned up my courage.

"Julie," I said slowly, "I have something to explain to you."

"Wh-what is it, Elroy?"

The truth came easier than I had anticipated.

"In the first place, I am not jumping from this bridge on your account."

She jerked her hands from her face.

"No?" she said in a strained voice.

"No, Julie," I explained eagerly. "The real reason those people down below think I am going to jump from this bridge—"

At this instant Doc Linnahan called up for the third time in a voice like a factory whistle: "Listen, Suppy, if you want to win that bet, jump and jump quick! You've got just thirty seconds."

The color left Julie's cheeks. "A bet? You're doing it to win a bet?"

"Yes," I stated, glad that the truth was out. "A bet. But to be honest with you, Julie, I am not actually going to jump at all, and the only reason I ever considered such a thing—"

"Never mind the reason, Mr. Simmons," she snapped in a voice so hard I could scarcely imagine it coming from Julie. "Go on and win your bet. After that, Mr. Simmons, try your theatricals on some one else."

"Julie!"

"Don't lose your bet, Mr. Simmons."

"If you'll just listen—"

I had reached out my right hand to emphasize a few well-chosen words that would set everything right, when too late, I discovered that on letting go my hold, I had at the same time lost my balance.

My body toppled to one side. I grabbed frantically for the stay, missed it, and shot off the bridge into space.

AS I spun toward the river, there was no time even for a cry of horror. The muddy yellow water rushed up. . . . Something hit me like a board.

I must have kept both mouth and eyes open, because I remember choking and going blind at the same instant. I was swinging my arms wildly, hoping I was not aimed at the bar of quicksand with the ultimate fate of plowing into its depths and disappearing forever.

The next sensation was like being shot out of a cannon from the river into the air. In spite of the water and mud in my eyes, I looked up to catch a glimpse of Julie Van Hulsteyn leaning over the bridge and watching.

The current caught my legs and sucked me back into the river. I was going down for the third time when Buck Wilmot grabbed the collar of my shirt. . . .

"This girl friend seems a bit sore at you," Doc Linnahan observed, as I lay in the boat sick and exhausted.

"What did she say?" I mumbled.

"Not a word. But as soon as she spotted us hauling you out, she picked up your hat and coat and shoes and threw them into the river. Then she hopped into her car and drove off hell-bent for breakfast. Don't worry. She'll be back. They're all alike."

I hoped Doc was right. Having won the wager, I could repay her father the sum owed him, and after that explain to Julie the whole truth in a tactful and appealing fashion. . . .

On the bank Mr. Antonio (Spaghetti) Antonopolous, smiling whiter and wider than before, handed me the envelope.

With a nervous motion I loosed the flap and shook out two ten-dollar notes.

"Where is the rest?" I inquired blankly after a careful examination of the interior of the envelope.

Young Mr. Spinford smiled weakly.

"That's all there is, old sportsman. There isn't any more. Don't you remember? You offered to bet me all you had in your trousers at the moment. It turned out to be only that ten-spot."

Of the many blows which had befallen me during the day, this was the worst. I had risked my life and ruined my future with Julie Van Hulsteyn for the sake of two ten-dollar notes!

I was just wondering how far on my way to Central America those twenty dollars would take me, when with the same smile,—though perhaps more so,—Mr. Antonio (Spaghetti) Antonopolous stepped forward.

"Pardon—escoose, Mr. Seemons," he saia in his dialect way of speaking, "but eef you remember, there was one bottle of sparkling grape-juice, imported, on your leetle beell last night and not paid. Would eet be convenient now to pay?"

He reached out a soft pink hand and took the two ten-dollar notes. There did not seem to be any change.

STILL dazed, I turned from Mr. Antonio (Spaghetti) Antonopolous to stare at the somber river, wondering if I would have time to change my clothes first, or if it would be advisable to leave for South America in my present dripping condition. I had practically decided on a start, when I caught sight of an individual waving to me from a point some hundred yards upstream. Half-hidden by a clump of bushes, he signaled with both hands; and then, as Doc Linnahan looked back, dropped suddenly out of sight. It was my Suppressed Comrade.

Elroy's double is causing him plenty trouble! Don't miss the next—the August—issue.

That zealous and warlike campaigner in the cause of peace Outrageous O'Smith persuades a friend to serve as a substitute for an assassin's victim, in this fine story—

By RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS

Illustrated by V. E. Pyles

Assassin's Target

IF I had been betting on it, I think I would have risked what was left of my week's pay maintaining that in that desolate little railroad-junction town in the country bordering on Russia I was safe from the machinations of O'Sullivan Smith.

Of course that red-headed, irresponsible little pest called O'Smith by his unfortunate intimates would go anywhere to do anything in furtherance of the single-handed, egoistic and unremitting campaign which he waged to preserve the peace of Europe. But I certainly didn't expect to run across him in that community—let's call it Spivak, since it's a bit early to be truthful about it. I hate to spoil anybody's illusions about the picturesqueness of Eastern Europe, but the town looked like something on the wrong side of the track out in the Middle West.

Though it would be no great hardship to die in Spivak, I was planning to get out of the place. That was why I didn't like the idea that I was being followed persistently by a huge fellow in a bearskin coat so worn and ragged that it showed more hide than fur. Against the snow my trailer stood out like a black eye at a Peace Conference.

There was no reason why I should be followed. Certainly my mission didn't justify keeping me under observation. I'd been covering the extradition proceedings against a one-way New York banker who had done an Insull to this Baltic country. The lawyers had dragged the legal fooleries on until the news value had faded out of the story. On the promise of Pete Vreeland, a friendly American exporter, to telegraph me the final decision of the High Court, I had skipped that day from the capital of the country down south to this railroad junction. If the telegram arrived in time, I might catch a train to Berlin at midnight.

If I hadn't come to Spivak I would have cooled my heels—and they were already far from warm—for another twenty-four hours at the capital, with nothing to read but howls for a real story telegraphed from Paris by Rufus Congleton, boss of the American Press League.

There have been occasions, chiefly precipitated by the unscrupulous Sully O'Smith, when I have been worth a secret agent's time to shadow. But on this particular evening I was as innocent as twins unborn.

Of course my actions might have seemed suspicious to an inhabitant of the country. There were in Spivak two buildings I would call railroad hotels—structures which shared the smoke and coal-dust with the roundhouse, but lacked the better features of that establishment. I picked the likelier-looking of the two. The room they had given me was cold with the concentrated, inhuman cold of a refrigerated morgue. A walrus couldn't have stuck it.

Downstairs in the place that was the restaurant, pub', café, smoke-room and lounge, there was a whacking big stove going full blast and dispensing pure carbon monoxide to a queer and furry assortment of travelers, most of whom were drinking tea. Some of the wayfarers were a bit gamy, but it was the monoxide gas that every so often numbed my head. When that happened I'd struggle to my feet, stagger to the door and walk around the streets, railroad-tracks and alleys of Spivak in the snow until the numbness had shifted to my hands and feet. Then I'd go back and try another fall with the stove.

THE first time I saw Bearskin he was standing by a pile of ties near the hotel. He had a bit of cardboard in his hand. After staring hard at me, he let me get some two hundred feet ahead; then slouched along behind me with his head tucked down on his chest. I took him for a beggar, but he never closed up the distance.

The second time I lurched out of the hotel he emerged from a hovel across the street. It was beginning to grow dark and the snow seemed to be coming down a bit thicker. He didn't try to get any nearer than before. I figured that if he were a thug instead of a secret agent he might be waiting for darkness before starting something.

I can truthfully say that it was not the fear of death but the fear of police that sent the shudders trickling up and down my spine. If Bearskin jumped me and I shouted and fought, some local *gendarmes* might mix in. Then it would be a toss-up as to whether he, as prisoner, would be any worse off than I, as complainant. We'd both be stuck in Spivak indefinitely.

I tramped back to the hotel and up to my compartment in the mortuary. I unlocked my bag and took out a long three-battery flashlight. Barring a gun, there's nothing like a heavy flashlight. Besides, nobody can charge you with carrying a weapon. I tucked it in the inside breast pocket of my overcoat.

As I opened my room door I jumped like a burned cat. There was a man standing just outside at the head of the stairs. It wasn't Bearskin. I had no reason to jump really, but I did jump. So did he, although his attention was concentrated on the people below.

For a moment he turned his head toward me. One of his eyes was covered by a black patch and the other, cold blue, glanced frostily at me.

"Très froid!" I said. French was as good as anything else in Spivak, but whether I was talking about his eye or my room I didn't know myself.

Black Patch muttered something uncomplimentary in German about a something American who spoke French—and strode into a room near mine. He slammed the door. I had an impression that he wasn't pleased that he had been seen. Well, it hadn't pleased me to see him, so that was square.

Downstairs in the crowded poison chamber I paused long enough to thaw my fingers and toes, but not long enough to numb my brain. I mustn't keep Bearskin waiting.

Amidst the disapproving eyes of the travelers I opened the door and stepped out into the frosty air again. Dusk was well along but it was not yet entirely dark. That suited me precisely. I set out briskly in the direction of the freight yards. That course, I had made certain, was the one in which I was least likely to encounter either police or civilian interference. Only once I paused; then I lighted a cigarette in the corner of a stone wall that leaned like the Tower of Pisa. I made sure in a quick side glance that Bearskin had not deserted me.

But I need not have feared that. He loomed up behind in a moment, plodding along through the deepening snow. As my match flared, he halted warily.

I moved on, with the glow of my cigarette to entice him, will-o'-the-wisp style. Around two more corners I led him. Quickly I strode around the third, beside the angle of a roofless house I had noted earlier in the day. Once out of sight, I stopped short, with my back to the wall. I slipped out my flashlight and waited.

He came thudding on. I stepped out into his path and with a thrust of my thumb sent a knifelike beam of light into his eyes. He staggered back.

"Be still, little one!" I snapped at him in French. "I don't wish to kill you!"

Whether he understood or not I do not know, but he grunted out a guttural exclamation and fled like an elephant.

WITH a yelp of disappointment I charged after him. With my free hand gripping the stonework, I swung sharply around the turn. But I had taken only three steps more when I sighted a small figure crouching against the wall.

"Be still, little one!" I snapped at him in French. "I don't wish to kill you!"

This newcomer spat out a word in some tongue unknown to me, and as I shot past after Bearskin, he stuck his foot between my legs. I went down in the snow like a diver off a springboard, finishing my stunt on my face. Blinded by the clinging, melting stuff, I clambered up, swabbing my face.

Bearskin was gone. Not even the clump of his feet came to my ears. I caught up my flashlight to follow his tracks, but no beam of light leaped from it at the urgent pressure of my thumb. Broken!

Damning my luck, I swung on the diminutive fellow who had ruined my chances of pursuit. He was standing still. I sank my fingers in his shoulders and shook him till his head seemed likely to fly off his shoulders.

"You interfering runt!" I raged, in English, banging him against the wall. "If you were only man-size I'd knock your head off!"

"Then I wouldn't be man-size," he retorted in a shockingly familiar voice. "So we'd be right back where we started. What's the good of it, Chris?"

"O'Smith!" I gasped. Almost instantly my anger flared up anew. My hands darted out to grab him again. But he edged sideways with eel-like ease.

"Easy!" he commanded calmly. "I'm the injured party this time, Chris. You nearly blew the works."

"You red-headed snake!" I stormed, repressing a most unnatural pleasure at the sight of the cocky little devil. "I might have known you'd be in this! You—"

As I relapsed into incoherence, he took me briskly by the lapel of my overcoat and led me, still fulminating, into the roofless ruin. The solicitude with which he brushed me off, murmuring apologies, suddenly turned me cold. Somehow it reminded me of the way in which the jailer provides the condemned with anything he wants for dinner immediately before the execution.

"Stop that pawing and tell me whose business you've stuck your broken nose into now!" I snapped, unable to stand the suspense. "And why did you stop me from dotting that big gump a couple?"

"The big gump was a mere jackal, unworthy of Your Excellency's attention," O'Smith said suavely. "We are out for bigger game."

In spite of myself I shuddered. There was something smugly confident about that "we," and something inexplicably sinister about the "Excellency."

"Get this into that crooked skull of yours, Sully," I said to him with all the fervid earnestness I could put into my voice. "Whatever you're in, I'm out of! You're no longer an employee of the American Press League. A millionaire guerrilla like you should never have been given a job in the first place. I owe you nothing—nothing! While I'll be glad to buy you a drink next time you're in Paris, I'll have no other dealings with you. The last time—"

"We haven't come to the last time yet, Chris," O'Smith assured me cheerfully.

"We damn' near did!" I snarled. "If that Bulgarian general's—"

"And we never *will* come to the time when Christopher Stokes is craven enough to put his own safety above the tranquillity of Europe and the peace of the world," he broke in.

I took a long breath before answering. "We have come to the time!" I ground out. "Damn you, we have! Understand that, Sully! The peace of Europe can go to blazes with a bang before you entice me into another of your sappy intrigues! I mean it!"

HE looked at me fixedly. Even in the dark, with the flakes swirling around us, I could see that. Then he shook his head in a manner that set needles to pricking in my spine.

"Well!" he said, as if aghast. "Really, I wish you had let me know how you felt."

"I have let you know!" I roared at him. "I've chiseled that decision through the cracks in your brain plenty of times!"

He shook his head again. "Really I do wish you'd have let me know before," he said plaintively. "Of course I counted on you—it never occurred to me—and certainly, Chris, there's no way to back out of it now."

I GRABBED him by the collar. "Cut that fake regret!" I snarled in his ear. "What have you let me in for, Sully? Damn you! Speak up!"

"It's this way, Chris," O'Smith said briskly, as if I had conceded a point. "Dr. Kulek, Minister of Foreign Affairs of this country, is a patriot and no jingo. Soviet Russia, which is deep in a program of industrial development which would be ruined by war, has quietly proposed to Kulek and the ministers of other buffer states around her a pact of non-aggression which will preserve peace. Dr. Kulek, incognito, is on his way to Russia tonight to confer on details."

"What of it?" I asked coldly. "I'm not interested."

Placidly O'Smith ignored my interruption, and went on with his lecture:

"Such a treaty is bitterly opposed by a certain group of Germanic extraction. They are not without encouragement from across the German border, where the Nazis are rattling their swords and glaring alternately at France and Russia. Some fanatics of this group, headed by one Herr Schmuck, an undisciplined Nazi, have gone so far as to plan a *coup* on their own."

Vaguely I made out O'Smith's broad grin as he paused.

"They were not fortunate in their choice of one of the conspirators, an Alsatian waiter with whom I've done business before," he explained softly. "So I'm in on the game. What they intend to do is have Kulek assassinated here tonight by three Russian fugitives, including two hard-boiled gun-handlers, the brothers Karnoff—Nick and Stephen."

"Well?" I inquired.

"That must be prevented at all costs," said O'Smith, jabbing me in the chest by way of emphasis. "Don't you see? The killing of Kulek will not only halt the tready, but will immediately be attributed to Russian Reds. The propaganda's all ready now. Naturally most of the people are uncertain about Russia anyhow; they'll believe everything they're told. In no time the country will swing

on a wave of hysteria the other way and become a cat's-paw of Hitler. And when Hitler has one or two allies—"

He threw up his hands grimly. "Don't get the idea that Germany's not prepared to fight," he added. "But it's not with machine-guns and shrapnel that she'll fight this time."

"I know a bit about that," I retorted. "But what's this to do with me?"

"Well, a conspiracy like this can't be scotched. It would crop up again where it wasn't expected—and Kulek would die. The attack must take place, Chris. It must fail, and the truth about the assassins must be uncovered. After that, even if Herr Schmuck did get Kulek, the treaty of non-aggression would go through."

"All right; I hope the peace-pact does go through," I conceded, with a shiver, for the cold was getting to me again. "And if Dr. Kulek gets his I'll be sorry; only on my salary I can't send him a wreath. But that's all. All!"

"You don't understand," O'Smith murmured. "My waiter friend supplied me with details of the plot. The three Russians came to Spivak singly today, so as to attract no attention. The scout, who got here first, was supplied with a photograph of Kulek, so that there should be no mistake. The attempt is to be made tonight just as Dr. Kulek steps aboard the Moscow express."

"Sorry I can't attend," I said. "I'm catching the Berlin express at midnight."

O'SMITH coughed. "The trouble is," he said, and I caught a tinge of embarrassment in his voice, "that, counting on your coöperation, and knowing that you were to be in Spivak tonight—"

"How did you know I was to be in Spivak?" I broke in.

"It was I who induced Pete Vreeland to volunteer to wire you here the decision of the High Court when it came through."

"Well, you did me a favor for the first time in your life, Sully," I admitted grudgingly. "With any luck I'll be out of here a full day—"

O'Smith coughed again. "The difficulty is," he said a trifle haltingly, "that counting on your usual courageous coöperation, I got my waiter friend to provide the Russian scout with your photograph instead of Kulek's."

For an instant I was silent, while the snow tickled my ears and a cold wind blew round my legs and up my spine. I remembered that yesterday an old bird with a battered camera had snapped my picture near the courthouse. Then I came to life on the jump.

"What!" I roared. "You mean to say you switched Kulek's pic' for mine! Why, damn you, that's why this Bearskin —It's murder, that's what it is—cold murder!—murder of your best friend—"

"The murder will be advanced half an hour if you don't pipe down," O'Smith whispered. But it was lack of breath that stopped me. I certainly damned that red-headed snake-in-the-grass uphill and down-dale in a manner which he richly deserved for his utterly callous and treacherous treatment. And he stood there beside me, taking it humbly and agreeing with me in a soothing monotone.

"But after all, Chris, Dr. Kulek can't be spared, while you—well, I can name offhand at least a dozen better correspondents, including myself, who could fill your shoes," he said cheerily when I paused. "And it's done, anyhow. Besides—"

I headed back toward the hotel without another word, while O'Smith trotted along beside me, talking. What a bond salesman that little Welsh-Irish so-called American would make, were he not a millionaire in his own right! But this time I was adamant. Shot down I might be, but I would not go near the platform of the Moscow express that night.

Near the hotel O'Smith lagged a bit. "Just go through the scrum around the stove and up to your room," he murmured and dropped behind me, vanishing almost instantly among the swirling flakes.

I stamped on to the hotel, too mad to fear an assassin's bullet drilling my skull. With a crash I flung open the door and clumped into the steaming, fetid lounge. I did not pause to warm myself, but pushed through and clattered up the stairs. My room looked and felt, even more than before, like a mortuary chamber—and with better reason!

I HAD hardly paced the floor two minutes when O'Smith stuck his head in the door. He smiled confidentially at me and flung the door open wider, ushering in with grave politeness a brown-bearded, broad-faced gentleman about six feet in height.

"Dr. Kulek," said O'Smith, "this is Christopher Stokes, the brave young American correspondent who has agreed to risk his life in the cause of peace."

The tall minister advanced with out-

stretched hand, his wide countenance beaming. "I am not surprised that an American should do this," he said in good English. "I know Americans; before my country was free I taught languages at Har—"

"Wait a minute!" I said sharply. "You are misinformed, sir! I did not agree to take your place—"

It was astonishing how rapidly the big man put his back to the wall and faced us both. He caught up the huge pitcher off the washstand with businesslike certainty.

"Ah!" he said, with a piercing eye on O'Smith. "Treachery, then? The killers are not Russians, perhaps?"

O'Smith drew out a sizable automatic and offered it, butt first, to Kulek.

"Your Excellency is misadvised," he said curtly. "But I have committed an error of judgment. Are you in need of a weapon?"

KULEK set down the pitcher and waved aside the pistol.

"It is still possible, then," he said briskly. "Listen attentively, Mr. O'Sullivan Smith! I step down into lounge without this." With a tug he removed his short brown beard. "Everybody will recognize me. The Russians will know in time that there has been a mistake about photographs. The attack as I take the train will be made—and let us hope, defeated. If I am killed, you"—he whirled upon me—"will do your utmost as a journalist to spread the truth—that it is a Hitlerite fanatic's plot—not a Soviet plot—that the reasons for the non-aggression pact with Russia are strengthened, not weakened. You understand?"

"I understand," I said grudgingly. "But would not it be simpler to summon police and soldiers to gather in these conspirators at once rather than risk your life—"

"Simpler, but not effective," he cut in decisively. "Where is the proof? We deal now with many lives—with a nation's independence. I must not grudge a little blood! It will be a good story for you."

He smiled; then turned to O'Smith. "You understand?" he asked.

"Wait a minute!" I interposed hastily. "As I told you, I had not agreed to take your place, sir. But now I will esteem it an honor."

"That's the real Stokes, boy!" O'Smith muttered—but I ignored him.

At once Kulek whipped around to regard me critically.

"Ah!" he said. "We change? We waver?"

"We do not, Doctor," I replied somewhat morosely. "We have a small friend who takes too much for granted. A man prefers to make these decisions himself."

He clasped my hand briefly. "Good!" he snapped. "It is a relief that I am not perhaps to be killed. This Soviet government"—he wagged his head gravely—"they must be bargained with and I am as hard a bargainer as Litvinoff himself. About this beard—can it be attached once more?"

Thirty seconds later he was speeding out of the room. I looked at O'Smith.

"I had every confidence in you, Chris," he assured me, grinning.

"And I have none in you!" I said wrathfully. "If I come out of this alive, you red-headed, half-size monomaniac, I'll—"

He waved a hand in one of those impudent, almost Gallic gestures of his.

"'I must not grudge a little blood,'" he quoted. "Kulek wouldn't make a bad high-pressure American business man, would he? Gets things done."

"Between you, you'll get *me* done!" I growled at him. "Spill the plan, Sully, while I'm still sappy enough to go through it."

IT was simple, as far as I was concerned. All I had to do was to walk out of the hotel by a side door which led direct to a bridge over which passengers crossed the lines to the east-bound tracks.

"Bearskin will point you out to the brothers Karnoff, if he has not already done so," O'Smith said. "The attack will take place just before the train pulls in. Drop at the first shot—you won't have a gun, you know. Kulek will plunge into the middle of things, minus his beard, toward the end of the mêlée. You then become merely an unfortunate bystander. The cops will draw their own conclusions about whom the attempt was made on, when they see the minister."

He stood up and glanced at his watch. "Time for me to get into position on the platform," he said. "Kulek's lent me, to repel the attack on him,—I mean you,—his trusted valet and his redoubtable chauffeur."

Rapidly he described these two protectors of my person.

"You'll be all right, Chris," O'Smith

assured me with easy optimism. "There're only two killers. Bearskin's just a scout. Luckily Herr Schmuck, the boss butcher, decided to do staff work at the capital. Safer, y'know. Doubtless he's waiting patiently with his one bright blue eye glued to a bulletin-board somewhere. Unless the Karnoffs talk, we'll never get Schmuck—but we can flatten his plot, anyhow."

"What do you mean by 'one bright blue eye?'" I inquired suddenly. "Is that description of Schmuck authentic?"

Suddenly guns roared with deafening violence. With a numbing shock I realized I was the target.

"I rarely lie," said O'Smith, with dignity. "And then only to make sure I can. Why do you ask?"

"There's a fanatic-looking gentleman with one black patch and one bright blue eye, staying at this hotel," I replied.

The cockiness went out of O'Smith like air out of a balloon.

"Heavy-set—battleship jaw—head rising to a point—scar above the eye-patch?" he snapped out.

"Right!"

He bolted for the door. "Schmuck will know Kulek even with that beard!" he flung over his shoulder. "Hell!"

He was down the stairs to rescue his statesman, before I could frame a question.

That left me in a jam. I looked at my watch. In fourteen minutes the Moscow train would pull in. I had an appointment to be shot at on the platform before it arrived. Should I keep that appointment? With Herr Schmuck on hand to direct the killers, our substitution would surely be discovered. Dr. Kulek was in grave peril, especially since he now expected no attack. Our surprise had been turned against us.

I grabbed up my bag, then dropped it again, cursing my lack of a gun. I shot

out of the door almost as fast as O'Smith had done.

Downstairs in the lounge I saw no sign of either Kulek or Schmuck. Near the side door, running direct to the station platforms, I cornered a gray-bearded page who could speak a little French. Desperately I prodded my left eye.

"Where is the gentleman with the patch?" I demanded.

He pointed toward the station door.

"And the other gentleman?"—describing Kulek. Again that same gesture.

I pushed him aside and flung open the door. The snow was thick just outside; I floundered into a drift, staggered sideways against an evergreen, and felt my leg knock against something heavy yet yielding. It was the body of a man shoved almost out of sight under the low branches.

HASTILY I dragged the limp form out into the light over the hotel door. It wasn't Kulek. This was a tall fellow with thick curly eyebrows. They met over his nose. He had a nasty mark on his forehead. Slugged!

O'Smith's description of Dr. Kulek's chauffeur leaped into my mind. One of the defenders was down!

I kicked violently at the door to summon help to the man; then swung around and pelted along the dim-lit path that led to the bridge over the tracks. Panting under my weight of clothes, I took the snow-filled steps up to the bridge two at a time. Halfway up I met somebody slinking down. The man gave a cry as he saw me and leaped convulsively past. It was Bearskin.

I let him go. I had more important things to do than chase a scout. Kulek was in a trap. For all I knew the brothers Karnoff had put out his valet as well as his chauffeur, and O'Smith, too. Sully had not been moving cautiously when last I saw him.

Although the bridge was covered, the snow had swirled in and lay in shifting masses along one side. Suddenly, near one of the meager electric lights, I stopped long enough to grab up a torn, shiny piece of cardboard projecting from a drift. It was part of a photograph, showing the lower part of a man's face.

I ran on faster than ever. I had shaved that jaw too often to be mistaken. My picture torn up and thrown away! My faint hope that Schmuck was not onto the substitution vanished. Bearskin had just come from this direction and he had been moving like a beaten cur.

"They know!" I groaned.

With ears cocked for the shots that would mean the end of Kulek, I sprinted on across the bridge toward the platform of the Moscow train.

I reached the head of the stairs and for an instant paused, staring down at the long platform. No firing yet! The few people on the platform were for the most part bunched around the bottom of the long flight below me. They were mere bundled, anonymous figures.

One traveler was hurrying down the stairs just ahead of me; a railroad man stood directly at the bottom.

I clattered down. I had taken a dozen steps when suddenly guns roared with deafening violence. Something snarled past me; I caught a glimpse of white, contorted faces and stabs of fire lancing at me from below.

With a numbing shock I realized that I was the target!

It was at that moment of stupefaction that I planted my foot on a bit of ice under the snow. Instantly I slipped, hooked a heel in one of the treads and shot head-first down the stairs.

The fall would have broken my neck faster than flying lead could have pierced my heart had it not been for the muffled, crouching traveler ahead of me. My hurtling body hit him, like a sledge, on the right shoulder, spinning him around and sending him sliding and bouncing down the stairs with me. We clutched at each other like drowning men.

"Gott! Gott!" he roared in my ear.

WE took harsh punishment from the iron-plated steps despite our layers of clothes. And still the shots roared on! Lead splashed on the stairs.

Suddenly we hit the bottom. He was on top of me, but it was I who knocked the railroad man's legs from under him. Another shot! My ears stung with it.

My first victim leaped to his feet. Screaming, he clutched at his thigh. A stream of German invective gushed from his lips. I realized that he had been hit. And at the same moment I saw his convulsed face.

The patch was gone from his sunken eye-socket, but I recognized Schmuck nevertheless. In a mad frenzy of rage, he was shaking his fists full in the face of a huge man with a gun.

All this in a single instant! And then, in another instant, I saw the face of

O'Smith project from behind the shoulder of the big assassin.

O'Smith's automatic thumped briskly down on his head. Vaguely I became aware of Dr. Kulek, pinioning a struggling man on the other side of the stairs.

"You should not reprove your hired assassins in public, Herr Schmuck!" O'Smith said in German. The big man with the gun had dropped like a falling curtain, revealing the little American. "Temper, Herr Schmuck!"

With a bitter curse Schmuck snatched his hand from his bleeding thigh and thrust it deep into his pocket. But half a dozen men laid hold of him before he could pull out his pistol.

"It is good of you to come out in the open at last, Herr Schmuck," said Dr. Kulek sternly. "A snake in the open is not to be feared."

"MASTERLY! Napoleonic!" Sully O'Smith said two hours later as he stood with me beside the Berlin train. "That dive of yours onto Schmuck's back will rank in history with—"

"Turn off the soft-soap," I said gruffly. "We both know I slipped. Flattery is an old gag of yours to soothe your victims. But you'll never get me in another hole like that."

"Not like that," Mr. O'Smith agreed.

I looked hopelessly up and down the platform. This train, which I had longed to take, paused here in Spivak ten minutes, but there was no sign of the telegram I awaited. Apparently the confounded High Court was taking its time about the fate of my absconding American banker.

In six minutes I would be lugging my bag back to that refrigerated hotel. I had already frozen my hands writing the story of the attempt upon Dr. Kulek; what else wouldn't be frozen by morning really wouldn't matter.

Morosely I frowned at Sully O'Smith's alert, ruddy countenance.

"Mine wasn't the only slip," I asserted. "You certainly got all the breaks, including the shot in Schmuck's leg that opened his mouth for you."

O'Smith shook his red head. "I'll concede the slip about Schmuck's unexpected appearance," he said complacently. "But now that you've dispatched your story, I don't mind admitting that the bullet in Schmuck's leg came out of my gun. I got him as he landed on the platform. I didn't mean to put it quite so high—but it wasn't bad shooting, at that."

"What!" I roared. "You wasted your lead on Schmuck when those two gunmen were spraying me—"

"I was behind my bird, with a grip on his gun-hand he couldn't shake," O'Smith said with dignity. "His shots at you went wild, of course. Kulek had a little difficulty with Stephen Karnoff at first. We could have used the valet and chauffeur they put out of the way before the party started. The valet was found laid out like a Christmas present under the evergreen next to the one where you found the chauffeur."

I scowled. "I can't understand yet why Schmuck didn't point out Kulek to the Karnoffs before—"

"According to your friend Bearskin, Schmuck discovered Kulek's two servants and ordered them to be slugged. But it wasn't until Bearskin showed Schmuck your photograph on the bridge that Schmuck tumbled to the fact that his Russians were gunning for the wrong bird. You can't blame Schmuck for failing to uncover my clever switching of the pictures."

Whistles shrilled, compartment doors slammed and the air-brakes of the Berlin express hissed as the engineer released them. I groaned and moved away from the train, with a last look around for the page I had stationed at the Spivak end of the telegraph.

But O'Smith stuck out his hand.

"Don't rub it in," I said gruffly. "You know I've got to hang around here till I get the verdict on that blasted banker."

"Oh, that!" said O'Smith. He grinned and hustled me toward an empty compartment. "The banker's going home."

"What!"

"I had Pete Vreeland send the decision to me direct so you wouldn't be distracted from your rôle of Foreign Minister," he explained, pushing me into the train. "It got here hours ago. I wired the story to the A.P.L. in your name—a damned good story, too. No, don't thank me!"

I DIDN'T. But I stood at the window of my compartment berating the deceitful little rat long after he was out of earshot! And he stood on the platform, waving cheerily, quite as if it were compliments I was bawling out to him.

Though Sully and I both got the Cross of Honor soon after Kulek returned triumphant from Russia, I've always felt that O'Smith's should have been a double cross.

Mr. Whimple

A strong-souled citizen busts a racketeer on the nose—and later events are even more exciting.

THERE never was a more surprised look on any gangster's face than there was on James T. (Killer) Mory's when Mr. Whimple busted him on the nose.

And it was a surprise! Mr. Whimple had been expected to turn white and then a yellowish green, and to shake a little, and perhaps stutter, and then ask in a weak voice if everything would be all right if he did what Mr. Mory's organization desired.

And he didn't act that way. No sir! Instead of that, he just hauled off and started one from the ground, and swung it upward and around, giving his wrist a little twist just when it stopped with sort of a *plunk* in the middle of the killer's fat face. And the killer started running backward, and then sat down hard. It was indeed a surprise.

It seems Mr. Mory had called on Mr. Whimple to tell him about what he had to do about a certain contract that Mr. Whimple had recently made to have his towels washed and delivered by the Puritan Laundry. This cleansing establishment did excellent work, but was not liked by Mr. Mory and his associates, who were known as the Laundry Protective Alliance.

The function of the alliance was to protect laundries; but they didn't protect those that didn't protect themselves by paying weekly dues to the alliance; and the Puritan Laundry didn't.

In consequence the most amazing things had happened to the Puritan people. In some mysterious way somebody who possessed some sulphuric acid and was fooling around with it, carelessly spilled a lot of it on two or three of the laundry trucks; and as luck would have it, the acid got on the customers' clothes, and spoiled quite a lot of them.

And it was the strangest thing how fires broke out in the Puritan Laundry most every night, and windows got accidentally broken; and then their drivers would get into the most unfortunate arguments with groups of four or five young men, for practically nothing at all, and get all beaten up and discouraged.

And the Puritan's customers! That was the really funny part of it. Just as soon as the customers were notified by Mr. Mory that the Protective Associates thought they'd better not bestow their patronage on the Puritan Laundry any longer, if they knew what was good for them, they quit. Just like that. They quit! All but one, who was deaf and didn't quite understand; and he fell down a flight of stairs right after, and blacked both his eyes, and broke his neck. And there was one more—Mr. Whimple.

Mr. Whimple was an independent sort of man who wasn't going to be dictated to by anybody whatsoever, even a quite famous gangster; and he lacked imagination, so that he didn't seem to know enough to be afraid. And he had one of the most beautiful right-hand swings you ever saw.

Well, it's a terrible thing to defy a gangster. But if you ever feel you want to do it, which is unlikely, it would be better to do it in public and suddenly, as Mr. Whimple did. Because when Mr. Mory is in a place where many people know him by sight, he is slightly inhibited. He is not quite sure that all the spectators are well enough acquainted with him not to identify him, and to know that he'll have them shot full of holes if they pick him out of the line-up. That is, assuming that he ever got so far as to be put in a line-up.

Strikes Hard

By WILLIAM C. FORD

Illustrated by Bert Salg

And as the incident of Mr. Whimple smacking Mr. Mory down occurred in Mr. Whimple's office, with all the help and three bill-collectors there, the killer controlled himself beautifully, and got up and fumbled around for a handkerchief, and didn't find one, and mumbled something about getting Mr. Whimple for this. And Mr. Whimple said: "Come and get me now." And Killer Mory went away.

But not for long. . . .

Mr. Mory and his chums started on Mr. Whimple that night when it was nice and dark, and they thought they weren't running any chances. They threw a bomb from a slow-moving sedan right onto Mr. Whimple's front doorstep. They hoped he'd be at home at the time; and as it happened, he was. In fact, he was right there on the doorsteps waiting, and he picked up the bomb before it went off, and threw it back at the sedan, and it exploded and destroyed the spare tire, and knocked off one of the license-plates, and scared Mr. Mory a light blue, because he thought he was going to get hurt himself. The car and its occupants escaped at a speed that hinted of agitation on the part of the driver, and the plate was found later to have been issued to a clergyman from some distance up-country. But as he had missed his car since the previous Thursday, it was rightly concluded by the police that he had had nothing to do with the matter.

Next day Mr. Whimple called at the Puritan Laundry, and interviewed Mr. Cohen, the proprietor, Mr. Cohen was unhappy, and inclined to take a gloomy view of things. He regretted that he hadn't arranged to pay the Protective Associates fifty dollars a week as had been suggested to him. He referred frequently to a Chinaman named Oy-Oy, and he didn't warm up very much to Mr. Whimple's suggestion that he fight. He didn't see anything whatever in it for him. Mr. Cohen was a peace-loving business man who wanted to mind his own business, and didn't want to hurt anyone, and he was only getting what was coming to him.

Well, to make a long story longer, Mr. Cohen wouldn't fight any more, and Mr. Whimple bought his laundry. Too much credit cannot be given Mr. Whimple for this, because he bought it very cheap, and insured it at once. Mr. Cohen, in fact, gave Mr. Whimple no credit at all, but insisted on cash money.

WE must give Mr. Whimple credit, however, when we realize that he was clearing the decks for action, that he was planning to be the Tartar that was caught, the mule whose tail the man got hold of, and the red-hot poker the fellow picked up; and that he figured to be all three of them rolled into one. In other words, Mr. Whimple was going to give them a fight, and he was going to use his head as well as the rest of him.

The laundry was on the East Side. That's how it came under Mr. Mory's jurisdiction. For besides being known as the Laundry Protective Alliance, Mr. Mory and his companions were sometimes called the East Side Gang. Of course they were called other things too, but we will not go into that. The fact remains, the laundry was in Mr. Mory's district.

Now, it is a strange thing that in most big cities that have an East Side, there is also a West Side, and one is generally about as good or as bad as the other. And most cities that have an East Side

Gang, have also a West Side Gang; and the only reason they don't get together and annihilate each other is that the middle, or meal-ticket side is in between, and that furnishes such fat pickings that the gangs don't take the trouble to work through and meet. And besides, the police don't seem to like to have them hurt one another, and might arrest them for it. So they keep in their own districts and flourish. That is, unless some Machiavelli like Mr. Whimple sicks them on each other. And that is what happened in the case at bar, as shall appear.

MR. Mory's gang dominated the East Side, as we have seen; and there was a man on the other side of town named Mr. Pelkas.

By diligence, and refraining from drinking anything but whisky and gin, this man had gone forward. Fate had smiled upon his efforts. Fortune had knocked upon his door not once but many times, and when he happened to be out raising particular Cain, she had waited for him. Until at last Mr. Pelkas had found himself at the head of one of the meanest, most prosperous gangs in the whole city—the West Side Gang.

Mr. Whimple went to see Mr. Pelkas. It is no small tribute to Mr. Whimple to record that. Not everyone could see Mr. Pelkas himself personally. But Mr. Whimple did it. He did it by knocking down the outer guard and kicking in the outer and inner doors, and putting a gun on Mr. Pelkas to keep him quiet till he heard the proposition. And the proposition was so good that Mr. Pelkas fell for it, and ordered his companions not to destroy Mr. Whimple, and even accompanied Mr. Whimple to look over the Puritan Laundry previous to taking it over.

For Mr. Whimple's proposition was that Mr. Pelkas and friends should take over the laundry and hold it against all comers. There was, of course, some talk, also, of handing it back to Mr. Whimple after things were settled; but Mr. Pelkas didn't take any stock in that. He planned to hold it against Mr. Mory and his gang, and expected some little action in doing so; but as for Mr. Whimple, even in the face of their first interview, Mr. Pelkas figured him as out of the picture. And what a colossal mistake that was, as we shall see.

Night settled peacefully upon the city. Gangsters awoke and ate their hearty undeserved breakfasts, and started out. Mr. Pelkas and gang were secretly hidden in the laundry, holding the fort. Mr. Whimple, as new proprietor, had sent word to Mr. Mory that afternoon that he would pay nothing for protection. In fact he had suggested that Mr. Mory go to a certain place, not his laundry. So he expected Mr. Mory that night. And sure enough, Mr. Mory and gang were in luxurious stolen sedans, approaching it. Mr. Cohen was in Bermuda; and Mr. Whimple was on the job, in the background, but pulling the wires. Let the orchestra play the "Flower Song." Nobody will recognize it, as it isn't jazz, but play it anyway, for the happenings now coming will be sad. That is, sad from the gangster standpoint. From all other standpoints they will be gay.

Mr. Pelkas' companions had taken positions at the laundry windows, smashing with their gun-butts those that were still intact, and thereby saving the Mory Associates the trouble.

The Mory gang, little suspecting that they were dealing with anything more dangerous than Mr. Cohen or Mr. Whimple, came up to set the laundry on fire, intending no harm to anyone; and as they approached, Mr. Pelkas and gang let fly with all they had in the way of buckshot, and many brave Moryites bit the cement.

NOW Mory, as was his custom, was in the rear with his bodyguard; like Napoleon at Waterloo, he ordered the Guard forward. They had the usual supply of bombs, pineapples, and so on, and they let them go. One of them caught Mr. Pelkas in the stomach just as it exploded, and just as Mr. Pelkas had drawn a shotgun bead on Mr. Mory seated in his stolen sedan, and pulled the trigger. Both were thus eliminated, and that was tough for them, but a break for the rest of the world. Most of the Pelkas band went up with the bombs. The Mory gang accompanied their leader to the Happy Hunting-grounds, practically *en masse*, which are the French words for unanimously. The laundry unfortunately caught fire and burned down; but the insurance company paid Mr. Whimple quite a little more than he had given Mr. Cohen for it, so things were pretty good, until the South Gang moved in and took up the work.

But Mr. Whimple still lives, so things aren't going to become too bad. Maybe he'll get a little help from the general public. But anyway, he'll carry on.

A not-soon-forgotten story of the Newfoundland sealing fleet, by the able author of "High Explosive" and "The White Wilderness."

By GEORGE ALLAN ENGLAND

Prize Cargo

Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson

THE fire-glow of the unknown burning ship trembled through a lull of that infuriate arctic blizzard. A vague and reddish wraith of light blurred out; a gleam so faint that by moments the streaming of the white storm-banners blotted it away. That glow, off to starboard, dimly reached the eye of the stocky and black-bearded first officer Nat Stirge, as he stood on the ice-sheeted bridge of the ancient Newfoundland sealing-steamer *Narwhal*.

Nat instantly realized its deadly portent—should Cap'n Absalom Tibbo see it also. Unmindful of himself, of ship, cargo, or crew, the Cap'n would inevitably turn to the rescue. Quixotic and deadly venture, that, in such a tempest! At all hazards, it must not be!

"Lord, if de Ol' Man only don't bring his sights to bear on dat, now!" Stirge thought passionately. "A few minutes more, an' we'll swing apast it. Beside our own cargo an' lives, what's anodder ship to us?"

Out into the storm-drive he keenly squinted with bloodshot eyes, then peered at the "Old Man" there on the other end of the 'midships bridge. Bucking the mass-attack of that brutal gale, Cap'n Absalom was driving his barbarously overloaded and laboring vessel toward St. Johns. "Home or hell!" was now his motto.

"Home or hell!" To attempt the rescue of another ship—would not that smear out the "home," and make the "hell" a certainty?

Already Absalom was dicing with pale and frozen Death. In the vortex of a shrieking and snow-blinded madness like this now playing its devil's-minuet, with

pack-ice grinding and crashing, with a tortured leaky hull and rackety engines hardly better than scrap-iron—above all, with twenty thousand more seal-pelts than ever the aged ship could safely freight, should not Cap'n Absalom have turned tail to the storm instead of fronting it?

By Davy Jones, his locker—yes! Most certainly he should have temporized with this demoniac madness till it had raged itself out, had he been a wise mariner. But when "high-liner" with a bumper trip, and thirsty for glory in port, what Newfoundland sealing-crew or captain ever has been wise?

Nat Stirge shuffled through deep snow on the bridge, over to its port end. Ah, if he could only hold the Cap'n's attention there, until that ominous fire-glow through the frozen scudge far off should fade and vanish! Only keep the Old Man from turning round and sighting it! Dissension might serve. . . . Nat launched an argument.

"What ye t'ink, sir?" he anxiously queried, as the tormented ship crashed through jams that hurled her iron-sheathed prow rearing at dizzy angles. Cap'n Absalom remained squinting over the sleeted weather-cloth, trying to pierce that rush and shriek of ghost-whiteness whipped by a far-below-zero gale. "Dis here aint gettin' no better, fast. 'Tis screechin' now. We're goin' to ketch it dirty, sir."

The Old Man, with more than a drop of Scotch blood in his arteries, rose to Nat's lure of controversy:

"Don't have the bad word, Skip! 'Tis only an airsome bit of a breeze. Aint we heavin' ahead?"

"Yes sir, dead slow," admitted Nat, wily as a serpent. "But our b'ilers is all crusted, wid usin' salt-water lately. Can't raise no good steam, ner hardly make

wayhead. We better shift our course an' run afore de storm, I'm t'inkin'."

"Run, me eye!" Absalom negatived this move, which would presently have put the *Narwhal* beyond all danger of sighting that distant fire-gleam. "No, sir, bob, by damn!" The Cap'n clamped his short foul pipe in a square-set jaw.

"But I don't like de looks o' dis," Nat persisted. "Not one bit, sir. Strike me blind if I do!"

The Cap'n's steely blue eyes narrowed under frosted brows, as they gimleted out into that mad-boiling tumult. With fur cap, dirty sheepskin jacket and woolen mittens, he made a huge-shouldered white figure, like a giant snow-man come to life. Angrily he retorted:

"What the devil is a little thick weather? Don't we hail fer more seals 'an any other ship, this spring? First time in me whole damn' life I ever come in high-liner—an' by Gad, we're goin' through!"

"Yes, sir." After a short pause Skipper Nat seemed to agree. He stole a glance to starboard. Thank heaven, that fire-

The first mad rush swept back most of the loyalists. Blood began to trickle. Fists flew. Knives glinted. Yells of hot rage filled the decks.

wraith of light was fading! A few moments more and it might wholly vanish. The situation might be saved. "All right, sir. But jakers! 'Tis an awful coarse gale. An' if ye'd only shift yer course downwind, I'm t'inkin'—"

"Stop thinkin', b'y, an' double full steam ahead! Come in first with a stigger-load, an' devil burn all squealers! Trust the Good Lard, me son, 'cause He was a seafarin' man Himself, one time!"

"Ye say, sir?" Well, now, if Cap'n Absalom could only be entangled in argument, no eye would he have for anything. "De Good Lard a sailor-man Himself, is it?"

"Even so! Don't it tell in the Book as how He took ship on the Sea o' Galilee?"

"Honest-up, sir? A ship like we got nowadays? An' seals?" (Of course Nat called them "swiles.") "Ye reckon dey had seals in dem waters, too?"

"Mebbe not, Skipper. But a ship's a ship, an' the Good Lard surely did go to sea. An' He did quieten out the tempests. He'll see us safe through all this, ye can bet yer jib-halyards on *that!*"

"Starb'rd!"

Far from the topmast barrel, down through level-shot blasts of snow, drifted an eerie cry. The "scunner," or lookout-man, dizzily aloft there and spying steadily ahead, had dimly made out some more open leads of water among clashing floes that hungered for the old ship's greenheart bones.

Gladly Skipper Nat realized the scunner had not yet happened to sight the distant shudder of flame from the burning vessel. Luck still held.

"Starb'rd!" Nat bawled to the four hard-shouldered and huge-booted men at the heavy double wheels far aft. And penetrating that blind drive of whiteness, back came the roar, *"Starb'rd!"* in a chorus harsh and wild.

Nat felt his spirits rise. So far, only he seemed aware of that distant fire—only he, out of the seven men at the wheels, on the bridge and aloft.

All the others aboard were tucked away below in aft-cabin and fo'c'sle, in 'tween-decks and galleys, engine-room, glory-hole. Out of harm's way, the ice-wrenched old ship's more than two hundred seal-hunters and others laired as securely as might be, from the storm-assaults that screeched with exultant fury.

There they crouched; there were they sheltered indeed, but in a case how far more desperate than even the incredibly filthy hardships of a usual seal-hunt! For now was not every cubic inch of space at a golden premium? In spite of all, those hardy fellows had laughed and gammed and sung; had also taken to shaving—sure sign of a completed "spring," or hunt. Not even the brutal smiting of this blizzard, driving them in swarms from the sculp-piled decks and making the jam below far worse, had doused their exultation.

"High-liner!"

What brilliant deals are to a financier, academic degrees to a scholar, or victories to a general, such to every sealing-crew and captain is the fame of beating all other ships' records. Now aboard the *Narwhal* this was paying for every pain and peril, richly compensating all this stenchful woe that engulfed them!

It was a pest-hole indeed that this amazing "jag o' fat" had made of the ship. But a pest-hole which every man aboard, from lowliest stowaway to Cap'n Absalom himself, bore with joyous pride. When sealers are freighting a logger-load, may not life itself be boldly gambled, to fetch so glorious a prize to port?

"Hove *me* off de bridge, did ye?" Nat howled. "Bide dere till I comes back, an'—"

Now all cargo-spaces were crammed to bursting. A gelatinous rawness of sculps lay packed in and under scores of bunks. Pelts filled "pounds" built on fo'c'sle-head, in waist and on quarter-deck. They jammed bunkers from which tons of precious coal had been recklessly shoveled overboard.

Bulkheads had been ripped out to make place for skins. Heaps of these reeked in cabins, in companionways, and—despite the perilous inflammability of seal-oil—in wooden compartments hard against the very stokehold! Even the lazaret had vacated its supplies of grub, kerosene and giant-powder, much of all this having been heaved out on ice to make more room for the miraculous "surge o' fat."

Three days now, ever since the triumphant homeward voyage to Newfoundland had begun, all the hands had been existing, feeding, sleeping in brutalized compression; walking on each other; jam-packed into that overburdened old arctic veteran, like herring in a cask.

Now it seemed that even one more sculp or man aboard would burst the ship or sink her. Burst, or sink! And what call had the tormented *Narwhal* to go chasing on a rescue-venture? . . . . Satan snatch all burning ships or perishing strangers, out there somewhere in the blizzard!

Cap'n Absalom started to turn toward the other end of the sleet-choked bridge. Nat still tried to detain him:

"My glorianna, sir, we sure oughta shift our course! Wid better'n sixty t'ousand sculps aburd, an' de *Narwhal* not rated safe fer more 'an forty—an' now our Plimsoll-mark under water—"

"Plimsoll-mark be tarred! If I could get the seals, I'd paint our Plimsoll-mark on top o' the funnel, an' let her rip! An' I— Hello there, now—what's *that?*"

The Cap'n's pointing arm bulked clumsily huge, like a bear's, as his mittened hand thrust out into the lancing sleet-scuds.

Silently Nat consigned Absalom to torments eternal, for a pig-headed old idiot. Now, by Gad, all the fat was in the fire; now scarlet disaster was to pay!

"What's that?" repeated Absalom, staring at the vague aura of light a-tremble through blizzard-flaws.

"What's what, sir?" Nat evaded.

"A fire, out yon!"

"I don't sight no fire, sir. Aint got a touch o' de iceblind, has ye? Dat sometimes make a man t'ink he see red."

"Ice blind be damned! I see fire—or the light of it. Ye're either blind, yerself, or lyin'! But how the double Tophet could there be fire out here in the ice?"

He hailed the scunner:

"Aloft, there!"

"Aye-aye, sir?" dropped a faint cry from ghostly loom.

"Take a sight nigh due west! Looks like a fire. What ye make o' that?"

After a moment's storm-driven silence, through which Skipper Nat was sweating blood, the answer fell:

"Right, sir. Dat *is* a fire, sir. 'Tis a vessel, I'm t'inkin'. Ship, far off, burnin' in de ice!"

This tremendous announcement drew a moment's blank stillness from the Old Man.

A ship on fire in the ice; well, that was just a burning ship. But, God o' mercy, was it not horribly more? Might it not spell disaster and death to their own vessel with all her swarming crew and her prize cargo?

THE Old Man, though, brushed everything aside except his bounden duty, just as Skipper Nat with only too terrible certainty had known he would.

"We got to see about that, I reckon," he exclaimed. "By the Law Harry, yes! If there's poor beggars perishin out yon, we got to stand by an' save 'em!"

"De divil ye say, sir!" Nat desperately expostulated. "Not wid our ship so heavy dat de leastest little wag o' sea would sink her! An' her a sick vessel, too, fer coal. All our steamin' an' grub gone, to de last pick an' scrapin's! How in blazes we goin' to feed an' bunk anodder crew?"

"Oh, we can make a fetch of it, some way."

"No, sir! De ol' *Narwhal* can't take nary anodder pound. Why, look-see!" Nat's voice went raw with bitter protest as he flung a mittened hand at the ship's waist. "We're nigh scuppers-in, a'ready. Aint got two foot freeboard, Cap'n. An' if we tries to take on mebbe a couple o' hundred more men, dat'll jam us proper. It'll lose us our cargo—our lives, I reckon!"

"We got to take the chance, Nat. Don't the Book say as how we're our brothers' keepers? We got to do our proper duty as real sailormen—like the Good Lard Himself. We got to go!"

"But I tell ye, sir, dat's unpossible!"

"Slack away aft!" Absalom retorted. "Who in Tophet is ridin' this un, anyhow?"

"You is, sir! But fer God's sake, try to have a bit o' common-sinse!" Now Skipper Nat's black eyes were gleaming, his jaw ugly. "Supposin' now, if we don't just happen fer to *see* dat fire—"

"What's that ye say?"

"Just us men on watch, here, knows about it. Why can't we all keep mum—haul off a few p'ints, sir? In ten minutes, won't be no light showin'. Won't nobody never know—"

"Port!" bawled Absalom, to the steersmen. "Head 'er up fer that fire ye see out yon to west'ard!"

"Port! Head 'er up, sir!" roared hoarse voices aft.

Through the snow on his bridge, Cap'n Absalom strode to the engine-room tube. Mightily he blew down it.

"Give 'er all ye got, Mack!" he shouted, when the Chief had answered. "Ship afire in the ice. Gi' me every pound o' steam ye can. Thrash hell out of 'er!"

"Aye, aye, sir!" bumbled the answer from dark regions below. "Hell it is, sir!"

Absalom swung on Skipper Nat. Furiously, with face rage-empurpled, he ordered: "Ye! Get for'ard!"

"For'ard, sir?"

"Ye heard me, ye inhuman devil!" Now the Old Man's eyes were flames of blue. "Ye're broke! To the fo'c'sle with ye. I'll have no first officer as advises *me* to give the go-by to a burnin' ship, an' murder a crew of able mariners. Go on with ye, now—get for'ard out o' here, ye cowardly, sneakin' son of a scut!"

Nat Stirge's face contracted with rage.

"Hell's flames, ye can't do dat to me!" His voice broke, gusty raw. "I'll not go, ner—"

The Old Man's convincing answer was just one smashing right-hander straight to the jaw. Nat hung a dazed moment against the frozen bridge-rail. Absalom finished the job with a powerful sweep of the arm that toppled Nat backward, down to the snow-deep cover of the quarter-hatch, eight feet below.

LURIDLY cursing, Nat slid thence to a drifted pile of sculps. He spat a tooth as he struggled up out of the snow. There, as the old ship rammed quivering through heavy-battering ice, he swayed a few seconds in his huge, spike-soled "skinny-woppers" or sealskin boots—a massive figure of murderous rage.

"Why, ye lousy ol' son of a scaldy!" he howled up through that bitter tempest-sweep, and brandished a pile-driver fist. "Hove *me* off de bridge, did ye? Yah! Bide dere—bide till I comes back, an'—"

He bubbled incoherent curses, then limped away over snowdrifted heaps of skins. Past the main-hatch and the forward galley he stumbled—yanked open the fo'c'sle-door—vanished with a slam.

Indifferent to all this, Cap'n Absalom spied out into the tempest's blind and screaming fury. There in vague distance, that ominous ruddy glow had now noticeably strengthened.

"Brrr-aaaa!" Dim stridors of a siren ripped the storm. Through numbing blasts, its despairing scream appealed for rescue from frozen-sheeted Death.

Absalom's mittened hand tugged his whistle-cord. With Minotaur bellowings, out into that driving smother the old ship hurled her ear-ripping answer:

"Hold fast! We're standing by!"

As her startled crew roused up, Cap'n Absalom swung toward his steersmen:

"One o' you fellers get Bridgemaster Kean up here to me, with all the master-watches. Step lively, there!"

"Aye, aye, sir!" And a snow-sheathed figure plowed toward the cabin-companionway.

"Soon see about this!" growled the Old Man. "See who's ridin' this un now, by damn!"

Presently, while the confused uproar of a "chaw-round" grew audible from the fo'c'sle, Jonas Kean clambered up to the bridge. Behind him straggled three master-watches, soon followed by five more —huge-shouldered sons of Anak, true Vikings of the North.

"Yes, sir? What is it, sir?"

"Harkee, Jonas, an' all o' ye! There's a steamer burnin', out yonder." Absalom pointed through whistling flights of snowlances. The others fixed wondering eyes on the glow ever more ominously looming through the blizzard. They heard the unknown vessel's siren shrieking.

"Yes sir," said Jonas. "An' what ye doin', sir?"

"Goin' to take off that perishin' crew, me sons." The Cap'n whiffed his pipe and spat. "Skipper Nat just refused duty an' miscalled me. I broke him. He's for'ard now, chin-waggin'. Stirrin' up a mutiny, likely. So, Jonas, ye're to be my first officer now. Ye're a wonderful able man in a shindy. Are ye—an' all o' ye here—with me, eh?"

CRIES, questions, shouts greeted the Old Man's broadside of news. Jonas Kean's voice hoarsely emerged:

"T'ankee wonderful much fer me new berth, sir. Faith, an' I'll stand to y'r back till all's blue!"

"Dat's a say-so fer us all!" chimed in the master-watches. "But 'taint comin' to a rookus, is it, sir?"

"Only the Man Above knows that," Absalom replied, while his overburdened old ship groaned with the impacts at her tortured bow. Ice-pans whirled as her thundering forefoot rode them down in smothers of leaping brine. "How many of our rifles got ca'tridges left fer 'em?"

"Narr one, sir," answered Jonas. "We finish all dem 45.70's, our last big shoot."

"So then, we aint got no fire, eh? My, my, my! Without guns—"

"Never mind, sir," put in a master-watch. "Wid just fists an' gaffs an' sculpin'-knives, us afterguard fellers can cow-out all as is likely to— Ah, look-see, will ye?"

"Here dem beggars comes, a-tearin'!" shouted Jonas Kean. "Here dey comes now, hellety-up!"

The fo'c'sle door banged violently open. Already Nat Stirge's rebellion had burst into vivid flame. Uproar swelled to a savage crescendo, as out upon the sculp-piled and snow-muffled deck there spewed a mob of furious mutineers.

Like froth on a comber, Nat was hustled aft by the crest of his raging human wave. Shouting, gesticulating, he staggered through the whiteness heaped over lumpy mounds of sealskins. Some of the rebels yelled down the 'tween-decks companionway; and this, too, began erupting grimed and filthy hunters.

AFT swirled the insurgents, bareheaded or wearing peaked caps; all in high spike-soled sealskin boots. Some brandished formidably hooked and pointed gaffs; some made play with ugly sculping-knives. The clamor of their shouting joined that of the mad gale shrieking in exultation over the sleeted vessel.

"Go get all the gaffs an' knives ye can," quietly ordered Cap'n Absalom. "One o' ye send up all the black-gang with pokers an' slice-bars. An' bid Chief Mack rig a steam-hose to the bridge. Ye, Jonas, tarry here. Rest o' ye, *go!*"

Alone on the bridge now with only his newly appointed first officer, the Old Man leaned elbows on the frosted rail and calmly went on smoking. With detached gaze he surveyed the frantic disorder tumbling aft against him, murder-bent.

More than a hundred and fifty hunters had with astonishing swiftness blazed into white-hot rebellion. Volatile, child-minded and ever tinder to the spark of frolic or fight, they had been a powder-magazine for the naked flame of Nat's denunciation:

"De Ol' Man, he's sellin' us out! T'rowin' our prize cargo on ice, to load up with a crew o' strangers! Riskin' our lives, too! An' when I say no, he fist me off de bridge an' bust me tooth out. He ruin de ship—murder de lot of us. To hell wid dat ol' gozaroo!"

"To hell!" most of them had roared in answer. And now here they came howling—wolves, raging for the kill.

Loud above the devil's-laughter of the blizzard, drowning the siren's ululation from the burning ship afar, that grimy-faced and bloodstained mob made tumult. Fists and weapons flourished through the snow-shot loom.

WHILE the struggling ship battled onward to the rescue, the mutineers jammed aft. Over the bridge-railing, smiling and unperturbed, Absalom still faced them. First blow! Who should strike it? A moment's indecision fell.

"You, dere, ye ol' cockabaloo!" Nat Stirge's furious voice gusted out. "Ye hark to me!" With passionate fist, dark face hate-writhen, he stood among snowed-under sculps on the main hatch. "We got rights to be heard, ye mark dat, solid!"

"All O. K. What's on yer chest, b'y?" the Cap'n returned, with unexpected mildness that sore disconcerted the mutineers. Bellowings, blasphemings—they had expected such, and these they could have battered down. But this soft-spoken, civil question gave them pause. Peacefully the Old Man tapped out his pipe and pocketed it. "What ye got to say, me son?"

Already, as the Cap'n temporized, his aft-guard backers had begun to reappear with weapons on the bridge. Some of the black-gang too were arriving, sooty Vulcans who bore formidable ironmongery. Out of the engine-room scuttle dawned Chief Mack's ruddy, full-moon face, anxiously judging where to lay his steam-hose. But how trivial these defending forces against that roaring mob!

"Come on, brud'," the Old Man still invited. "What's wrong with ye? Spit it out!"

"Ye know good what's wrong! Our trip o' fat, what we been slavin' and riskin' our lives fer—ye says t'row it away on de ice. T'row away flakes o' money, an' mebbe our lives, too!" Nat vibrated a mad fist at the flame-glow through the whirls of blizzard. "Fer strangers, all! Divil take such nonsinse, an' you too—ye ginger-whiskered old bosthoon! Aint it, b'ys?"

Shrieks of storm-demons were drowned in a many-throated roar, deep-charged with lust of blood.

"If dis ship's company got to die," Nat howled, "'tis ye—*ye,* ol' man—as'll be de first to go!"

Cap'n Absalom lifted a huge and mittened fist; and as some measure of silence fell—

"Harkee!" he cried. "I'm in command. My word at sea is law. All as stands against me is common mutineers. Ye'll lose y'r bite—y'r share o' the prize-cargo money! So then, all that's still under orders, get to sta'board o' the main hatch. Mutineers, to port. An' give us a look at the lousiest bunch o' cowardly puckaloons in ol' Newf'un'land!"

Amid jostling turmoil, the now snow-powdered hunters fell to cleaving sheep from goats. Some struggled to reach port or starboard, others to hold them back. Insults, blows, curses, savage laughter mingled in confusion under the blizzard-drive that slashed like knouts.

Unmoved from his portentous quietude, the Cap'n still leaned on bearish elbows, waiting, watching. Swiftly it grew evident that scores of the hunters were not going to risk the loss of their "bite." Nat, to win, must strike before the sealers could ponder. He howled:

"Come on, me lucky sons! Aint narr law as can touch us fer defendin' our own property an' lives. Every man as *is* a man, stands wid me now! Come on!"

THE mad-attacking rush, scaling the bridge, swept back most of the loyalists. Gaffs whirled aloft, dashed down. Thudding, they bruised and wounded. Blood began to trickle. Fists flew. Knives glinted. Men dropped.

Yells of exultation and hot rage filled the ghost-white decks. Hunters rolled in trampled snow, slid entangled over frozen sculp-piles.

Up over their contorted heaps stormed more and ever more attackers of the bridge. Their spiked boots lacerated those who fell.

Starkest war raged along the bridge-railing. Clotted like swarming bees, there men furiously strove. And there Jonas Kean, master-watches and black-gang, plied gaffs and irons with deadly effect.

Cap'n Absalom laughed right joyously as he hauled off his mittens, flung them away and spat upon his mighty hands. He snatched a gaff, and with immense gusto laid about him. Right! Left! Up and down and left again, and right! His slashing blows were a Viking's.

His gaff splintered over a mutineer's skull. Its iron gyrated through the sleety gale. He grabbed a slice-bar. At every whistling sweep he mowed down rebels. Though his own face was now gashed and bleeding, he felt nothing.

Roaring like a bull of Bashan, the Old Man struck and bellowed, flailing there

amid his ship's defenders. Even like the two-edged sword of Eden turning every way, so did his slice-bar hurl insurrectos spinning backward, bawling as they tumbled headlong through the ruck of starkly mad besiegers.

"Give 'em what-fer, b'ys!" he thundered. "Learn 'em who's a-ridin' this un—give 'em hell!"

A long section of the icy rail swayed, tore away. Down with it catapulted a frenzied pack of fighters. On and up over them stormed more and ever more.

FROM this new storm-wave the face of Skipper Nat loomed. Roaring, the Cap'n swung at it. Nat ducked, closed in, and Absalom struck only the rebel's shoulder. But the terrific blow hurled Nat backward. He landed sprawling, on frozen sculps below.

One wide leap from the bridge! Ah, the Old Man had him! Dropping his bar, Absalom went after the ringleader bare-fisted. They gripped in a bulldog tangle. Clutching, hammering, they writhed in churned-up snow that blossomed with crimson stains.

"Spare road!" echoed furious yells. "Leave dem two settle dis!" . . . "Stand back—bide by how dem two makes out!" . . . *"Spare road!"*

Some obscure white man's instinct, dominant through ferocious surges of hate and murder-lust, quelled the hunters' rage. Friend and foe alike crawled or staggered back, shoved away.

From broken bridge, from snow-heaped piles of sculps, even now clambering to low-sunk rail or blizzard-whipped ratlines, the hunters with savage eagerness stared at this grim battle.

The Old Man's iron fists would have pulped any man less hard, but Stirge with shrewd interest paid blow for blow. At last Stirge with violent effort wrenched clear. As the Cap'n's bleeding knuckles battered his puffed face, he swung a bone-cracking right-hander to Absalom's left eye—and spinning backward, landed all-ends-up amid frozen pelts.

Ferocious howls of triumph burst from the loyalists. But with scrambling agility, Nat rolled into a crouch and hurled himself against the Cap'n's powerful, huge-booted legs.

"Show *ye,*" he gulped, "—who's ridin' dis un!"

Absalom stumbled in the bloodstained, trodden snow. Nat surged against him and fisted him on the ear with a brain-jarring crash.

Screeches of raw rage and exultation whirled down-blizzard as the Old Man crumpled.

"Hell's flames! Spike him, Nat!" . . . "Jump him, wid de frosters!"

The white man's code, though, still held Skipper Nat. He withstood the temptation to "spike" the Cap'n's face to rags with one kick of those deadly boots. Drunk with hate and punishment though he was, still he gave Absalom a chance.

"Get up, ye looardly swab!" he cried, a crimson trickle clotting his beard. Fists swinging, he swayed over the Old Man. "Up, so I can crack ye down ag'in!"

Bull hood-seals sometimes roar as Absalom roared then; they launch to the attack even as Absalom heaved up and charged.

Nat drove hard to the ear again, but only rocked the Cap'n. Absalom licked blood from swollen lips and spat crimson. His left eye was buttoned tight; the other, though, still could see a bit.

With guile the Old Man circled. He jockeyed Nat around, till just behind him yawned the open 'tween-decks companionway. Now the rebel was dead in line for that hungry pit.

"Mind y'rself, Nat!" yelled partisans. "Stand cl'ar o' de hatch, b'y!"

Absalom feinted at Nat's belly. Clumsily Nat guarded.

Crack! What was that—a mule's kick on the jaw? It sounded so—it felt so!

NAT spun backward. Vacancy caught him. A second, his sprawling arms snatched at nothing. Steel boot-spikes glinted in the open hatchway, then vanished.

Thud! Up from blackness a half-heard curse groaned. Then silence fell.

"H'under, below!" yelled some wag—the regular hail used when sculps are flung into a sealer's hold. And at this grisly witticism, Gargantuan laughter roared many-throated aloft through snow and gale.

That mockery did for the mutineers—it killed their rebellion. And the child-minds of the hunters, ever variable as a burgee in a hurricane, instantly veered again to Absalom.

"T'ree cheers fer de Ol' Man!" . . . "Lead us to de burnin' ship!" . . . "Let's save dem poor perishin' beggars!" . . . *"Leave us go!"*

Uproariously the old ship blared her rescue-message as the battered but triumphant Cap'n, with reddened hand,

With blood-red glare, the dying ship poured herself aloft in living flame.

tugged at his whistle-cord. On through the pack-ice the *Narwhal* jammed her massive old oaken shoulders, scornfully thrusting aside her ancient enemies of ice.

Nearer the doomed vessel, Absalom watched the fire-glow steadily brighten. This glow made mocking imitation of sunrise, as if behind the swirling storm-curtains some warmly glorious day-dawn were at hand.

Eager tension gripped the crew. Unmindful of bruises, cuts, wounds, men clung everywhere and strained their eyes as they fronted the slashing blizzard, eager for first glimpse of actual flame.

Already whiffs of smoke—the strangling, stinking smoke of a seal-fat fire—had begun to swirl on the breath of that polar storm. And already confused tumults were growing audible—smothered shouts, yells, the crash and thud of dull explosions.

Then quite suddenly out of that bitter snow-drive, the vaguest of ghost-figures began to loom: Sealers, toiling toward the *Narwhal;* hunters, laboring through that insane ice-jumble of giants' dice; suppliants, who rose and sank on the league-long swell built by the blizzard in the arctic ice.

"*Ahoy!*" drifted a raucous shout. The oncomers waved frantic arms. "Aburd, dere!"

"Ahoy!" flared back the Old Man's voice. Half-blinded, with face bloodily knocked-about, still he stood erect and powerful on the remnant of his bridge. Blizzard-lashed, and his crimson-frozen beard now whitened again with snow, he hailed in answer: "Ahoy—on ice! What ship—is that?"

Faintly after a pause, the reply drifted: "*Kamouraska!* An' goin' fast. Fer God's sake, heave ahead!"

The Cap'n's jaw dropped with dismay. He turned his Cyclopean gaze on Jonas Kean, beside him.

"*Kamouraska!*" he gulped. "My glorianna! That'll be Jackman Penney's ship, eh?"

"Dat's right, sir."

"By damn! The devil's whelp—him an' his vessel, too!"

THROUGH the *Narwhal* ugly growls ran like wildfire. For the *Kamouraska* and her crew and captain—black reputations, there! Rumors of having killed seals before the legal date of mid-March; of hunting on the Lord's Day; of making unfair cuts into other ships' "fat"; even of pirating and stealing others' pans of sculps.

And now this detest[illegible]itfit was burning, eh? Well, fine ri[illegible] to vile rubbish! Let them flar[illegible] hell!

But no, no. . . . L[illegible]gh these two blizzard-bound sh[illegible]e, between them the code of t[illegible] seas still held.

"Comin', damn ye!" blar[illegible] Man, to those haggard and gh[illegible] pliants. "Comin' now, ye sons o[illegible] me-gots an' pirates—standin' by!"

One of the outlawed *Kamouras*[illegible] scatter of men, scrambling up a pinnacle, flung crazed arms toward the fire-glare.

"Is that you, Zebulon Kinsella?" the Cap'n shouted. "I knows *you!* Bridgemaster, aint ye? What crew ye got?"

"Hundred an' ninety-odd, sir. An' over fifty t'ousand sculps!"

Kinsella's news ran like a torrent. The *Narwhal* echoed with loud argument. But Absalom heard naught. The cogs of his slow mind were grinding out distressful calculations:

"Hundred an' ninety men. That means not far off thirty-four thousand pounds o'

sculps—seventeen ton—we got to heave out, to offshoot the heft of 'em. We lose seventeen ton of our prize cargo. No high-line chance *now!*"

Cap'n Absalom cursed the fate that—merely to save some enemies of gallows-bad repute—had now smashed his whole life's ambition. One moment, the old Adam in him whispered:

"Jakers! If our course had only been another mile to the east'ard! If we only hadn't sighted that fire!"

Swiftly, though, the Cap'n shook off this black dog from his shoulders. He yelled to his beseeching foes, out on ice:

"All right, me sons! Comin'! Sent an S. O. S., have ye?"

"No, sir! Our Sparks, he got a hard crack on de head, an' aint come to his proper senses yet. An' we aint got narr anodder man as knows how to work dat t'ing. Ye got a wireless man?"

"No wireless, at all! Get back to yer ship. We'll smash through to ye, fast as the Man Above'll let us!"

Absalom roared down orders at the jam of hunters on his snow-buried decks. Some he dispatched at top speed out over the ice to fetch what help they could to the dying *Kamouraska.* Others he bade clear the hatches, man the "gurdies."

"We're goin' to h'ist out seventeen ton o' sculps on ice! Jump yary, now!"

Even before the laboring old ship had crushed her path within dim sight of the oil-soaked and blazing wreck, hatches gaped wide. By the time she had ground to a halt amid rumbled floes, winches were all a-steam gushing wide on snow-

Hup each numbering ten seals' up from cavernous black ca- swung outboard, thudded ... the *Narwhal's* crew—amaz- like all sealers—were for their ... salvation laboring to fling out ... of their precious prize cargo; they ...led, cursed and laughed, pried and ...crained, mucked there in the frozen fat.

Indifferent to all save the majestic spectacle of the burning ship, Cap'n Tibbo stood on his ruined bridge. Once more his short pipe was glowing as he watched the death-struggle of his adversary.

FROST and flame, blizzard and the pit of hell itself contended for that hulk. A Vesuvius of flame and smoke was pouring from 'midships and forward. That smoke, shot through with red-spiraling brands of wreckage, gusted down upon the *Narwhal* in black and choking swirls that fled along the ice, swooped off into the spectral loom.

With a vast shouting, hundreds of men from both crews were perilously at toil to salvage sea-chests, stores, powder, grub and equipment from aft.

One moment obscured by some heavier snow-drive to but a blood-red glare, then again through a flaw searingly revealed, the dying ship poured herself aloft in living flame.

"Hell of a perishin' she's got," muttered Absalom, like a connoisseur fully appreciating the bouquet of some rare wine, "Devil himself couldn't save her, now." His one eye glinted with satisfaction. "Only thing as keeps her lazaret from blowing up is that she's layin' stern to the gale, so the flames aint swept aft, but has to eat their way."

DESPITE the adverse gale, the flames were ravenously wolfing toward the stern. Now the bows had crumbled to glowing ruin, the bridge had caved in, and from 'tween-decks an immense crimson geyser was belching.

As Absalom watched, the funnel drunkenly yawed, hung at a dizzy angle, crashed. Gigantic spark-sheaves leaped skyward on tongues of glorious radiance that wavered, gusted, faded in the blizzard's pallid shrouds of death.

Foremast now was gone. Mizzen stood licked by ravenous and wind-tortured fire-tongues. In that leaping, wavering inferno-glare, unreal silhouettes of men drove desperately at deadly perilous labor. Some, far aft, still clung to the dying ship. Absalom and Jonas Kean watched as these hurled salvage from the blazing pyre to swarming groups on ice.

Louder yells reached the watchers' ears, as from the quarterdeck men began scrambling, leaping down. Like ripe-clustered fruit, masses of hunters from both crews were dropping to ice. With wild arms flung, away from the doomed ship they scattered.

They fled, shouting, struggling, to what shelter they could find among the pinnacles.

"Fire in de main cabin now, sir," judged Kean. "An' wid de lazaret right under dat, she's liable to bust any time. Can't be lang, till—"

The *Kamouraska's* whole stern leaped from the ice in a dazing furnace-glare of incandescence, into the blizzard. Gushes of flame licked higher than the mainmast-head that staggered down into a vivid fire-pit.

Shattered to a chaos of spinning wood, iron, seal-sculps and fire-brands, a cloud of débris shot aloft, rocketed in vast curves, plunged in formidable and luminous rain.

This pelted down to smoking, hissing extinction on the ice, amid swarms of crouching and running men.

The Cap'n's ears were nearly shattered by a blast. It flung him back against the aft rail of his bridge. Then, as silence fell, a tremulous crying rose. This mounted, deepened, swelled to a many-hundred-throated roar. Up into that stark tempest it flung—a communal howling from enemy and friend alike. Farewell to another sealing-ship.

Farewell, indeed!

For already through her shattered stern the engulfing sea had begun to pour. Down canted the wreck, down and backward at ever-steeper angles. In a swirling ruck of shattered ice and seething brine, lower she sagged and lower still. She brandished a moment like some gigantic and incredible torch gripped by frost-giants. For a moment flames still crackled as the gale drove them flaring. Then swiftly in that blind snow-drive, away the *Kamouraska* slid. An instant her charred and ravaged bow pointed almost straight up, accusing heaven itself, till—gripped under by Davy Jones' own resistless hand—down it sucked and drew.

Among the blizzard-swept floes now remained only a dark oblong patch of water shrouded with coils of evil, greasy smoke beneath which swirling ice-pans drifted to close that open sea grave.

Silence aboard the *Narwhal* muted men and engines. Hunters ceased their cries, winches their clattering. More terrible than any uproar seemed that empty and vast silence, through which the untiring blizzard still shrieked on. For such silence was the funeral oration of one more ship, gone down to death.

TOWARD the rescue-vessel masses of men came struggling in. Beaten and disheartened were the *Kamouraska's* "greasy-jackets;" some were burned and blackened, torn, wounded, bruised; all were victims of soul-crushing loss. And the *Narwhal's* hunters, too, made a sorry lot. Many of them bore grievous marks of battle. All labored under the misery of no longer "borin' up fer home, highliner." Sullenly, in silence or with bitter-mouthed execrations, back toward their ship they trudged through smothering white suffocation of the tempest.

Iron-faced, one-eyed, the Old Man squinted at them. And—

"Look-see, Jonas," he growled. "Here comes the heft, fer to offshoot our prize cargo. We got the weight comin', but not the sculps, now. Eh? Must be the Ol' B'y himself as done the likes o' this to us. Hell burn such luck!"

SUDDENLY, shipward through the approaching groups, three men came thrusting at almost a run—men whose sharp spikes swiftly chipped the ice as they scrambled over pinnacles, leaped rifters, feverishly pushed along. One of them was shouting through the gale:

"Cap'n Tibbo! Cap'n Tibbo, sir!"

It was Zebulon Kinsella again, the *Kamouraska's* bridgemaster. He waved excited hands.

"What the devil's grandmother has gone alee, now?" the Cap'n demanded, peering out through snow-squalls as Kinsella and his two comrades closed on the ship's flank. The Cap'n hailed:

"*Now* what's wrong o' ye?"

"Nothin' wrong, sir," panted Kinsella, breathless as a blown dog. "'Tis good news I got. 'Tis our wireless. A few minutes 'fore our lazaret blowed up, our Sparks come to his senses. An' after dat—"

"Ye say?" Eagerly Absalom clutched a remnant of his rail.

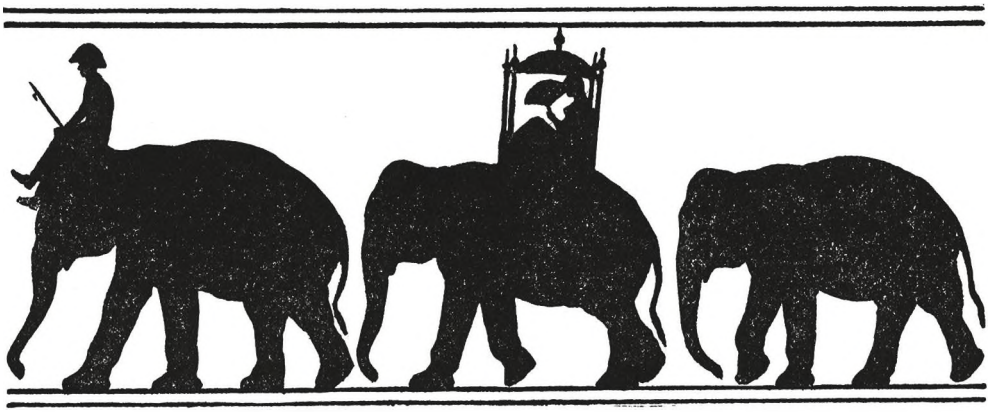
"He shoot a message t'rough to St. Johns. How our ship burn, an' her position, an'—"

"An' then?" the Old Man cried, while all in earshot tensed with eagerness.

"An' den, sir," gulped the spent messenger, "he get back word, just de last minute—how de *Grampus* is bein' sent right out. Sent flyin'-light, wid a rescue-crew, sir. So all ye got to do is shelter us two or t'ree days, till de *Grampus* get here. Stand by yer sculps here on ice—then pick 'em up ag'in—"

"I get ye, b'y," nodded the Old Man, while joyous tumult rose among his men. Calm in triumph as defeat, he turned to Jonas Kean.

"Ye mind that?" he queried. "Trust the Good Lard, b'y, an' He'll allus see ye through! By this reason, that the Good Lard He was a proper shipfarin' man Himself, long ago. I reckon Him an' me is a fine pair of shipmates. *He* know a real ol'-time sealin'-cap'n an' a real prize cargo when He see one. An' He aint makin' no mistakes by not takin' care of his own kind, de Good Lard aint. No sir, bob, by damn!"



The Elephant Man

THE car came to a standstill. We were at the entrance to the main street of the little country town of Maynesford.

"What's holding up the traffic, Constable?" asked Jonathan Lowe.

The red-faced constable grinned.

"Lions 'n' tigers, clowns 'n' elephants," he replied. "Simpson's Circus has come to town."

The blue eyes of Jonathan Lowe gleamed with boyish excitement. He turned to me abruptly.

"I think we'll park the car, young man, and have a look. Are you interested in circuses?"

I shrugged my shoulders. Whether I was interested or not, mattered little. With Lowe, anything that concerned itself with animals was a passion. This white-haired man, with a lithe body that even his loose snuff-colored clothes could not disguise, had spent the best part of his life in jungle, forest and bush. As a forestry officer on the slopes of the Himalayas, he had come to know animals with an affection and sort of instinct.

Jonathan Lowe always sniffed disdainfully at civilization. "People in cities behave like beasts in the jungle," he would reiterate. "Men and women prey on each other. The law of the jungle is that the strongest and most cunning survives. Even a murderer is only a beast that has turned man-eater. And just as a man-eater must be ruthlessly shot, so the murderer must be hunted by justice."

He had proved his theories again and again. From that strange house in St. John's Wood, with his little private zoo at the end of the garden, he had unraveled with a shrewd instinct more than one murder-mystery which I had posed before him. As a crime-reporter on the Daily *Courier* I had benefited by his deductions; my friendship with this man known to natives of India as the "Father of the Jungle" had brought more than one scoop to the *Courier*.

"There's always something tragic in a circus procession," murmured Jonathan Lowe as we squeezed our way into the crowd that thronged the pavements of Maynesford. "Even the clowns and the brass band can't make it entirely joyous."

"The lions look well-fed, anyhow," I said, as the cages on wheels rumbled by.

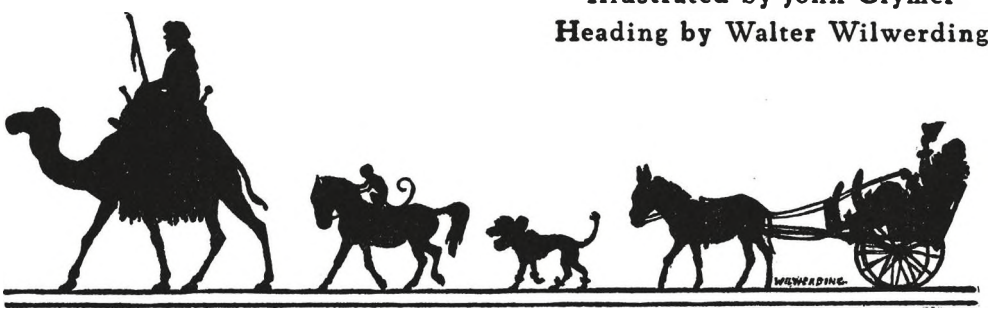
Jonathan Lowe nodded.

"But the lions are troubadours—wandering players," he explained. "I don't mind a lion in a cage, but I hate to see it doing tricks with a furtive eye on the whip of the trainer. Animals hate to be humiliated. They hate it almost as much as does a man or a woman."

"Look out! Here come the elephants!"

An excited whisper ran through the crowd. A band blared past. And then came three big gray beasts, their heavy feet padding along the macadam. In their cautious, swaying progress they had the appearance of three giant drunken sailors. The heavy folds of their skin hung like baggy trousers at the legs. Their trunks curled and sniffed at the throng lining the street. One of the beasts flapped its enormous ears. The crowd laughed.

Illustrated by John Clymer
Heading by Walter Wilwerding



A dramatic exploit of that strange detective Jonathan Lowe.

By WILLIAM J. MAKIN

who wrote the famous Wolf of Arabia stories.

"Look at the miserable mahout," said Jonathan Lowe.

It was then I glimpsed a shabby man with bowed back who walked at the side of the biggest elephant. In contrast to that massive bulk the man looked a miserable specimen of humanity. Despite the blare of the band and the procession, the elephants retained something of dignity—but not so the man in the shabby clothes; his pale pinched face, his bowed back, his cracked boots, all told of a man who felt himself humiliated beside his gigantic charges.

"Good heavens, it's Blethwick!" cried Jonathan Lowe, aloud.

The cry must have reached that man. He looked up for an instant. I saw a pair of dark eyes gazing in our direction. Then the pale face flushed with shame. He bowed his head, and a dirty white hand went up instinctively to caress the big beast which trudged warily at his side.

But even as he looked up, I heard a woman laugh shrilly.

"There he is!" she cried, and a jeweled finger was pointed in derision.

At the same moment the mahout's gaze, wandering in her direction, was met with a loud guffaw of laughter from a prosperous well-dressed man standing by the woman's side.

"A clown among the elephants, eh?" laughed the man.

Both these people bore the stamp of "County" folk. The man, whose face had the tinge of weather and whisky, had his arm in that of the woman whose simple, well-tailored clothes told of an expensive dressmaker. She was beautiful, except for the laugh that now slashed her face—there was something evil, something terribly derisive in that laugh.

And the shabby man trudging with the elephants saw it. The flush of shame he had turned to Jonathan Lowe was now the red of rage. The dark eyes glinted savagely; for a moment the bowed back was straightened and his body seemed tense with hatred. Wild beasts quiver in that fashion before they leap.

"Isn't he funny!" the woman laughed.

Her laugh was like the lash of a whip to the beast in the man. He cringed. The head was bowed, and the eyes stared at his own cracked boots. Once again his dirty white hand slid across the crinkled hide of the huge elephant. Followed by that derisive laughter, the miserable man and the three elephants passed by.

The blue eyes of Jonathan Lowe had narrowed. There was a grim look on his mahogany face. He took the yellow handbill that a clown had thrust into my hand, and gazed at one of the items in that Gargantuan attraction known as Simpson's Circus.

STUPENDOUS ATTRACTION
SEÑOR GONZALES
and his
THREE MIGHTY MASTODONS
Enrico—Alberto—Francisco
These three savage elephants from the Indian jungle will perform in masterly fashion under the command of the greatest of all elephant trainers—Mahout Señor Gonzales.

"Poor Blethwick!" murmured Jonathan Lowe. He regarded the well-dressed man and woman who were grinning over that same yellow bill. "I'm going to stay here and see the circus tonight," he added decisively. "What about you?"

I shrugged.

"It's Saturday night and a journalist's holiday," I said. "Moreover, it's some years since I saw a circus. It might be interesting."

"I think it will be very interesting," asserted Lowe, and began to stroll back toward his car.

"BUT who is Blethwick?" I asked Lowe as we sat at dinner that evening in the County Arms at Maynesford.

"Now Señor Gonzales, a circus trainer of elephants," was the reply.

"But when you knew him as Blethwick," I persisted.

The blue eyes of Jonathan Lowe took on a ruminative expression.

"He was once the finest elephant-man in India. Every native who worked for him, worshiped him. They regarded him as a god among the elephants. It was whispered that he was the one white man who had seen elephants dance in their secret jungle haunts. And the Indians will tell you that the man who has seen elephants dance at midnight is forever possessed of their secrets. Elephants know their masters."

Jonathan Lowe took the coffee which the waiter had placed before him, sipped a little, grimaced, and put down the cup.

"Blethwick was highly paid by the Indian Government to go into the jungle and round up wild elephants. This is always a dangerous and a ticklish business. You may have heard of the Keddah, the stockade into which the wild elephants are driven by beaters. An amazing and exciting sight! These trapped beasts fling themselves against the stockade until it groans. Then torches are lighted, and into this mass of struggling, trumpeting gray beasts, a few selected mahouts ride on trained elephants. Within an hour, order is restored. But it needs all one's nerve and jungle knowledge to be able to tackle the Keddah. I have seen Blethwick ride like an emperor into the Keddah and approach beasts that even the trained mahouts had given up in despair."

"He sounds like a brave man," I said.

A grim smile crossed Lowe's face.

"But like all brave men, a fool where women were concerned!"

"So there is a woman in his life?"

Jonathan Lowe nodded shortly.

"A beautiful, determined woman. I saw her when she arrived in Simla. She was fresh from London. Perhaps that may sound very ordinary here, but to a man who has spent years in India it is an exciting spectacle. Those sun-dried 'memsahibs' look like hags against the fresh, creamy complexion of a woman just out from England. And how dowdy their dress, compared with the latest fashions worn by the new arrival! Health and vigor against sun-sucked, fever-racked bodies—a cruel comparison. But the new arrivals would not be feminine if they did not glory in their superior charms."

"You're a woman-hater," I ventured.

Jonathan Lowe ignored the remark.

"When Viola Collins—for that was her name—arrived in Simla, she dazzled the whole of officialdom. From what I've said, you'll guess that wasn't difficult. But Viola Collins always gave the impression of having just walked out of a beauty-parlor in Bond Street. Her hair was always perfectly waved, her dress just right and her perfume ravishing."

"For a woman-hater you have acute observation," I smiled.

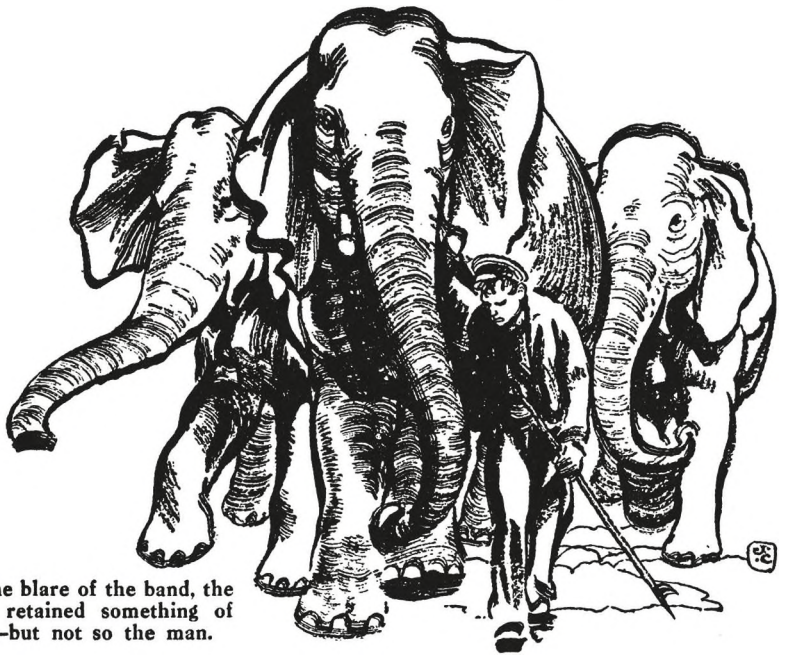
He nodded unsmilingly.

"I never neglect to study the female of the species. She is, as Kipling has observed, more dangerous than the male."

"And did Viola Collins meet Blethwick?" I asked.

LOWE waved a deprecatory hand. "Like all young people, you want to hear the end of the story before the beginning," he grunted. "Well, perhaps the smoking of a cheroot tends to make one prattle philosophically about women. Yes, she did meet him, after having heard some of the marvelous adventures which were told about Blethwick and the elephants in those days; he was a bit of a hero and he carried something of the glamour of the jungle with him. . .

"At once officialdom lost all interest for her. What mattered a secretary to the Viceroy or a Director General of Information when an elephant-hunter with a hundred and one marvelous adventures to his credit entered the room? She herself became a hunter—a hunter of big game; she began to stalk Blethwick as relentlessly and as cleverly as he himself had ever stalked an elephant. And the poor fool seemed unconscious of it—or rather, blissfully, ecstatically conscious



Despite the blare of the band, the elephants retained something of dignity—but not so the man.

of the fact that he was already head over heels in love with her."

"This is an old story," I remarked cynically.

"Maybe. And it followed the inevitable lines of the old story by ending in wedding bells. I was in the church at Simla when they were married. I recall Blethwick shambling sheepishly down the aisle with his wife's arm through his. At that moment he looked as placidly happy as his own baggage-elephant, and Viola was as triumphant as any mahout riding in the Keddah.

"A fortnight later Blethwick was ordered to Ceylon where a herd of wild elephants had been doing considerable damage. His job was to round up the beasts. His new wife decided to stay in Simla until the job was finished."

"This is where the story becomes modern," I mused.

Jonathan Lowe nodded.

"Enter the other man. He also had just arrived from England. Lionel French, the son of a wealthy landowner. Lionel had a pink complexion, a pink body, and a pink sort of mind. He had a mania for keeping fit—though for what reason he kept himself fit was a mystery. He had no brains worth talking about. He was just a healthy animal concerned only with diet and exercise.

"But very soon a third interest came into his life. This was Viola. He began by playing tennis with her; then they went for rides together; finally they were frequently dancing together. And somewhere in the sticky, steaming jungle of Ceylon, the brave fool Blethwick and his mahouts were hunting wild elephants! I remember thinking that if Blethwick had learned many secrets of wild beasts by seeing the elephants dance at midnight, he would have learned much more about women if he had seen his wife dancing at midnight with Lionel French."

"Did they bolt, together?" I asked, and again Lowe nodded.

"Lionel French couldn't stay any longer in India. He said he didn't feel too fit. And no wonder. Champagne, late dinners and dances, and the high altitude of Simla take some getting used to. Hearts wabble at that altitude, and Lionel French's heart had wabbled dangerously for some time. But so had Viola's! When he took the mountain railway down to Kalka, she was with him. They went to Bombay together, and sailed at once to England.

"Ten days later Blethwick arrived back in Simla. He went at once to the bungalow he had rented for his wife. It was empty, save for a smiling Hindu servant who squatted on the doorstep. . . .

"It was the end for Blethwick. Brave men are always fools enough to believe implicitly in their women. Consider the shock, then, when he received a letter from her in which she calmly demanded a divorce. Well, he played the usual game of honorable husband to dishonorable wife. He gave her the divorce, and

then began to console himself with the whisky-bottle. He took whisky into the jungle with him, and his work suffered. Then one night a stampede took place in the Keddah. Four mahouts were killed. The inquiry showed that Blethwick had been drunk and incapable that night. He was dismissed."

"And now?"

"You saw him, tramping along the street with those three elephants. A circus performer! A miserable life for a man of the jungle, as it must be for a wild beast of the jungle."

"Afterwards, there is the whisky-bottle," I said.

"A poor consolation," said Jonathan Lowe, shaking his white head. "Too often it makes a man remember, rather than forget. But I must see Blethwick after the show tonight, for he has suffered real humiliation. The finger of scorn pointed at him, a jeweled finger, and the woman—"

"Surely not—*Viola?*" I gasped.

"Standing there with Lionel French," Lowe confirmed. "She as beautiful as ever, and he as pink and as fit as ever. Gloriously comfortable and aloof, they could afford to laugh at the wreckage of what was once the finest elephant-hunter in India! That laughter was probably unendurable. The least I can do is to shake hands with Blethwick tonight."

I glanced at the clock.

"The circus is just about to begin," I said, and Jonathan Lowe rose hastily.

WHIPS were cracking. Four black horses and four white horses were wheeling, shaking their heads in proud disdain, as we took seats near the ring. Arc-lamps spluttered beneath the ghostly white tent. A happy Saturday-night crowd rose in tiers to a box where a noisy band in green uniforms blared forth jazz music in strange dissonances.

The ringmaster, in perfect evening dress, curled his mustache and flicked his whip. But he looked ungainly, even absurd, against the beautifully groomed black and white horses who trotted and wheeled in a perfect rhythm of motion. Finally a loud crack of the whip brought them with forefeet on the edge of the ring, and their cropped heads bowing to the audience. Then with a whisk of plaited tails the horses galloped from the ring.

Clowns tumbled in—large clowns and little clowns, white faces and black faces. The audience began to laugh as soon as they glimpsed them.

Each clown carried a bucket and a brush. At the end of their tumbling, their shrill jokes, their face-slappings and their sawdust trippings, brushes were dipped into buckets. A scream of laughter rose from the audience, as the white clowns began splashing whitewash over the faces of the black clowns. The black clowns retaliated with a sooty liquid.

I was laughing uproariously myself when I felt Jonathan Lowe's steely fingers grip my arm.

"Fools . . . fools!" he whispered. "They might have spared him *this* final humiliation!"

I followed the narrowed gaze of his blue eyes. There, taking seats at the ringside, were the two who had laughed openly at Blethwick in the street—Lionel French and Viola. They took their seats with the smiling condescension of people who are esteemed in the County. The perspiring proprietor of the circus, Joseph Simpson himself, beamed as he bowed them to their seats.

"You don't think—" I began; but a blare from the band and a burst of applause that surged after the clowns, now tripping out of the ring, whipped my thoughts away.

"If they've come here to laugh at him again," said Jonathan Lowe, "they're taking a great risk. They don't know the man. There's a point beyond which you dare not humiliate a beast further. These circus people know that. And the same might be said of a man like Blethwick."

A chattering, grinning, yellow-faced group of Chinese came bounding into the ring. They began to tumble each other about with agility. To the roll of drums boys were tossed about on upturned feet. Others stood static, their slant eyes and teeth spread in an engaging smile. Then, with a parting gesture to the audience, they took their turn in the tumbling, rolling, twisting, falling acrobats of the ring.

"It might be pure chance that has brought them here," I suggested to Lowe, for the pink-faced man and his beautiful wife were displaying signs of boredom.

"They've come deliberately," said Jonathan Lowe. "I don't like it at all."

His brown features were set and grim.

TO thunderous applause the Chinese troupe chattered and tumbled out of the ring. The green-uniformed band was blaring the latest jazz melody, and half the audience were whistling or humming it. There was something dramatic, therefore, in the entrance of the ringmaster,

holding up his hand. The band stopped in the middle of the melody. A sudden hush descended upon the tent.

"Ladies and gentlemen," roared the ringmaster, "it is my great pleasure to introduce for your delectation the greatest of all elephant-trainers—Mahout Señor Gonzales!"

The band thrummed out the entrance music, and a slim figure in white ducks and wearing a sun-helmet stepped into the glare of the ring. He took off his helmet and bowed to the applause.

"That's not Blethwick!" I said to Jonathan Lowe—for the face that bowed before us was swarthy.

"Yes, it is," said Lowe. "They've dressed the poor devil up to look like a Spanish explorer in the Strand. Brown grease-paint has done the rest."

"—And his three gigantic mastodons," the ringmaster bellowed. "Enrico, Alberto and Francisco!"

EVEN as he spoke they ambled in, flapping their ears, twitching their absurdly small tails. But their trunks hung docilely. They knew their business.

So far, Blethwick had not seen the couple at the ringside. I could see as he passed near to us that the brown eyes were shot with drunkenness. He had been consoling himself with the whisky-bottle during the afternoon. But he was muttering strange words, Hindustani words, which the elephants understood.

The band was lurching its way through the "Blue Danube" waltz. The elephants began to swing their trunks. At a sharp word of command from Blethwick, they began to raise their heavy pads. One—two—three. Their bodies swayed. They were waltzing to the music.

Laughter and applause broke forth. The music ceased, and the elephants stopped stupidly. Señor Gonzales bowed.

"He hasn't seen them yet," I whispered to Jonathan Lowe.

"Pray heaven that he won't!" was the reply.

The usual tricks followed. Both man and elephants went through them with a sort of weary indifference. Francisco was made to raise his hind legs in the air and twitch a silly tail at the audience. A roar of delighted laughter greeted this feat.

Alberto had a mouth-organ thrust into his trunk, and he waddled across the sawdust playing an unrecognizable tune. He dropped the little metal plaything with disgust as soon as the trick was ended. For a moment the great pad was raised as though it would stamp the beastly thing into the earth. An explosive word from Blethwick, however, and the beast turned submissively.

"Enrico hasn't done anything yet," murmured Lowe. "He's a wicked-looking beast."

I saw the red eyes of the beast winking dangerously in the light. This was an elephant in a bad temper! Its ears flapped irritably.

At that moment Señor Gonzales lay down in the center of the ring. He gave a peculiar whistle, and from each of their places in the ring the elephants ran to the center.

There was a gasp from the audience as they met before the prone body of the trainer. Another whistle, and they raised their heavy pads in the air. One false move, a stumble, and those feet would crush the man beneath into a shapeless mass. But the three elephants stood poised, their forepads raised in the air.

A storm of applause broke forth. As though it were his cue, Enrico stretched forth a trunk, circled it about the prone body, and held his master high in the air. The smiling, swarthy face of Señor Gonzales was revealed. Still held by Enrico, he bowed to the thunder of applause.

But in that moment the dark eyes caught sight of Lionel French and Viola sitting at the ringside. Rage twisted his features and the swarthy grease-paint seemed to drip away. It was Blethwick, humiliated beyond endurance, who now looked down upon the man and the woman who had wrecked his life.

They realized that they had been seen. With mock enthusiasm Lionel French rose in his seat and stood clapping and smiling. Viola sat back, and contemptuously flicked her cigarette-ash toward man and beast.

"This is getting dangerous," muttered Jonathan Lowe, crossing and uncrossing his long legs beneath the seat.

BLETHWICK was again standing in the sawdust. Two of the elephants had lumbered out of the ring; only Enrico, the red-eyed beast, remained.

The band had stopped playing, and laid down their instruments. The audience realized that some dangerous feat was about to be performed. A sudden silence descended. Hundreds of eyes watched the lithe figure in white which now stood in the center of the ring.

"He's drunk," I whispered to Lowe.

Blethwick had pushed back his sun-helmet, and an evil grin was on his face. Swaying restlessly, Enrico the elephant watched him.

A shrill whistle broke forth from the figure in white. Enrico plunged to the ground, as though he had been shot. He rolled over in the sawdust, and lay still. A moment's suspense; then the shrill whistle came again. Enrico scrambled to his feet, shuffled toward Blethwick, and with a twitch of his trunk swung the white-clad figure onto his back.

A gesture to the audience; then Blethwick caught one of those ears and dropped to the ground. Then he gave a sharp word of command and the beast began to shuffle slowly round the ring.

"Somalo! Somalo!" I heard the man cry. "Careful! Careful!"

Another whistle, and the animal increased his speed. Laughter broke out from the audience at this shambling gray bulk shuffling past them.

"Faster . . . faster!"

Blethwick snarled a command in Hindustani. But he was not looking at the elephant. His dark eyes were gazing savagely at those two superior, smiling people who had brought him this final humiliation. A cruel twist had come to his mouth.

"He means murder," said Jonathan Lowe suddenly. "—Stop that beast!"

He rose in his seat. But at that moment a strange savage cry came from the

"Mail, mail, Enrico!" cried Blethwick. "Go on! Give him the tusk! Hit him, hit him!"

lips of Blethwick. It was the cry of a mahout when he is in the excitement of the Keddah and is urging his elephant on to mischief.

"*Arre! Arre! Hai! Yai! Kya-a-ah!*"

The shambling beast stopped suddenly. The whole of his gray bulk seemed to quiver at that cry. He had stopped almost in front of Lionel French and Viola.

"*Maîl, maîl,* Enrico!" cried Blethwick. "Go on, go on! Give him the tusk! *Maro! Mar!* Hit him, hit him!"

A savage trumpeting, followed by a woman's scream. Enrico had stretched forth his trunk, twitched Lionel French from out the seat, and swung him high in the air.

Blethwick was screaming commands in that queer Hindustani.

"*Khatam kar dena chatriye!*"

Like some monstrous somnambulist, Enrico was obeying orders. He swayed to and fro, still holding the terrified man within his trunk. Viola stood petrified; she wanted to scream and could not.

In the pandemonium that was spreading, I was dimly aware that Jonathan Lowe was standing on his seat, shouting in the same queer Hindustani that Blethwick was still babbling.

But now Blethwick's drunken, cracked voice had taken on a piercing note. With a snarling curse at Lowe, he once more shrilled that strange command:

"*Khatam kar dena chatriye!*"

It decided the elephant. With a flick of that monstrous trunk, Lionel French was flung to the sawdust. And with a trumpeting roar, the beast raised one of its huge pads to crush the life out of him.

Viola's strangled scream now came to birth. It resounded throughout the arena. I noted mechanically that several people in the audience turned their backs upon the sickening scene that was impending. The only man who was not petrified into inaction was Jonathan Lowe. He had scrambled through the crowd and leaped squarely into the ring.

IT was an affair of seconds. His fist shot out—caught Blethwick squarely on the jaw. Even as the drunken elephant-trainer collapsed, Jonathan Lowe had seized the whip from his hand and rushed to Enrico.

The beast's pad was descending with a deliberate solemnity that seemed to have all the concentrated hate of years in its progress; it was about to crush the upturned face of the helpless Lionel French into pulp. But even as it neared the mark, a squeal of pain came from the brute. Jonathan Lowe had hit the beast squarely on the pad.

He failed to stop the descent. The pad came down with a sickening thump that caused the earth to tremble. But it missed the face of Lionel French—it caught the carefully creased trouser-leg of the outstretched man, and crushed through flesh and bone.

Again and again Jonathan Lowe struck at the pads of the beast. It squealed in pain and drew away, like a child that has been burned by fire. Men rushed into the ring and seized Lionel French. He was carried across the sawdust and out of the ring. One leg hung helplessly.

Pandemonium broke out among the audience. They shrilled and hammered with their feet in the hullabaloo. Some were scrambling hastily for the exits.

And standing on a seat was Viola, screaming hysterically:

"He's a murderer! He's killed him! Murder—"

In her hysteria it was some moments before she realized that a man was standing in front of her. Only when the steely grip of his fingers closed on her wrists did she realize who he was.

"Jonathan Lowe!" she faltered.

"Better get to him quickly!" he commanded, jerking his head in the direction of the dressing-rooms. "There's a doctor with him, and he'll be needing you."

She nodded; her screaming stopped, and holding up her long evening frock, she ran across the sawdust ring. She did not even look at Blethwick, who was squirming back to consciousness. As for Enrico the elephant, he stood bewildered before this display of human emotion. He allowed the nervous ringmaster to lead him out of the ring.

Then Jonathan Lowe stepped forward and lifted Blethwick in his powerful arms. Through a wondering group of clowns, their faces still stretched in painted grins, through the chattering group of Chinese acrobats, he carried the man who had been humiliated almost to the point of murder.

The ringmaster was bellowing:

"Clowns on! Come on, clowns! Get busy and be funny!"

The band blared as the grinning painted faces scampered into the ring. The audience resumed their seats.

A MAN with a rifle was ready; he held it pointed at the head of the chained and now docile Enrico.

"Stop!" croaked a voice. "You can't do it!"

Blethwick, tense-faced, still in his dirty white ducks, rushed forward and confronted the man with the express rifle.

"You mustn't kill the poor beast!"

"I'm sorry, Mr. Gonzales," said the man with the rifle, "but the police have given orders. The beast is dangerous."

"The beast is not dangerous!" shouted Blethwick. "It obeyed my orders. I told the elephant to seize that man and kill him!"

"You'd better be careful what you're saying, Gonzales," said the ringmaster. "There are two detectives here."

"All the better," shrilled Blethwick. "Tell 'em I'm the man who committed the murder! But the beast must be left alone."

"There's been no murder committed."

JONATHAN LOWE had appeared on the scene. Beneath the flaring kerosene lamp he eyed the miserable figure in dirty white ducks.

"So he wasn't killed?" said Blethwick.

Jonathan Lowe shook his head.

"No, but he'll be a cripple all his life. One of his legs is done for."

"And that's why this beast must be shot," said the man with the gun sternly, and he raised it to take aim at the gray bulk of Enrico.

"No, no!" pleaded Blethwick. "Bring the police. *I'm* the criminal!"

The ringmaster shrugged his shoulders.

"This is madness, Gonzales. The beast is dangerous, and—"

"Bring the police!" thundered Blethwick. "And *you,* put up that rifle!"

Once again Jonathan Lowe had slipped away, but he returned as two detectives came to the stables at the back of the circus. Beside Lowe walked Viola.

"This beast has got to be shot!" one of the detectives insisted. "It nearly committed murder tonight."

"*I* nearly committed murder!" broke in Blethwick. "I ordered the elephant to seize the man who was sitting there, grinning at me."

"Why?" asked the detective, narrowing his eyes.

"Because he ran away with my wife, years ago in India. The woman was there with him. When I saw them together, I determined on revenge. I called to Enrico to seize him, and—"

"May I interrupt a moment?" Jonathan Lowe's voice broke in.

The two detectives swung round.

"This is the gentleman who jumped into the ring and tackled the elephant so bravely," the ringmaster explained.

"I did what I could," said Lowe modestly. "But I ought to tell you that having lived some time in India I knew the peculiar jungle Hindustani that this fellow was yelling at the elephant."

"And what was he yelling?" asked one of the detectives.

"He was calling upon the beast to be quiet and put the man down."

"Are you certain?"

"I'll swear to it."

"He's telling lies!" shouted Blethwick. "The man stole my wife, and—"

"The lady is here," broke in Jonathan Lowe coldly. "Perhaps she can speak for herself."

The little group parted as Viola, tense and tearful, came forward.

"I'm sorry to have brought you away from your husband at such a moment, madam," began one of the detectives, "but there is a matter which must be cleared up. Do you know this man?"

Viola looked at the miserable figure in white ducks. Her eyes were dimmed with tears. Her lips trembled.

"I've never seen him in my life before tonight," she murmured.

With a nod to the detectives, Jonathan Lowe led her away. . . .

"Well, what about it?" asked the man with the rifle.

One of the detectives stroked his chin.

"We'll think it over," he said slowly.

Without a word, Blethwick went to the great beast and nestled by its trunk.

Enrico flapped his enormous ears with pleasure. He was reprieved.

TWO hours later Jonathan Lowe and I were motoring back to London.

"He's all right," he said above the rumble of the engine. "I think the shock of those dreadful moments has brought the fellow back to his senses. I left him deadly sober."

"And what is he going to do?"

"He'll be back in the jungle again soon, with my help, I hope. I asked him to come back to London with me tonight."

"What did he say?"

"He refused. 'I'm not going to leave my elephants,' he said stubbornly. 'As for Enrico—' Then he broke down at the thought of how nearly he had made a murderer of the elephant. . . . A fine fellow, Blethwick!"

And Jonathan Lowe let his foot down on the accelerator.

The Treasure of

The fascinating tale of a strange murder in New York and an adventurous treasure-hunt among the cliff-dwellings of the Southwest.

PROLOGUE

ALL night long the skin drums had throbbed in the Valley of the Caves. And all night long the rhythm had been taken up, repeated, carried farther and farther like distant echoes, both north and south.

Toward morning the fateful sound had died. At dawn the Valley of the Caves was sunk again into its eternal silence, and no living soul could be seen among the rock houses hanging there in the crevices of the cliffs.

Yet high on the brink of a red, barren point, the witch-woman crouched, rocking from side to side as she fed grayish-green twigs to the thin blaze of her votive fire. Black smoke rose toward her shriveled old shoulders; and with a scooping motion of one hand she made it swirl about her hollow face. Endlessly in a voice high-pitched and wailing, she chanted to her gods, invoking from them a curse of death.

Out of the last shadows of night far down the valley floor, fifty dark specks moved in single file. It would have taken an eagle's sight to see them clearly, but the witch-woman knew they were the pack-horses of the hated Spaniards.

She added twigs and chanted on. Her old heart glowed with triumph—she had heard the voices of the drums. Her eyes glared down upon the Spaniards' train. They were leaving. After these many days of looting the cliff city, killing her people if not enough gold was brought forth, they were going forever.

Aye, forever! They would not in this life return again. Nor in the next. For the curse the witch-woman chanted was a curse to last all time. Death to any hand that touched the treasure of her house!

The pack-train moved on toward a narrower part of the valley, where like a gateway the cañon walls swung in upon each other.

Feverishly the old woman rocked. More twigs sent the smoke thick about her crouching body. She swung her arms into it, shook out the strings of her gray hair, rose on trembling legs and looked.

Before the sharp report had burst from down

Suddenly among the black specks came others, smaller ones that raced from behind the cañon gateway. Like hordes of ants they swarmed upon the fifty. There came faintly the sound of sharp voices. Shrilly the witch-woman called down; she beat her sides, danced alone

Hanging House

By HAROLD CHANNING WIRE

Illustrated by V. E. Pyles

the cañon, Ed had swept Jerry beyond the light.

there on the cliff's edge while the gathered men of her tribe took their revenge. When it was done, she sank again onto her heels to wait.

In time, up the cliff path came figures bent with treasure, men bringing back that which had been looted from them—and more. For from the Spaniards' horses they had taken bags of colored stones, and some that glittered, and strange dishes made of gold. All these things the men held out to the witch-woman as they passed, while over them she invoked the protection of her gods.

With the last man gone, carrying the treasure to its vault in the deepest cave, and she was again alone, she stood up barefooted in the ashes of her fire.

She raised her arms. Her head fell back; fixed thus, rigid, she screamed the everlasting curse. Death to any hand that touched the treasure of her house!

CHAPTER I

ON Monday, May twelfth, most of the New York newspapers carried this notice: "Dr. Andrew Logan will hold his private exhibition and sale on Wednesday of this week only."

What was to be exhibited and sold was not stated. If you were an initiate, you would know; if you were not, you would have no interest and pass the notice without thought.

But that same evening the tabloids enlarged upon the modest announcement with headlines shouting: "PROFESSOR FINDS FORTUNE!"

The story, on another page, qualified that. Professor Andrew Logan had not exactly unearthed a million dollars in gold, but had almost completed an ancient Keres Indian record which would enable him to do so. Along with the story were three photographs; one an indefinite panorama of barren Southwestern mountains, one the figure of a wizened, mummy-faced man, the third and most prominent, a beautiful young girl.

So between the newspapers and the picture sheets an interest in Andrew Logan's find was pretty well passed about the city. Yet the group attending his exhibit and sale was bound to be small. You would go only if you had a flair for pottery dating back to a dim past; or if

you were fascinated by queer old Doc Logan, himself looking like an ancient Keres, so long had he been poking among those cliff cities off there in the Southwest. Or perhaps you would go to meet his daughter Jerry.

She was worth it; a brown-haired slip of a thing who could not possibly have gone through so many wild adventures with her archæological father, and yet who had. You would not be alone in your motive if you went merely to have Jerry Logan talk excitedly to you over the admiration of a prehistoric jug, while a pretty flush colored the tan of her cheeks, and her clear gray-blue eyes sparkled or grew serious, according to the trend of her story, and you stood there wondering how the conversation could be changed from the past to the present. You might try. But Jerry was bound up in her father's discoveries.

At four-thirty Wednesday afternoon there were but twenty-five persons present in the wide room adjoining Andrew Logan's study. The purpose of the exhibit and sale, all knew, was simply that Dr. Logan might raise more funds with which to continue his explorations. It was an annual event.

Each January certain scientific men of New York began to anticipate his return from the field. He would show up with his collections and his photographs and his dry-as-rock data, which the scientific men would pore over and enthuse about for the next four months. Meanwhile Logan would work on a written record, give the best of his specimens to the museums, free, and then about May begin to think of financing his next venture.

THAT was not too difficult. He left the details to Jerry, who long ago had learned the city's trick of salesmanship. Art and antiques must be sold over a teacup. You exhibit your treasures, serve tea and cake, and both good spirits and prices respond upward. It is a pleasant way for people of wealth to spend their money. Besides, Jerry had faith in what she offered, and her pieces of pottery and strings of beads were both beautiful and rare.

As usual she was near the serving-table this afternoon, a slim little figure in green, a dull chain of Keres gold bringing out the golden softness of her throat. Visitors to the exhibit moved in groups about the room. She greeted new arrivals, poured tea, smiled; and none saw behind that smile her troubled look.

Jerry was worried. Her eyes went often to the room's entrance. She wanted a few more minutes to think before Alan came in. She must tell him something. But what? . . . . He had been splendid. Not many men would have helped her father as he had, and it never could be repaid, in dollars. Perhaps it was little enough to give him her love. But that was the trouble. She did not feel a stirring love for him, at least not the desperate hopeless yearning she had always imagined true love for a man would bring. Then there was an unpleasant sense of duty about this now.

FROM time to time Alan Darcy had lent her father money to carry his work through lean years. The money really was donated. Darcy could spare it. He was alone, and had inherited much. Her father, in his detached, abstract way had accepted the gifts, had told Jerry often what a fine young man he was, and last summer had taken him for a time into the Southwest. Thinking back, Jerry realized that her engagement to Alan Darcy one night there in the Valley of the Caves had been a little forced. At the moment she was moved too much by gratitude.

She had managed to put their marriage off a year. Today he must have an answer. She must set a date, or— Jerry frowned, her dark head bent. It ought to be truthful; she knew her heart now. What she had felt for Alan was not love; nor had it grown into love these past months of being away from him. Her answer was ready. But something else had come up. Alan had sunk his fortune in the stock-market. If she broke off their engagement, refused to marry him at a time like this, wouldn't it look as if she had been only a gold-digger and an awful hypocrite all along? She thought so, and hated it.

"Hello, squaw-girl? Why the heavy frown?"

Jerry turned with a start. For a time she had not been watching the doorway, and Alan had entered unseen.

Darcy was thirty-five, of short, slight figure, yet an attractive-looking man in his black-haired, polished bachelor's way. Women liked him. He could talk of art and books; and there was about him a certain helplessness that aroused a tender instinct. Men were apt to dislike him. To them, he lacked a force that bucking up against the world might have given. He had never been made to do

"You're right," Ed told Old Mournful. "It's Pap Welton. But who or what's he bringing with him?"

that. Everything had come his way—except Jerry.

She looked up, smiling as she turned. "Hello, Alan. Did I have a heavy frown? Well, deep, dark thoughts, you know!" Abruptly she dropped her banter. Alan himself was not looking so gay this afternoon. Poor man! He did love her. He had been a perfect dear to wait.

AFTER meeting her first glance, his eyes went swiftly among the groups of people in the room. Jerry took his arm. He jerked nervously.

"Why, Alan!" Jerry had never seen him like that.

Darcy laughed. "I've got the jumps, all right. Too many weeks with my eyes on the little yellow ribbon."

Jerry nodded with understanding. He *had* gone through a terrific strain. It was beastly that she must tell him. Her courage slipped. Quickly she reached for a teacup. "Here—"

Darcy pushed it away. "No; no, thanks." He put his hand on hers. "Let's go where we can talk. Let's go now!" Again his eyes swept the gathering. "Anywhere," he finished.

Panic flooded Jerry. She didn't dare talk. In spite of herself, she was too filled with sympathetic feelings for him.

"I can't leave," she evaded. "I'm serving here. And there's so much to say. We—"

"So much! To name the date would be enough."

Jerry smiled. "I know it would. But I want to say more."

"You mean," Darcy asked, bending close, "that you haven't made up your mind—not even yet?"

"No." Jerry gave her head a slow shake. "Not exactly that, Alan; only—"

"Only you want more time," he finished for her.

That was it. She did want more time. She couldn't tell him the truth now.

Some women came for tea, and Jerry was glad of the few minutes' relief in giving it to them. Alan stepped back and stood scowling across the room. When he came again to her side, his face was set.

"Jerry," he demanded, "what's it all about? We're engaged, yet we aren't to be married! What is it, anyhow?" He had flushed angrily.

Jerry looked at him in surprise. Anger does not go well on the faces of most men; it is apt to be revealing.

Then before she could speak, he went on: "Do you know what I think, Jerry? I think you have been turned by this treasure business. You probably know more than you've told me. But the papers are full of it."

"I wish they weren't!" Jerry broke in.

He looked at her sharply. "Why? Is it true?"

"YES; but that isn't what I mean. I don't care who knows, except that talk of treasure like this starts trouble. And people get the wrong idea of our work."

Darcy gave her a wry smile. "Do they? Of course you don't want to go back down there and find that Keres gold! Right this minute you aren't holding me off because of it! No. Lord, no!" His face was flushed again. "Do you see what I think?" His mouth hardened. "I'm no longer necessary—not now! All right; thanks for telling me."

"Alan!"

But he had turned abruptly on his heel and was walking away.

Pap Welton

Jerry stared after him, hurt and amazed. To break over money, and talk of treasure that was still unfound!

She paused, one hand on the tea caddy. A queer chill swept her and she shrugged it off. She was thinking of the legend about the Valley of the Caves. Indians said there was a curse upon it. Nothing but trouble was in here, they vowed, trouble and death, and only a few could be hired to go down into that valley under the red rimrock. . . .

The large room was filling. The twenty-five clients who had been first to come had increased to three times that many. Jerry knew most of these people who came to her father's sales; yet now she saw a number of strange faces. Curiosity brought them. The gold story in the newspaper had proved good advertising, but not quite a desirable sort.

Her glance traveled to one side of them, and stopped upon a man's face. It was sharp, ratlike, arresting her at once by its intent look toward her father. The man was listening. A movement of the crowd about the tea-table cut him off, and it was several minutes before she could again see the room's farther end. The man was gone. Alan was chatting amiably with two girls. Andrew Logan moved in his abstract way from group to group.

The exhibit would last until late, with more people coming in after dinner. At six o'clock Jerry looked for her father; he even had to be told when to eat. Walking among the scattered groups, she found he was not in the main gallery. In his study adjoining it, then. Jerry went to the door. A little frown puckered her gray-blue eyes. She hated to knock; he might be at work. Softly she called, "Father? Oh, Father!"

The afternoon had been a trying one. She was a little on edge. But she had not realized how much until this minute, when fear unnerved her because no reply came from the locked study.

"What is it, Jerry?"

Whirling, she faced Darcy. He was standing with a tense gaze fixed on the door. "Nothing," she replied. "I must tell Father it's dinner-time, that's all." She knocked, then tried the door-knob.

"Oh!" A cry escaped in spite of her.

Darcy went to the lock. "There's no key in it. Have you another?"

She ran to her own room, came back. Darcy took the key, his hand trembling. The lock yielded and they pushed in.

"God!" Alan gasped. "What—"

The wizened form of Andrew Logan lay bent across his study table. Papers were scattered about him, his files of charts and notes strewn from their cases. The room had been searched in every corner. Nothing had been overlooked. And Andrew Logan—it appeared certain as they bent over him—was dead.

CHAPTER II

ALAN DARCY'S apartment was on the ground floor and had a private entrance of its own. On the street was an iron gate which must be passed first, then a short tunnel-like corridor, then the door of the apartment itself. Darcy enjoyed a feeling of isolation, kept no regular servant, and would often stow himself away in there with his gin and his books and his dabbling at art-criticism for a week at a time.

It was ten o'clock this evening when he alighted from a taxi. He gave the driver a bill, waving aside the change, and hurried across the walk. His movements were stumbling and almost furtive. Ordinarily he would have to unlock the gate and the inner door. But not now. Both were unlatched.

He pushed through, ran down the corridor, entered his apartment. Cigarette-smoke and the odor of alcohol greeted him; in the glow of a floor-lamp two men looked up from comfortable positions on his lounge.

One was small, dark, rat-faced, and still wore the afternoon clothes of his attendance at Dr. Logan's exhibit. The other was heavy-set, smooth-faced, self-assured in the look of his narrowed eyes and the clamp of a wide jaw. His was a face to remember, and no doubt many

did remember it; for Al Sloan, racketeer, had been much in the tabloids lately.

THAT was where Darcy had heard of him. At this moment he would have given his last dollar if he had not. Only the desperation of his love for Jerry, he repeatedly told himself, had made him hunt up the man. What he had planned was for her and her father's good, anyway. He hadn't dreamed—

He lurched across the room. Al Sloan stood up. "Take a drink!" he snapped. "Get yourself together."

"But for God's sake," Darcy cried, "why did this fool do it?" He swung to the other, who had remained seated. That one sprang to his feet. Sloan stopped him. "Sit down, Jimmy!" Then to Darcy: "Go ahead—get it out of your blood. Then I'll talk."

Blood! The very word made Darcy cringe. There had been blood on Andrew Logan's table.

"I didn't want anything like that," he blurted. "All I hired you for was to get the paper. The way I explained to you, it needn't have caused trouble." He broke down and babbled as if in confession, as if somehow telling his true purpose to these men would absolve him from what happened. "I only wanted to keep Logan dependent on me. Didn't you understand? That was all. I only wanted to keep him from finding a fortune. His daughter—"

Sloan waved an impatient hand.

"Oh, sure," he said, taking Darcy by the arm and seating him in a chair. "Sure. All you wanted was to keep the old man from getting rich, so you could hang onto the girl! We got it, all right."

Abruptly his manner changed. He bent down, hands on his knees, his eyes hardening into cold slate. "But listen, brother; that wasn't what *we* wanted!"

Darcy gasped. "You? What have you to do with it?"

Sloan straightened and looked at the other man with a short laugh, then back at Darcy. "God, brother, do you want me to draw a diagram? There's a million dollars down there some place—waiting to be dug up. You offer me a lousy thousand to get the map from Doc Logan. Well, I've got the thing, all right—at least part of it. Jimmy couldn't find the rest. Logan wouldn't tell. That's why—"

Darcy lunged from his chair, his hands groping. It was all plain to him now. He stood swaying unsteadily, and a tightness in his throat made his voice a hoarse whisper. "You can't keep that map! I'll have the police—"

Sloan's quick laugh checked him.

"Sure, brother, that's right. Go tell the police. Then we'll all talk!" Again he took Darcy's arm. "Now look here: what's done is done. You're in it up to your neck—and it'll be your neck if you squeal! I don't think you will, though. I'm leaving tonight, see? Me and a partner. Jimmy's going to stay here and keep you company. Get it? Any door-bells or phones, Jimmy answers 'em.

"That goes for a week. You'll have time to think things over by then, and we'll have time to travel southwest. But listen. Don't think that's all. This map isn't enough, maybe. We might need you. Something may come up. If we send a wire, you come. Get that too!"

All at once Darcy's legs were lifeless beneath him. Violence and threats of violence were not things he could cope with. He sank upon the lounge, dazed. It wasn't possible; this, when he had only wanted to keep Jerry's love, make her love him. He covered his eyes, but a vision stayed before them. Andrew Logan, dead. What—what had he done?

WHEN at the end of a week the rat-faced Jimmy left and Darcy was no longer watched, his first act was to call Jerry on the phone. He gave the number. In a moment the operator's voice said: "That line has been disconnected."

Disconnected! Why? He stumbled outside. Among the accumulated mail in his corridor box was an envelope addressed in Jerry's free-running hand. The note explained everything.

She had tried to call him. She was sorry to leave so soon, without seeing him, but it seemed best. What had happened was certainly the plan of some one who would do anything to follow up the treasure story. Her father's incomplete chart of Hanging House had been stolen. She had no time to lose now if she hoped to prevent the whole region of cliff dwellings from being looted and dynamited in a mad search. That would destroy all further continuance of her father's study. And to continue that study was her work now. She owed it to him.

As for what had happened—the police were working on it. There was nothing for her to do here. Her place was in the San Verde Mountains. And somehow, at this moment, she wanted never to come

East again; she hoped something would keep her always out there. He understood, of course, that night, that they could not be married, but she wanted him to know she did appreciate from the bottom of her heart all he had done—and she would never forget it.

Finished, Darcy folded the letter. Bits of sentences burned in his mind. The police were working on it. The thought chilled him. The police had interrogated him, of course, as they had questioned every friend or acquaintance of Andrew Logan's; and they had not seemed specially interested in him or suspicious as to the account he had given of himself. Still—

CHAPTER III

ED YOUNG sat comfortably in the warm May sunshine, at his back the solid adobe walls of his rambling ranch house, before him the wide level acres of San Verde Mesa—his, the whole twenty sections of them—and speculated as to the cause of a dust-flag from up the mesa's far rim.

Young was a son of the West by adoption. He had been engineer and technical adviser for a firm that exported ranch machinery. Everything had seemed all right. Then the great depression wrecked the machinery business just about the time his physician had begun to scowl over his loss of weight and his persisting cough. He had made his decision overnight, packed, and next morning was aboard a train bound southwest.

Because he had been dealing in machinery for great ranches, and knew the theory, if not the practice of large-scale operation, he had sought a country where the most acreage could be had for the least money. San Verde Mesa seemed ready-made for him. He saw the possibility of bringing water to its level top from the San Verde Mountains. He would raise grain and alfalfa there. That would be winter feed for cattle which he could summer-graze in the mountain meadows. He had enough money saved to carry him for a year or two more of depression prices, for he had been able to buy his stock very cheaply.

The plan had worked. Beginning with five sections, he had increased to twenty. Yet sitting now with his back against a low, Spanish adobe that many men, and women too, might dream of, his acres stretching away there in the sunlight, he was saying to himself: "Well, sure, this is mine. But what of it?"

A huge, doleful-faced hound with drooping dejected ears hunched himself from a doorway upon hearing Ed's voice. Ed grinned. He could always grin at sight of Old Mournful; the hound seemed to feel so much worse than he did.

Having considered Ed with a worried wrinkling of his brow, Old Mournful was turning back into the house, when his ears twitched, his nose lifted. He swung about, sniffed, looked.

"Bloop!" his bass voice rumbled tentatively. Then it belled into a tone of recognition that was almost joyous. *"Bluh-wow!"*

Ed faced south across the mesa. A queer caravan was approaching along his wagon road; pack-burros, horses, a huge form riding, others plodding behind.

"You're right," he told Old Mournful. "It's Pap Welton, sure enough. But who or what's he bringing with him?"

The caravan came on in its rolling ball of dust. Then, while the animals swung off toward Ed's corrals, a short, gray figure shuffled in through the patio gate.

Pap Welton had been one of Ed's first friends in the San Verde country, and had proved his best one. Ed on his part had liked the quaint old codger at once. Pap, desert man that he was, had taken his time in sizing up the newcomer. That he approved, was first expressed when Ed started his hunt for irrigation water which he might file on and bring down to his San Verde acres.

Having prospected the whole San Verde range, "from the rimrock on the south," as he expressed it, "upwards of sixty years to the north," Pap knew every spring and underground creek, and had guided Ed to the most valuable water locations. Later, during Ed's trouble over the claim of a 'breed Indian named Black Wolf to certain sections of land, it was Pap Welton's draw—mighty quick on his old single-action forty-five in spite of long disuse—that saved Ed from being neatly marked off.

PAP had a habit of traveling routes of his own, making trails instead of following regular ones. Also he could smell any of the Black Wolf tribe "up to forty minutes away." For those two reasons he had been able to come upon the 'breed lying in wait by Ed Young's homeward trail from the town of San Verde. The old man's one regret was that twilight—it was really dark—had

spoiled his aim. Black Wolf still lived to carry around his grudge.

Considerable unspoken understanding had grown between Ed and the old desert drifter. Shuffling in now across the patio stones, Pap came to a patch of shade and halted. A long smooth pitchfork handle, serving double purpose as cane and burro prod, lay rifle-wise in the crook of his left arm. At rest, his thin frame was pulled a little off-center by the weight of his huge revolver. He wore exactly what clothes were visible: boots, breeches, shirt and hat.

He hunched one shoulder against the shaded wall. "Howdy, Ed? Hot, aint it—fer May?"

"Hello, Pap," Ed returned, wondering what the old fellow had on his mind and why he had brought the pack-train. Usually two burros were enough. "Sure it's hot—hot enough for May or July or any other month, and nothing but a couple of crack-brains would be figuring to stick it out through the summer!"

Pap considered him with gravity, then nodded. "Gone sour again. Thought so. That's why I come. Young pup out here with nothin' but himself to think about—which aint much!"

So Pap had come for a purpose! But before he could begin again, two Mexicans came up from the corral. Ed knew them—the Cartegos, one a man named Pedro, called "Pete," lazy, shiftless, though a good packer and camp monkey when he had to be; the other his wife.

She was almost a ball in shape. Her face was round and smiling. She weighed two hundred, mothered every stray child in San Verde and would have been worth a million dollars to any city restaurant that could have hired her as a cook. Her name was Angel.

Without a word to Ed, Pap turned to them and gave orders: "Pete, you rustle some wood. Angel, if you could just throw together—"

Angel beamed. "Five minutes!" she laughed, waddling on into the kitchen. It would be an hour; but what things she would have on the table then!

Ed drew out a pipe and began to stuff it. Pap often came by and used the house, making himself at home there, except that at night he always unrolled his blankets and slept outside. He had never before brought visitors. Lighting his pipe, Ed shot him a questioning glance.

Pap met it with a twinkling of blue eyes. "Good couple to have around,"

Black Wolf

he offered. "Pete'll be handy for camp chores, grazin' the animals and such. Angel, she'll keep us fed, and sort of be chaperon for the kid."

"Say, look here now," Ed asked, taking his pipe into one fist. "What the dickens are you driving at? What camp? And what kid?"

"Over in the San Verdes—sort of toward the Valley of the Caves. We've hired out to go in there."

Ed's slow smile broadened. "We have, have we? Nice place for a vacation! Indian bucks won't go within fifty miles of it. What have we hired out to do?"

"Look around."

Pap took off his flop-brimmed felt hat, and from the inside leather band produced a telegram, folded lengthwise. Ed squinted with interest. Only things of great importance and secrecy ever went into Pap's hat. It was his safety-deposit box. He opened the telegram for Ed to read.

MEET ME MORNING TRAIN THURSDAY. HAVE EQUIPMENT READY FOR INDEFINITE STAY IN SAN VERDE. TELL NO ONE I AM COMING. HIRE PEDRO AND ANGEL AGAIN, AND ONE OTHER WHO MUST BE ABSOLUTELY DEPENDABLE. LEAVE THAT TO YOUR JUDGMENT. —SIGNED, JERRY LOGAN.

"Well?" Ed questioned. "What's the mystery about? Translate, will you?"

Carefully Pap folded the paper into his hat-band and crushed the hat far down onto his gray head. "You remember the Logans?"

"Some," said Ed. "They've been around this country considerable, but we've never crossed trails. I've seen them in San Verde. The old man always looked like a dried badger ready to duck back into his hole. The girl—trick little piece, all right."

For inhabitants San Verde had only dogs, a few shiftless whites and 'breeds—and Sheriff Watt.

"Well, Doc Logan's dead," said Pap bluntly. "Murdered."

"How come?"

"Injun curse on the Valley of the Caves workin' overtime and reachin' clean to New York City to get him. Leastwise, that's what is bein' said around San Verde. I got it from Sheriff Watt, who has been asked by New York police for details of some enemy that Doc Logan might have had hereabouts. And there's been nary an enemy. Folks in these parts liked him."

"Then what do you say?"

Pap frowned. "I don't. I've got a few ideas, but they don't hook up yet. Last summer Doc Logan struck something about the old Keres treasure-house. He aimed to come back this year and follow it up. Now he's dead. His girl is comin' alone, wants no one to know it, and needs a helper." Pap gave Ed a quick look. "One that's plumb dependable."

Ed nodded, half smiling.

"You aint so absolutely such," the old man went on, "but you'll do. Today's Wednesday. That makes Thursday fall on tomorrow mornin'."

Pap Welton was never halfway in his planning. Ed understood Pap's way. He knew now that on the seven-hour tramp up from San Verde the old man's mind had been working things out in every detail. His own part was simply to listen, then follow orders.

"The morning train gets in at six," Pap continued. "You'd better ride in late this afternoon, so's to be there. Anyways, I want you to do some scoutin' around. The girl will need a horse to ride, and one to pack her stuff. You take 'em in. I'll put up out here overnight, and cut across to meet you at the foot of Rimrock tomorrow. We all ought to come together there about dark."

Ed reached to his shirt pocket for tobacco and began to roll a smoke. Beneath his slow movement was a growing tingle of pleasure. Camp smells came to him—bacon, coffee, the sharp breath of a blue dawn. He hadn't been on a pack-party like that for a long time. He had never been to the Valley of the Caves at all. And this other business! Logan bumped off—his daughter coming back wanting to keep under cover. Ed drew on his cigarette. Something warm was beginning to creep into his blood.

"What I want you to scout around for," Pap finished, "is to see what a couple of jaspers that came in the first of the week are up to. They want horses. And there aint none to be had right now, because all animals are hired out to the dude ranches. These two offered to buy mine. Their price was too high."

Ed laughed. "Too high?"

"Yep—to be square. Better take a look at 'em. See what you think."

And that was again Pap's request, when, in the cool of late afternoon, Ed swung onto a tall dark bay, and with his spare horses following, turned south toward San Verde.

CHAPTER IV

IT was still twilight when he jogged the last mile down a gentle slope from the mesa top and approached a cluster of squat adobe buildings.

San Verde had begun as an Indian pueblo village, changing into a boom camp later when gold was found in the ravines near by. It was now neither one nor the other. The Indians had wandered away or had been moved to a reservation. The boom had been but a flash. So there remained the deserted adobes mixed with shanties of rusted sheet iron; and the settlement survived solely because a branch of narrow-gauge railroad ended there. Of permanent inhabitants San Verde had only a pack of dogs, a few

whites and 'breeds too shiftless to move out—and Sheriff Sam Watt.

Ed was thinking of Watt as he rode to the only hitch-rack that hadn't rotted off at its posts, and tied his horse. He'd see the Sheriff first and find out if anything new had happened. The two extras that had been following, halted in the middle of the street. He went to them. At the same time a man sauntered out from the opposite sidewalk.

"Say, brother," he began at once, "are those both riding-horses?"

It would not have taken that too familiar "Say, brother" sort of an introduction to tell Ed the man was from distant parts. He had perhaps a week's tan, but his face still carried the look of city barber-shops. He wore khaki breeches, cotton shirt and high boots self-consciously, and he was puffy around the middle.

His whole appearance was smooth. "Slick," Ed put it to himself. "Slick with his head, too," he amended after a second glance.

Before answering the question, Ed put ropes on his animals and took a little longer than necessary in tying the knots.

The man stood waiting with evident impatience. Presently he held out his hand. "My name's Thompson."

That was what he called himself here in San Verde—which was not his name, any more than it had been "Al Sloan" back in New York. Not that names mattered. He hadn't planned on introducing himself in this place at all. Who'd have supposed you couldn't land in any Western town, pick up a guide and some horses, and be gone before morning? And here he'd been five days in this lousy dump! Not even a mule yet! He waited a moment longer, scowling as he thought. Been better if he'd come alone. He needed Gregg, sure—Gregg could handle a gun; but he wasn't the kind to sit around with. And that damned Indian who'd promised so much—

"Depends on what you mean by riding-horses." Ed had finished tying the ropes and turned to the hitch-rack. He knew that here was one of Pap Welton's strangers, and decided to stall. "If you mean have they been saddle-broke; yes. But they've still got some ginger that might get uncorked any time."

THOMPSON'S eyes narrowed as if with practised inspection. "Lively, are they? Fairly fast, then?"

Ed nodded. "Yep, fast as anything hereabouts." He shot a glance from under his hat-brim, adding: "They're good in rough country, too."

The man's heavy-jowled face remained impassive, telling nothing. He reached for a package of cigarettes, broke into it and offered one. "How about a drink, brother? I've got some real stuff." He nodded toward the San Verde House with its long chain of rooms.

"Well, sure," Ed agreed, "later. I have some business to do first. What number are you in?"

"Two. Right off the lobby. You can't miss it. In about half an hour?"

"Something like that."

"O.K., brother!"

Thompson turned away. Ed walked off in the other direction, puzzled. Just what was this game, anyhow?

SHERIFF WATT had lighted an oil lamp and was sitting at a roll-top desk, his fat body bent forward, head propped on both hands over a litter of papers. He turned slowly at Ed's step. Movement was becoming an effort for Sam Watt these days. There was too much of him. But his job no longer called for the agility of lean hard muscles, and so he managed his office well enough, working from a swivel-chair instead of a saddle, and having to ride no farther at any time lately than the two blocks for his mail.

"Howdy, Ed. Sit down," was his greeting. "Saw you chinning up with our friend Thompson a minute ago. What did he want?"

"Didn't say. Offered me a smoke and a drink. The smoke was all right, no gunpowder in it; I'm not so sure about the drink; I'm going back later for that."

Watt bent forward, hands on his knees. "Didn't he want to buy your horses?"

"Not a word. What do you make of him?"

"Nothing yet, except he isn't exactly wanting a health trip like he says." Watt leaned back and swung his chair around to the desk. "I've been looking through some old posters. There's a chance I might come across that jasper's face on something or other."

Ed pulled out a cigarette and a match. "Well, I'll string him along this evening. If I learn anything I—" With the match lighted, but not yet touching his smoke, he stopped.

Watt had turned, facing him again. Sudden warning flicked across his eyes. They went to the door at Ed's back. "What do you want, Wolf?"

Full dark had fallen outside. From it a tall black figure emerged and stood on the threshold.

Ed did not look around. He wondered how long Black Wolf had been standing there, and how much he had overheard.

"I come take my brother," the 'breed Indian said, his voice thick and muttering. "I got good job for him."

"Yeah, sure," Watt answered. "Good job emptyin' bottles! Your brother's all right. I'll keep him locked up awhile yet."

"I take him now!" Black Wolf insisted.

"Ninety days or a hundred dollars," said Watt. "The judge gave him that. 'Taint none of my business lettin' him out. If that's all you came for, suppose—"

Wolf took a step inside the room. The motion of his right hand toward his coat pocket brought a like move from Sheriff Watt. But the Indian's fist came up with a roll of money. He threw it on the desk, and over his dark face spread a leer. "Maybe you count that!"

ED caught a glance from Watt and understood. The 'breed had never been known to have more than one dollar at a time. Yet here were ten ten-dollar bills. Ed saw that, knew the Sheriff would be busy now making out release-papers, so stood up with a casual, "Guess I'll be going."

In rising, his eyes came level with Black Wolf's, and their glances locked. Neither spoke. But Ed went outside with his right hand mechanically feeling for the revolver that Pap Welton had advised him to carry again.

His first thought was to put up his horses for the night, then get a room for himself. The San Verde House ran the length of a block, being but a single chain of rooms extending from one corner to the next. Behind it, and parallel, was a long shed for horses.

Arriving there, Ed picked out a stable which would be in full view from a certain window in the hotel. Then, having given his animals feed, he went into the lobby, helped himself to a key from the rack, and continued to the room he had selected. Ordinarily so much precaution in this matter of a place to sleep would have amused him. Men hadn't done that since San Verde's bad days. But tonight he had a hunch it would be wise to keep one window open, where any sound from his horses would waken him.

Upon returning to the lobby a few minutes later, he found Thompson waiting in the doorway of his adjoining room. The man beckoned with a jerk of his head. "How about that drink, brother?"

"Don't mind if I do," Ed agreed.

But inside, he let the glass that Thompson filled rest on a table and sauntered across to where he could stand facing the door.

Thompson lifted his own drink. "Well, brother, here's the opener! And there's more where this came from."

Ed slid his hands into his pockets and leaned lazily against the wall. "Talk first and celebrate afterward," he said. "Suppose you say what you want. I'll listen."

Thompson put down his glass. "O.K. That suits me. No insult if you refuse a man's liquor. I think I've got you lined up right, and I'm willing to talk. It's business. And I'll pay good dividends. First thing I want is some horses—enough to ride and some to pack. You came in with three today. Can you get more?"

Ed nodded. "If the price is fair."

"It is. Do I look short? You're talking to a man with ready cash, brother. Then the next thing I want is for you to—"

He broke off as the door opened. Black Wolf lurched in, started to speak, stopped with eyes squinting at Ed. Then he turned to Thompson. Between them passed a look, quick, short, full of a meaning that Ed did not quite read. It was over in an instant, and when Thompson faced him, he showed nothing.

"Sorry, brother," he said. "Suppose we finish our talk in the morning."

"Any time," Ed answered, moving out past Black Wolf. "I'll be around town somewhere."

AT once the door closed behind him. He heard Black Wolf's low-voiced grumble, then an angry retort from Thompson. Ed went on, remembering there was a partner who might be on watch here in the lobby. So that was it! Black Wolf and his money—easy enough now to see where the hundred dollars came from. And a sweet mess for Jerry Logan to come into in the morning!

Later, sitting in the dark on the edge of his cot, he was still thinking about the girl and this peculiar situation, as he reached for a cigarette and a match. Habit, with perhaps the subconscious warning of his thoughts, made him raise the lighted match in cupped hands. There

came a shattering report. A red finger pointed out of the night. He pitched from his cot and dropped flat on the floor, but was aware even as he fell that the crash of glass had come from behind him. He had been facing his open back window. Against the front wall opposite was a bench, with a wash-bowl, and above that a mirror.

IN the half-second of lying sprawled on the floor, Ed divined exactly what had happened. His cupped hands had shielded the lighted match from being visible outside, but had thrown its reflection into the glass. The shot had struck accurately in the reflected glow.

Ed drew himself to the window-ledge, gun in hand. He heard his bay horse Zuni take a long snorting breath, showing the animal was curious, yet not excited. Nothing moved among the deeper shadows of the shed, nor against the dim gray desert beyond. After the first impact of the gunshot, the night turned totally silent. Now as Ed crouched at the window, there came a sudden clamor of San Verde's dogs from farther along the street.

Moving swiftly to his door, locking it as he went out, Ed walked on the soundless dirt until he came to the hotel lobby, then stepped up onto the boards and entered.

"What's up?" a voice hailed him.

Thompson was peering from a crack in his doorway. He opened it wider and stood in the yellow glow of the lobby's oil lamp, fully dressed.

"Wasn't that a shot?" he asked.

"I thought it was," Ed answered.

Thompson turned, looking into his room. "Didn't you hear a shot, Gregg?"

There was a pause in which his question went unanswered. Then another man came beside him. At the instant of seeing Ed, his drooping lids flipped open. They dropped half-closed again at once.

"Who fired it?" he asked.

Ed shrugged casually. This was his first sight of the partner, and he needed no more than a glance at the thick straight neck, heavy head, outthrust jaw and glowering features to tell him what the man was. Thompson himself was too brainy to be a killer. He had brought one along.

"Probably some drunk Indian fired it," Ed answered.

He saw Thompson give his partner a look. Gregg maintained his glowering expression. Thompson turned from him. "Sounded too close to this hotel, brother. I'm curious. Suppose we go out and see."

"All right, suppose we do," Ed agreed, his glance noting that neither man carried a gun.

He took the lobby lamp, and with the two in front of him, approached a small rear door. Thompson opened it. Immediately Sam Watt stepped out of the shadows.

Before he spoke, his eyes swept over Ed, as if to reassure himself; then he asked: "Who was shootin' back here?"

"We wondered," Ed replied.

"Glad you're on the job, Sheriff," Thompson said quickly. "I'm a greenhorn, and shots so close to where I sleep make me uneasy." He gave a short laugh. "Maybe I'll get used to it later on."

"Yeah," said Watt, surveying him, "I reckon you will."

He turned, playing a flashlight on the ground as he walked off toward the sheds. Presently he halted, stooped, then looked up at the others who had stopped near by.

"Must have had sore feet, this jasper—runnin' around here with gunnysacks tied over 'em!" He sighted to the chain of hotel rooms, using his revolver to point out a window that would be best in range from this position. "Let's go see if there's a corpse."

In the screen of the window was a neat round hole. Watt held his flashlight close to it.

"Good God!" Ed exclaimed. "That's my room! Lucky I wasn't in there."

HE swung sharply, and caught Thompson staring at him. Gregg, at the man's side, still retained his granite-jawed somberness.

"Now, I'd sure like to know," Ed continued, "who in San Verde would be laying for me like that."

"You haven't any enemies?" Thompson suggested.

"Me? Lord, no!"

"Say," Watt broke in, "where's Black Wolf?"

Ed faced Thompson. "He was in your room last time I saw him."

"And he's still there," said Thompson, "drunk. I planned to hire him for a guide. Thought perhaps he'd know of some old Indian health-spring; but the fool passed out on me. Do you want to see him?"

"Might as well," said Watt.

Black Wolf was sprawled full length on a bed. Watt shook him, and he rolled over, muttering thickly. There was no doubt about his stupor being genuine, for his mouth sagged, he opened a glazed eye, and the room smelled with a sickly odor of bad whisky. Watt lifted the gun from Black Wolf's belt. All six cartridges were unexploded. He frowned as he returned the weapon to its holster.

Ed moved to the door.

"Come on, Sam," he advised. "Let him alone. Black Wolf wouldn't have been taking shots at my room, anyway. We settled our troubles long ago." He nodded to Thompson and Gregg. "Well, gentlemen, don't lose sleep over this. It was some Indian popping off half-cocked."

With Sam Watt he crossed the lobby and went on into the street. There the Sheriff gripped his arm, halted him.

"Explain yourself, young fellow! What are you stringing that line for?"

Ed told about the mirror.

"Who did it?" Watt demanded.

"That fellow Gregg, of course. Black Wolf's dead drunk. I saw his brother leave town on the night train. Gregg, he's Thompson's gunman; the cities are full of his sort. They're supposed to be crack shots, and right now this one must be wondering what happened. I wanted to keep them both guessing. It's plain enough they've come here on a treasure-hunt and mean to have no interference. Black Wolf heard us talking tonight in your office, then tipped them off to what I'm here for. But if I can string them along until Jerry Logan comes and we get out of town, it'll make things easier at the start. Afterward—" Ed shrugged. "Well, afterward will have to take care of itself. Now I'm going to turn in."

This time he pulled the mattress from his cot and lay down on it in one corner of the room. Not much chance of any more trouble tonight.

CHAPTER V

SHORTLY after dawn a toy engine with combination baggage-car and coach came rattling up the narrow-gauge. Ed was alone on the San Verde platform. For all he could see, he was the only man alive in town. But as the train drew in, the station-agent opened a window and yawned at the sun, a boy ran across the street for the mail-sack, and the engineer gave a shrill toot that was San Verde's morning alarm-clock.

Almost before the coach had stopped, a girl jumped lightly from its steps. She was the only passenger.

Ed went toward her, approving of her in the first glance. Ready for business, all right! She carried only a single small brown bag; and she had changed already into a boy's outfit of khaki breeches, boots and blue cotton shirt. Points of brown hair curled under a gray felt hat. She smiled as Ed approached.

"If you're Miss Logan," he began by way of introducing himself, "I'm Ed Young."

"Where's Pap Welton?" she asked, thus immediately taking affairs into her own hands.

Ed explained, feeling a little strange in front of this girl, whose clear gray-blue eyes seemed to be summing him up from head to foot without their glance ever leaving his own. Nor could he read what she thought when that summing-up process was completed. Her small oval face with last year's tan turned now to faint gold, told nothing, even in its smile. Jerry Logan was not pretty. You don't call the vivid warmth of sunset just pretty. You don't call the clear brilliance of desert stars that, either. Somehow, Ed's first impression of her was this mingled warmth and clarity.

He liked her at once, yet matched her own reserve, and spoke with his usual slow indifference. "Pap put up at my place yesterday and sent me on in to get you. We won't see him till near Rimrock tonight. Now, hadn't you better have breakfast while I pack your things?"

"No," Jerry refused, with a quick shake of her head. "I want to get out

of town. Did you bring our horses to the station?"

Ed pointed to the three tied at a rack near the building's end.

"Good!" Jerry approved. "There's my stuff coming from the baggage-car now."

Ed grinned as he followed her trim brown figure. Regular little general!

Yet somehow she had a way of making him like it, not altogether because it was new and pleasant to be ordered by a girl. Ed decided it was because Jerry Logan knew what she was doing. The equipment that came from the baggage-car was already boxed, and each box fitted exactly in the kyacks of her pack-horse. There was no trouble, no delay. Ten minutes after the train had pulled into San Verde, Jerry was mounted and they were riding out.

She took the lead. Ed followed, driving the pack-animal, and delayed a moment in keeping it from darting up a side-street. At the edge of town, where the last crumbling adobe gave way to open desert, he looked back. Automatically his hand drew in the bridle reins.

"Hold on, Zuni," he said into the bay's questioning ears.

The San Verde House stables were in full view. It was a gathering behind them that held his eyes fixed. Black Wolf's tall form was easily made out, along with Thompson and Gregg. The 'breed's brother was there too, and it was easy to see what his "good job" had been. He had taken the night train out of town. He was back now with three horses—poor, thin crowbaits that stood slack-boned and lifeless. Ed nodded to himself. Some desert Indian had waked this morning to find his corrals empty!

He rode on. Coming abreast of Jerry, he said nothing about what he had seen, nor mentioned the fact of two strangers being in town. No need to wear her with talk of more trouble. He glanced across the profile of her face, and thinking of her father, and all that she must be going through in coming back alone like this, sympathy filled him.

UNTIL they were far out on the desert, with their animals settled into a swinging walk, the pack-horse plodding ahead, she rode in thoughtful silence. Suddenly she faced him with a quick, flitting smile that was all her own.

"Well, Ed Young? How are you, anyway!"

Ed laughed. "Me, I'm poorly, thank you. And yourself?"

"Better—much! You know, it's a wonder to me that all doctors don't prescribe a horse and saddle and country like this for every ill that comes to man. There's nothing to equal it!"

"You're right," Ed agreed. "There's something about the feel and sound of horses crunching along this way, sure enough," he said earnestly. "And it's a funny thing that horseback is exactly the right height to give a man the proper look at his world. From the ground he can't see as far as he ought to. Something may sneak up and bite him. From any higher than a saddle, he sees too much, picking out trouble that he might never reach." He paused, his slow smile widening.

Jerry chuckled softly, as if taking his philosophy to herself and enjoying it. "Tell me about yourself, Ed Young."

He glanced into her eyes and read interest, not curiosity. The girl was human. He felt he could tell her about himself, perhaps tell her much, even the plans and hopes he had for San Verde Mesa, and she would understand. But the habit of keeping unspoken the things that meant most to him was strong.

So he grinned and said lightly: "It would be a dumb recital! But if you want the main points, I've been out here seven years, came West from New York City—"

"New York!" Jerry exclaimed, giving him a closer look. "Well, I'd never have thought it!"

"Am I as rusty as all that?"

"Heavens, no! You look so—" Jerry broke off, smiled, left that thought unfinished. "Do you want to go back?" she asked.

"I have wanted to," Ed confessed. "Sometimes I feel like locking up my place and throwing the key away for good. You work things about as I'd like it—here for a few months, then East a few."

He was aware of a sudden look of pain upon Jerry's face. She rode on in silence, then turned abruptly to him.

"It sounds good—here a few months, East a few; but I never want to go East again. I hope there will be work enough to keep me here always!"

Ed moved closer. There was nothing he could say. The pain upon Jerry's face passed, and the quiet strength of her gray-blue eyes returned once more, but he understood the grief that until this moment she had covered so well.

FREQUENTLY through the morning Ed watched the back trail, looking for any signs of followers from San Verde. Black Wolf had a horse of his own, and a good one. The three scrub Indian ponies that the brother had stolen would give Thompson and Gregg something to ride and leave one to pack. The brother himself would probably not be brought along.

Midday came, and there was no telltale dust-flag on the desert. Ed felt better. At least he was not being followed directly.

At noon they dry-camped; and from his saddle-bags he brought out ham-and-egg sandwiches.

Opening hers, made of inch-thick slices of bread from the San Verde restaurant, Jerry laughed, then took a hungry bite.

Ed grinned, apologizing. "Fuse burned out on the electric toaster! And the lettuce— Well, anyway, you like pickles, don't you?"

"Love 'em!" said Jerry.

He unwrapped two.

They traveled again in half an hour, and toward dusk were under the towering red wall of the rimrock. Here the lower desert which they had been crossing from San Verde butted against the first rise of the mountains. Their way now would be up a narrow ravine.

Ed drew in Zuni and called his packhorse from trudging on in the lead.

"What is it?" Jerry asked.

He leaned out of his saddle and studied the ground. "Pap Welton ought to have come in ahead of us, about here. Cutting across from my place, he would naturally drop down off the mesa and follow this old Indian path." Ed pointed to a shallow winding depression, hollowed ages ago by countless human feet. There were no recent marks upon it.

He moved his horse, searching farther.

"Funny," he said at last, "—no sign of Pap. Well, there's a spring farther up, where we planned to camp. Let's go on."

It was almost dark by the time they reached the willow-fringed water-hole. And as they approached up the ravine bottom, from over its left bank came a straggling caravan—Pap Welton arriving, but not at all from the direction that would have been his natural course.

Ed grinned with relief. "Trust Pap to travel his own way every time!"

The two parties came together under the willows, Pap's blue eyes full of welcome, though he greeted Jerry as casually as if he had seen her yesterday. Angel made up for it in warm affection, folding the girl into her big arms.

Ed and Pap began at once to unsaddle the pack-train.

"I sort of kept to the high country," Pap explained. "Thought maybe it would be good to keep an eye on your hind trail."

"See anything?" Ed asked.

"Nothing on the flat. I couldn't get much of a sight into Big Sandy wash."

Ed nodded, drawing the lash from a mule's pack. "Your two friends were still in San Verde, Pap. They've hired Black Wolf for a guide."

The old man scowled. "Then what?"

"This morning when we left, I saw them with three Indian scrubs."

"Couldn't cross much desert on them," Pap asserted. "What's the girl's plan?"

"She hasn't talked about it yet."

They finished unloading; then with the kyacks of equipment put in rows, their saddles near, they took the animals down beyond the fringe of trees to where a trickle of water made a narrow grass-strip. Here in the ravine they hobbled an old gray bell-mare. The others would not leave her.

BACK at camp, Pedro had started a fire; Angel was already cooking supper. Jerry was unrolling her tent, and soon had it strung between two willow trunks. In half an hour the desert water-hole had turned miraculously cheerful, with the sound of voices, red fire dancing, smells of coffee, meat and spiced food drifting down the night.

Immediately after the meal Angel said she was tired and went to a tent pitched

opposite Jerry's. Pedro, like a timid watchdog, rolled himself in a blanket and lay down at her door.

Ed stretched his long legs and lay back comfortably against his saddle. The fire had almost burned out, with only enough remaining to light Pap Welton's rock-brown face, his pipe, his gray hair, and across from him the contrasting soft lines of Jerry's eyes and mouth.

SHE looked up, her lips parting in a sigh. "Gosh, this is home! Well, I suppose you two would like to know what the next move is?"

Pap puffed slowly, saying nothing. Ed made a cigarette.

"We'll reach a camp-site low down in the Valley of the Caves some time tomorrow," she continued, "near the only good spring that I know of. We won't be more than a mile from Hanging House, and that's where our work will be. First to find how it can be entered. You remember it, don't you, Pap? High up on the side of a cliff, five hundred feet, anyway, looking like a swallow's nest plastered to the cave roof?"

Pap took out his pipe. "I recollect somethin' of it. Your father hadn't found a way up—nor down neither, had he?"

At mention of Andrew Logan, Jerry's head dropped and she stared into the fire's dull glow. But then, drawing her knees up, clasping her arms about them, she nodded, and the look of quiet courage returned to her face.

"No," she answered, "Father hadn't. It was almost the end of our season when he finished a record that made him think the treasure vaults were in Hanging House. We spent a week looking for some hidden entrance that would lead up, and didn't find one. No telling how much time it will take now."

She paused, seeming lost in thought.

"I wish the papers hadn't printed so much about treasure!" she said suddenly. "The vaults in Hanging House may be full of gold—Father believed so. But that was incidental to his making a record of the Keres history. Yet you flaunt buried gold before a lot of people, and something happens. There are men who'll do anything—anything! Once at Casa Loma, a wild story was told, and while Father and I were away, the whole cliff village was dynamited by a band of crazy idiots trying to find some hidden treasure-room!"

Jerry's hands tightened. "That can't happen here. I want to finish Father's record of the Valley of the Caves. I'm going to!" She flashed a look from Pap to Ed. "I haven't told you everything. A chart was stolen from Father's study that—that day. It wasn't complete. But it was enough, and there were notes too. Some one right now must be headed for Hanging House. That's why I came so quickly."

Ed caught Pap's glance and understood the meaning in his blue eye. They had not told everything, either. Now she ought to know. He sat up, squatting cowboy fashion on his high-heeled boots.

"Does the name *Thompson* mean anything to you? Medium-sized man, dark hair a little gray, keen slate eyes? Might be in any sort of business where there's quick money?"

"Thompson?" Jerry repeated slowly. She considered, then shook her head. "No. Why?"

"That probably isn't his name, and a man with him called Gregg—you wouldn't have seen either."

"What about them?" Jerry demanded. "Tell me!"

Ed explained what had happened in San Verde last night. He told about Black Wolf and his earlier trouble with him, then of the fact that the three men were saddling horses this morning. He would rather have spared her, feeling this was too much a recital of bad news. But then, finished, he was given once more an insight to the nature of this Jerry Logan.

"Well," she said, "at least we know exactly how things stand. I feel better."

A SOLITARY finger of flame leaped up from a bursting knot in the coals. In its light their shadows lay motionless out into the blackness of the willow trunks. Ed crushed his cigarette.

"I'm goin' to turn in." He broke off at a warning click from Pap.

The old man was sitting like a gray badger, nose lifted. Slowly he hunched forward onto his knees, sniffed, stood up.

"It sure is," he told himself. "It sure is 'breed Injun."

"Oh, now Pap!" Jerry laughed.

"Hush, girl."

Jerry subsided with an amused look.

Pap moved soundlessly out beyond the row of pack-sacks.

"Funny old dear!" said Jerry. "Do you think he really can smell things the way he claims?"

Ed nodded, his eyes riveted on the spot where Welton had vanished. "I

Ed Young

don't know. Pap swears he can scent Black Wolf. Animals have sensitive noses—and Pap has lived almost an animal's life. Nothing much to spoil his primitive instincts."

They sat waiting. . . . It seemed to Ed that even before the sharp report burst from down-cañon, he had already swept Jerry back beyond the camp light.

They were in the protecting dark, standing up. He felt the clutch of her hand on his arm. She gave a cry that was but a sharp breath: "Oh—"

"Stay here," he said quickly. "Don't move an inch to show yourself!"

He turned, and only the momentary gleam of his gun sliding from its holster marked his passage through the trees.

AT the willows' edge Ed Young stopped, listening. Echoes of that first crash had died. Now even the small sounds of desert night life were stilled.

He stepped out onto the arrowhead of grass that thrust its point down-cañon for perhaps two hundred yards. To the right and left gray walls rose dimly. It was on the right bank that a rock clicked beneath a boot-heel.

Instantly a red streak spurted; and in the roar of it, Ed recognized Pap Welton's old single-action cannon. The shot was not answered. Sounds of running came from the right bank. Ed leaped down the grass strip, his boots making no noise there as he went toward the spot where Pap's gun had thundered. He stopped as grass thinned into gravel.

"Pap?"

At his low query a black blob detached itself from the night and came toward him, grumbling angrily: "A shot like that! An' missed! Sure gettin' old and plumb decrepit!"

"What's the trouble?" Ed asked.

"Trouble!" Pap retorted. "Not more'n twenty yards, and I didn't even nick him!"

"Was it Black Wolf?"

"It was. Didn't I smell 'breed Injun?"

Ed scowled off down the hills. So that pack had managed to follow!

He turned again to Pap. "If it was Black Wolf, he was after our stock."

Pap nodded.

"We ought to change our plans some," Ed went on. "Except for the girl and a woman being with us, I'd say let's stop here and end things with that outfit. But we can't take any chances.

"The next best bet is to pull out and maybe throw Black Wolf off the track. He must figure we'll stay here until morning. Suppose we let our stuff feed and rest, then go on—say about midnight. We'll have a moon; and you know the way, don't you?"

"The kid does, if I don't," said Pap. He cast an eye along the cañon rim. "I don't reckon anyone will come back, now that they know we're stirred up. But we ought to watch. You sit here for a couple of hours; then I'll come down for a couple."

"All right," Ed agreed. "Announce yourself when you reach camp. Jerry might plug you."

Pap trudged off. Ed found a boulder and squatted on his heels in its under curve. He could see the dim shapes of horses and mules grazing on the strip, and counted them. None missing. His glance went on beyond, trying to pierce through the black cañon bottom. Where was that crew camped? And how the devil did they get even this far with the old crowbaits he'd seen in San Verde!

A swishing step sounded in the grass behind him. He turned warily, then stood up. "Miss Logan?"

Jerry came out of the starlight. "Yes. Nothing wrong."

"Why aren't you asleep?" he asked. "Didn't Pap tell you we'd move on in four hours?"

She nodded. "I can't sleep. Pap has turned in. Angel and Pedro have settled down too. But I—well, do you mind? I thought I'd like to talk."

"No, of course I don't mind," Ed answered warmly.

They sat together against the rock, Jerry with arms hugging her knees, Ed with his long legs stretched comfortably.

Jerry took a deep, slow breath, then sighed. "This is nice! Thank you, Mr.

Young." She laughed softly. "But I sha'n't 'Mr. Young' you any more. It doesn't fit. Besides, there'll be no formality on this trip."

"I guess there won't," he admitted. "What with the Valley of the Caves ahead of us, and a party of Lord knows what behind, we'll know each other well enough before long. Do you believe the legend about the Valley?"

Jerry considered. "Well, yes, in one way—not the way you mean. The papers in New York after—after what happened, said the curse was being carried out. That isn't true. There can be no working of a mythical force. But it's like this: You don't have to be a witch-woman nor an evil spirit with a far-seeing eye, to stand up and prophesy that buried treasure will bring trouble and calamity. The natural course of human greed will take care of that."

Ed smiled. "You're right. It will."

"But let's talk of something else," Jerry begged. "I've had four days on the train to think about all this. By now I have myself pretty well in hand. At least I can see that for a certain time ahead, until I have completed my father's records, my life will be a busy one." She paused, then added: "Plenty of work to do is always good, isn't it?"

Ed said nothing. The question had its point for him, and he wondered. Just what was she keeping back in that little brown head of hers, anyway?

Jerry leaned against the rock, turning to him, her eyes catching the cold starlight and warming it. "Pap says you have a marvelous place on San Verde Mesa; tell me about that."

"Pap's an old romancer!" Ed declared. "I have an adobe; but to hear him, you might think it was in some place better than the Garden of Eden. The truth is, Pap always strikes it first after being on the desert for several months. Anything would look good then!"

"Yes, of course," Jerry agreed solemnly. "Anything would."

HE gave her a quick look, and she smiled. "Pap says also that it's bad when a man reaches the point where he can hire most of his work done for him."

"Did Pap say that?" Ed demanded.

"Why, yes. Does it apply?"

"Well—a little, perhaps. I did send some cowboys into the hills with the summer herd instead of going myself. But—Lord! There's so much more to do!" Ed's dream of his twenty-section enterprise flashed again. He bent forward eagerly. "I had planned on making the whole desert top of San Verde Mesa into something productive, something that would go on for generations." He broke off.

"Well," Jerry prompted, "why don't you do it? That's a perfectly splendid idea."

Ed looked out into the night, half-smiling. "I will go on with it, sometime, of course," he answered. "For seven years I've worked to get the place started. But just now, looking ahead, I don't get the kick I expected."

His eyes came back to her. Jerry had turned her face away.

"I see," she said quietly. "Sometime you will go on with it. I understand."

The night silence closed about them. "I understand." He wondered if she did.

UNDER a slice of moon rising eastward, the pack-train moved without sound up the sand of the cañon wash. Pap trudged in the lead; Pedro followed, then Angel on a mule, and the string of loaded beasts behind her, white packs rocking to their slow steps. Jerry rode at the end of these, with Ed trailing.

He stopped to look back at the first bend of the Z cañon. From their recent camp-site came the soft tinkle of a bell, then a quick clatter broken by intervals of silence.

"That ought to keep them unsuspecting until daylight," Ed assured himself.

He had hung the grazing-bell on a willow branch that swayed in the breeze. To anyone listening from below, it would sound as if the animals were still feeding on the grass strip.

For two hours the train climbed steeply, then rope-walked a hogback, twisted through a higher gap, and continued upward into a second winding cañon. Another hour, and the cañon walls grew lower. Presently dawn began to gray the ridge tops. A sharp bend, and the walls flattened. A last scramble up loose rock, and Ed looked out upon a broad brown plain, treeless, unbroken save for a white ribbon lying along the far side. Beyond that rose a line of red hills.

He stared at the sudden vista, and marveled. "Good Lord!" He had not imagined there was so much top land behind the San Verde's frontal slope.

Pap, standing beside the lead mules while they all stopped to blow, took out his pipe and stuffed it.

"Yep," he agreed, following Ed's look. "Right smart of a universe up here, and not much of us! That's about the proper proportion."

Starting off again, he pointed his pitchfork-handle at the white band Ed had seen far across the plain. "Yonder's a dry lake. If we can reach it before anyone spots us, we'll leave no tracks."

BUT the lake was farther than it had seemed. Toward midmorning it was still only a waving white ribbon close to the base of the hills. And it was not until noon that they reached it, and the animals' shoes rang as they stepped out upon the hard white surface. Immediately Pap turned at an angle southward. Now underfoot there was no sign of the train having passed; no revealing dust rose from the rock-like bottom.

The lake was ten miles across, with the red hills rising from its shore. With practised eye Pap chose a cañon and tramped toward it. Ed halted before entering, and with glasses swept the plain behind them. Nothing there showed that the caravan's southward angling had been discovered.

"It looks as if we had left those fellows, all right," he said, pulling up beside Jerry. "How do you feel—tired?"

She smiled. "That's nice of you. Yes, I am. But it won't be long now."

"Won't it? We have these hills yet. Where is the Valley?"

"Wait and see!" Jerry laughed. "You have a surprise coming!"

And he did have. The hills were in fact but a single narrow line. Beyond them was another level plain, as unbroken as the first one, Ed thought, until suddenly the lead animals swung sharply and halted, and almost in the next step his horse was on the brink of a cliff.

He leaned in his saddle and looked two thousand feet straight down. His eyes followed across the valley floor and up again on the far cliff side. He turned to Jerry with a grin.

"Nothing but a ditch!"

It was as if a gigantic steam shovel had cut a winding trench up from the south and on northward, the red hills being piles of dirt dumped from its great maw. He looked again. The valley was perhaps two miles wide. Where were the caves? And then he saw them. What had appeared at first only scratches on the opposite cliff came to him now as shadowed crevices lengthwise along the face. It was still a moment before he realized that the irregular gray cubes standing out against the shadows were houses.

"Well, now, then," he said solemnly, "the whole Keres tribe must have had wings. How in thunder do you reach their front doors?"

"That's exactly what we've come to find out," Jerry answered. "One or two have been easy enough, but the others, especially Hanging House, seem to have been built by the birds."

Pap had walked on ahead. He returned now.

"Have you found the chute?" Jerry asked him. To Ed, she explained: "There is only one way into this part of the valley. Is your horse good at sliding?"

"Good enough."

"Didn't miss it far," Pap answered her. "The chute is just yonder."

"Then let's go."

FOR a short distance the mules walked close along the valley rim; then Pap turned them. To Ed, riding again in the rear, they simply vanished over the edge, going one by one over that two-thousand-foot drop. Jerry sat waiting beside him. When all the pack-animals were over, she touched her horse.

"Come on!"

Ed followed. His Zuni stepped into a V notch. Next moment, with all four legs stiffened, the horse was sliding downward in a chute of flowing gravel. Pack-train and humans landed at the bottom in a grit-cloud, choked, blinded, but right side up; and the descent had taken something less than five minutes.

From the chute they swung under the cliff wall, where a cut bank had hidden a sizable patch of grass and a spring. On approaching the place, Pap gave Jerry a troubled look.

"Been dry this year. Not much feed." He waved toward the short stiff growth.

"Not much," she admitted. "But you brought grain, didn't you?"

Pap nodded. "Some. Enough, I reckon, if we string it out."

Jerry kicked her feet from the stirrups and jumped to the ground, then with the familiarity of having lived in this spot before, took charge of making camp.

Ed sensed how completely she had relieved Andrew Logan of all thought, save of his work. She knew where she wanted her tent, her equipment, her living ar-

rangements. A single juniper grew near the spring. Under that was a stone slab for a table, with a rock fireplace handy. The high outward-sloping cliff gave shade and concealment from above.

"Made to order, isn't it!" he exclaimed to Jerry. "No chance of being spied on. Sort of have our backs to the wall, and can keep our eyes fixed front."

"I do feel safe here," she answered. "The chute was Father's discovery, and we have never told about it." She paused, watching Pap hobble the mules and horses, and send them off to the grass patch.

"Still," she continued, "we can't take chances. It will be Pedro's job to stand guard in the daytime. Nights, you and I and Pap can take turns."

"Leave that to Pap and me," Ed objected. "You—"

"Look here!" she broke in seriously. "In this camp every one of us goes share and share. You mustn't consider me as a girl at all."

"That's a fact," Ed answered into her gray-blue eyes. "I mustn't."

Jerry smiled. "We have work to do in this valley," she reminded him. "You have no idea how anxious I am."

CHAPTER VI

WORK! Ed discovered next day that Jerry knew the full meaning of the word. It meant rolling out half an hour before dawn; Angel cooking breakfast, Pedro driving in the horses, Jerry, Pap and himself making up climbing-ropes, picks and shovels. It meant riding up the Valley of the Caves to the cliff that held Hanging House, then hours of tramping in search of some means by which the ancients reached the impossible level.

Ascent to other cliff-dwellings was by stone footholds cut in the rock, or by poles of juniper spliced together and crossed ladder-fashion. Some were entered by coming down through a chimney from the rim. But Hanging House, plastered in its cave upon a face that rose sheer for five hundred feet to the cavern lip, seemed to have neither stairway up, nor crevice leading down. . . .

A full week they searched for that entrance. Ed swore he had shoveled away half a mountain in uncovering every rock slide that to Jerry's experienced eye might cover some secret opening.

"It sure does beat me!" he declared.

He was sitting with Jerry in the scant noontime shadow of a boulder, lunch between them, their eyes turned up the blank cliff wall. Unapproachable, baffling, the long horizontal split holding Hanging House yawned overhead.

"But people did reach it, somehow!" Jerry insisted. "They didn't have wings. They climbed up, or came down. And whatever way they went, we can go!"

Ed picked up one of Angel's generous tortillas, with its thick layer of chopped meat rolled in the baked flour, bit into it, sat scowling.

Suddenly Jerry turned to him.

"I'm as certain as anything that the way to Hanging House is through this lower group of buildings."

She nodded toward a cave-mouth with its rock structures near the base of the cliff. Those houses could be reached with a juniper ladder.

"All right," Ed answered. "Suppose we take a look in there when Pap comes."

Welton, as usual, had gone off scouting on his own, one eye out for a passage to Hanging House, the other sharpened to pick up any sign of Black Wolf's party. Since the first night's camp under the rimrock, it had seemed as if Thompson must have turned back. Yet he had not looked like a man who would quit. And Black Wolf had reason enough to carry out his job. . . .

The moment Pap Welton came in sight up the valley floor, Ed knew the old fellow had made a discovery. Pap hurried only on rare occasions. He was hurrying now, poling himself along with the pitchfork-handle, his cannon of a gun jogging in its holster at his side.

Both Ed and Jerry went to meet him.

"Well," he announced, "they're here. Boot-tracks yonder about three mile—comin' this way, then turnin' back. Looked like whoever made 'em thought he'd come far enough. Must have a camp considerable beyond where I first picked up the marks."

Abruptly Pap crushed his hat onto his head and turned away.

"Here," Jerry checked him. "Have something to eat first."

"No time, girl, no time!"

He shuffled off, and they saw him last climbing a chimney up the canon wall.

THE lower cliff house was long, narrow, broken into many small rooms. The rooms were set one upon another in tiers; and the tiers rose without windows, making a solid outside wall that touched

the cave roof. Inside, the house was wholly dark.

Ed went in first with a miner's candlestick. Jerry followed, her own light throwing his shadow in huge deformed size against the room's partitions. He grinned back over his shoulder. "No place for a white man! Where now?"

"Let's go in here."

They turned together along a corridor. For an hour they groped from room to room, up flights of stone steps to watch-towers in this castle of the ancients, crawled through narrow openings into chambers carved from the cliff rock, breathed the dust of centuries—and still the house continued.

"Is there no end to this thing?" Ed exclaimed at last.

"Seems not," Jerry admitted.

THEY came to a double opening at the end of a passage, one door leading straight on, the other making a black oblong at right angles.

"Wait a minute," Jerry asked. "We haven't much more time. Pap will be coming back at sundown. I seem to be all wrong about there being a way from this place up to Hanging House. Yet I do feel it. Some narrow fissure in the rock could lead up, or even a stairway might have been dug."

She peered at the two openings. "No use in both of us covering the same ground. I'll go down this passage. You see what branches off here."

Ed hesitated. "I'd rather trail along."

"No. Please don't!"

Jerry shook her head impatiently, then smiled. "I've poked through hundreds of these places. Nothing can happen. Now let's not waste time." She continued along the passage.

Ed watched her candle-light swiftly grow dim as if at a great distance. She seemed safe enough. Still he watched, and there flooded over him the desire to run after her, bring her back. It was not because of danger here. It was that he wanted never to have her out of his sight.

Then because she was anxious to finish the search of this lower house, he obeyed her wish, entered the doorway—and almost at once his duty ended. He took a step backward, bent low with his candle and stared. A skeleton lay doubled at his feet. The bones were brown with age, only the teeth showing white. Around it were pottery jars, pieces of shell, lumps of green rock. He had stumbled into a crypt, the wall ending beyond the bones.

He moved farther backward. "You just rest there awhile longer!"

Standing again in the passageway, he called: "Jerry?"

His voice echoed in smothered tones. "Jerry!" There was no sign of her light, and no answer.

He sprang down the corridor. It turned. He followed, running heedlessly. Another step, and he tripped. His arms went out; his candle dropped. In the instant of saving himself on a ledge of rock, he heard a faint gasp from somewhere below.

"Jerry?" he called again. *"Jerry!"*

Still there was no reply, save that pained drawing of a breath.

Ed choked. Cold fear gripped him. "Easy!" he warned himself. "Take it easy. . . . Get down there."

With his candle gone, he could see nothing. Lying on the rock ledge, he felt up the passage wall, found a knob jutting outward, tested his weight on it. The rock held. He unwound a climbing-rope from around his middle, looped it over the knob and let the free end drop.

The pit was not deep. He had gone down hand over hand for perhaps ten feet when his boots touched bottom. He struck a match. Jerry lay crumpled before him, motionless. Yet in the flare of his match, her eyes flicked open.

"Ed!"

He knelt, his arm under her.

"I'm all right," she whispered. "All right. Only, only get me out of here. Can you?"

GENTLY Ed drew her up against him. She could stand. No bones broken. Thank God! He made a loop with a tight knot and slipped it about her wrists, fastening them securely together.

"Jerry," he directed, "lean against the wall, here, and hold your arms up. Still all right?"

She nodded.

Ed climbed the rope, braced himself, and by sheer strength and the desperation in him, lifted Jerry to the passage floor. He knew she had fainted; catching her in his arms and groping blindly, he carried her out to open air.

Now in daylight he saw the blue welt on her forehead. With water from his canteen he bathed her face, her throat. He took her in his arms again, and held her many minutes until she sighed, and drew herself up to look at him.

He released her. She sat on the rock floor, smiling faintly.

"What a fool I am! I should have known there would be a trap somewhere. I've seen those pits before. What a little fool! And that's what you must be thinking too. I was idiotic. I'm sorry."

Impulsively Ed took her hand. "Hush such talk! Lord! I've been petrified. If anything had happened to you!" He broke off, let his arm fall, and sat staring out across the Valley of the Caves.

Dusk was beginning to darken there, though sunlight was still on the rim. He knew in a few minutes they must go and meet Pap Welton.

HE turned to Jerry. "No; it isn't what a little idiot you are that I'm thinking. It's that you are something else. And I've got to tell you. Back there,"—he nodded toward the passage with its pit trap at the end—"back there I swore you should never go into one of those places again. But I haven't the right to ask that, have I?"

Her head was bent, her eyes fixed downward and away from him; yet he saw the warm color flood her cheeks. She did not answer.

"I have told you of a dream of mine," he continued. "Of my hopes for things there on San Verde Mesa. That dream has come back this past week, Jerry, stronger than ever. Because I've seen you in it. I know I shouldn't ask now; but some day I'm going to."

Still she held her head bowed, brown hair half-shielding her face.

Suddenly she did look at him, unashamed. "Ed, you're splendid. And I'll confess that I've been thinking of that dream too, this past week. It's beautiful, and fine, and—and I'd love it! But you must not ask me; you mustn't."

Again she turned. And Ed, though he himself had admitted that he should not want her answer now, was troubled, for his reason and hers did not seem the same. Something in her voice, in a quick look, told that. His reason was because of the work she must finish here, and her father's death so recently. Hers was something more. What?

Ed stood up. From across the valley Pap Welton came trudging toward the cut bank where they had hidden their horses.

"Nothin'," said the old man, when they reached him and asked what he had discovered about the tracks. "This sure is the nothin'est country I ever seen!"

They mounted and rode toward camp.

"Tracks come from nowhere, go nowhere," Pap continued. "No sign of a spring, or any water-hole where a party might stay, either. But some one's livin' here in the valley."

"Perhaps a good many miles up," Jerry suggested.

"No water to the north," Pap refused. "I'm plumb certain of that!"

Ed had ridden in silence. "Part of Black Wolf's ancestors were Keres Indian," he reminded them now. "Those ancients lived all along this place—and had water. Perhaps some knowledge that we don't know about has been handed down to him."

Tomorrow, he decided, he and Pap could put in the day together. No use running more risks with an enemy camp secreted somewhere near.

BUT that plan was not to be carried out. Angel came stumbling through the twilight even before they had reached the grass patch.

"The horses!" she blurted. "That Pedro! They—"

Ed drew rein beside her. "Here now, Angel. What is it? Horses stolen?"

"No, no. Not gone. Today I go hunt for that *yerba buena.* That lazy Pedro sleep. Those horses, they come, break in the grain-sacks. It is eat—all eat!" She stood wringing her hands, her round form shaking in misery.

Ed spurred into camp. His animals had cleared the grass-patch in a week. Now if the grain had been— It had. In a glance he saw the broken gunny-sacks; saw that what feed had not been eaten was lost beyond recovery in the trampled gravel.

By the time Jerry rode in, he was already putting a pack on one of his mules.

"Ed?" she asked. "What—"

"Feed's gone, sure enough," he answered. "Not a day's supply left, and we can't afford to let our stock go lean. May need 'em." Jerry swung off and he looked at her with a smile. "This is going to be one flying trip! I'll take shortcuts and ought to make San Verde tomorrow morning sometime. That will throw me back here the day after."

She did not speak then. But when he had mounted Zuni, she gave him her hand, reaching up, her head tilted to the starlight.

"Yes, Ed, hurry—hurry back!"

"You know I will," he answered; and wheeling, he carried away that starry vision of this girl whose face seemed now at the end of all the trails he was ever to travel.

CHAPTER VII

"WELL, by thunder, if you aren't just the man I'm looking for!" Sheriff Watt swung amiably around in his swivel-chair as Ed entered the office.

"Sit down," Watt continued. "How are things anyway? What's doing over in the Valley of the Caves?"

Ed took a chair. "Not much that you can see," he answered. "Plenty that you can't."

"So?" Watt questioned. "The old curse at work, is it? Explain. Or here—maybe you can give me some light on these things first."

He waved a heavy hand toward some papers on his desk. Ed saw that most of them were telegrams.

"Been considerable correspondence back and forth between me and New York City," the Sheriff went on. "I was figuring maybe I'd have to travel over into that country of yours, which would be a real chore for a man of my weight."

"Come on!" Ed broke in. "What's happened?"

"Well," said Watt, "I reckon now I'll make you a deputy for the time being. Then if you run across a certain party, you can bring him in—or leave him there in a nice long nap—I don't care which."

"Who you talking about?" Ed demanded.

"Why, a fellow that the New York police want. Nothing definite on him, exactly, but they think he knows how old Andrew Logan happened to cash in so sudden. Leastwise this man disappeared the same night the thing was done. They believe he came out here—having a good reason to come."

"Thompson?" Ed asked.

"No. By the way, where is he?"

"In the valley. Black Wolf led him there. But go on—who is it the New York police want?"

"Fellow by the name of Darcy," Watt stated. "Alan Darcy; and they think he came this way because he's engaged to marry Miss Logan."

"Engaged?" Ed repeated. "Nothing in it!" he said flatly. "She isn't engaged."

But even as he spoke, there flashed before him that moment in the cave mouth, and her words: "You mustn't ask me, you mustn't." Was this the answer to what he had wondered then?

"Well," Watt was saying, "here are the telegrams. Read 'em yourself."

Ed picked up the papers. Out of all the words upon them, one alone caught his eye: *"Fiancé. Alan Darcy, the fiancé of—"* He read no further.

Slowly he took his chair again, reached for tobacco and rolled a cigarette. Jerry engaged!

"Too bad, son," grinned Watt unmercifully. "Perhaps you had your eyes trained on the girl. Never mind. Run this Darcy down, and you can have her!" He leaned back, squinting thoughtfully.

"Here's the way I've doped it: Old man Logan's dead. If Darcy knows too much, he'll get to the girl and hitch up with her as soon as he can. Later on, she wouldn't turn around and put her own husband in bad."

He sat pondering, then continued: "Well, Darcy didn't come through here. The only other way he could get to the Valley of the Caves is by having himself packed clean from the east side of the State. Which is about what he has done. Now you say Thompson is over in the Valley?"

Ed nodded.

"Looks like a treasure-hunt, all right."

"It is."

Watt considered. Then he sank deeper into his chair. "Well, I'm passing the buck to you, son. Here's a badge." He flipped one from his desk drawer. "You're a deputy now. See what you can make of it."

Mechanically Ed put the badge in his shirt pocket. He said only: "I'll be starting back in an hour, soon as I load some grain and get the mail."

He stepped out into the street. . . . Jerry engaged!

IT had become a habit of Ed Young's adopted from Pap Welton, to travel cross-country by routes other than the well-known ones. He enjoyed a change of scenery; also there was less chance of a surprise meeting around the next turn of the trail.

The trip to San Verde had taken the night and half a day. Now in the afternoon of that same day he pushed east again. He made good time, passed up the rimrock ravine before midnight, rested his pack-mule and Zuni two hours at the spring there; and then, upon reaching the broad plain above, angled northward instead of taking the previous course a little to the south.

Going north would bring him a few miles above camp when he came out of the red hills. He wanted to reconoiter, following a hunch that the mystery of the tracks Pap had found should no longer go unsolved. Black Wolf knew the Valley of the Caves even better than Jerry did. Somewhere he had found a place to hide Thompson's party.

IT was past midafternoon next day when Ed Young came out of the hills and crossed the flat toward the valley rim. Before reaching the jump-off, he dismounted, and leaving both the mule and Zuni anchored, went on afoot. Automatically he loosened the gun in his belt. He had slipped a rifle from its saddle scabbard, and carried it now in the hollow of his left arm.

At the rim he lay full length, looking over. For a moment his position was not clear. Then he recognized a white-banded section of the cañon wall opposite. Hanging House was some three miles below that. Only huge boulders showed on the level bottom, their shadows now beginning to lengthen.

Ed went back to his horse, mounted and rode until almost above Hanging House. There he crept again to the rim. Instantly his eyes picked out two dark objects moving below; Jerry on a splotched pinto, Pap Welton riding a mule. They were not far from the cave where usually the animals were kept hidden. Ed understood that. They had again been hunting an entrance.

His glance swept ahead of them, behind them—stopped suddenly. Two other objects were moving now, two men afoot emerging from the shadow of a rock. For a moment they stood watching the mounted figures, then turned and went swiftly up the valley bottom. In the tall one Ed recognized Black Wolf. The other was too indistinct in the fading light. Presently they vanished under the cliff overhang. But they appeared again, this time riding horses at a run.

He sprang to Zuni, left his pack-mule standing with rope down, and raced parallel to those men below. At intervals he halted, looked cautiously, rode again as they continued. At about five miles above Hanging House, they turned sharply toward the far wall.

A low-roofed cave lay ahead of them. They drew rein, swung off, and then Ed saw other figures running from the cavern mouth. He counted four in all, squinted hard, counted once more to make certain. Four? That would be Black Wolf, Thompson, Gregg, and—

There could be no mistake. Three had followed from San Verde. This fourth one's name was Darcy. Jerry's fiancé had come!

Ed rode south to pick up his pack-mule, rode on then to the chute, slid down, and decided, by the time he reached camp, not to report all he had learned this day. Pap and Jerry should be told about Black Wolf's hiding-place, but not about Darcy. Of that man there was much he wanted to know first.

"You're late," was Pap's greeting.

"Some," Ed admitted.

"Trouble?" Jerry asked.

"No," he answered, busy with the pack-lash.

Unsaddling, he explained of having swung north, and described Black Wolf's cave there.

Later, over the supper fire, he felt Jerry's eyes seeking his. He avoided them, knowing surely she realized he was holding something back. He took refuge in talk. They still had discovered no way into Hanging House.

"Well then," he said, "I have a plan." It had been formed on his trip from San Verde. "Tomorrow we'll work it out."

CHAPTER VIII

ED YOUNG found in the morning that Jerry had thought of the same plan, but she had put it aside.

"You can't!" she refused. "I won't let you take the risk!" And in that objection he found a strange relief.

His plan was to have himself lowered over the cliff, then manage somehow to swing in upon the floor of Hanging House cave.

"Three hundred feet of rope would do it," he insisted. "I brought some from San Verde. With our pack-lashes, spliced together, it would be plenty strong enough, and long enough."

Jerry shook her head, her gray-blue eyes filled with trouble. "No; nothing is worth that."

Pap stood watching them quizzically. "What the Billy-hell are you two wranglin' about?" he broke in. "We come here to get into Hangin' House, didn't we? And there's no way up, cross-cut nor sidewise; we know that, don't we? Only thing left is to swing down, sure. Ed, you're right! Jerry, don't you fuss about him. Now come along!"

So it was settled.

By midmorning they had spliced the ropes, had cut two juniper posts, and were on the cliff rim directly over Hanging House. With an ax Ed sharpened the junipers and drove them deep into the earth, one a pace behind the other, and both back some ten feet from the drop-off.

"Double anchor," he explained. "Not likely that one would pull out; but with two there's no danger at all." He picked up the spliced ropes. "Now let's pull knots in this thing about every so far. That will give me hand-holds."

Both Jerry and Pap worked with him, tying knots. When the job was finished, he coiled the whole line, stepped to the cliff edge and tossed it over. Lying flat, he looked down. The line hung free, with the upper end secured by double hitches around the juniper posts.

He gave Jerry a grin of reassurance. "Couldn't be better if I had wings! Now what do you want done down there? I thought I'd get a general idea of the cave, perhaps poke around for a while in case there might be an exit of some sort, then come back up and talk it over."

"That's enough," she answered quickly. "Don't stay long. If you are not here again in an hour, I'm going to come down myself!"

Ed laughed.

"I mean it!" she declared. "I'm not in favor of this at all."

Ed swung his legs over the brink and sat sweeping his gaze both north and south along the valley bottom. It lay shadowless and glaring white under the sun that was now close to noon. He turned to the flat land behind him. Only gray brush-tufts showed there, stretching motionless off toward the red hills.

"Well," he grinned, "this show seems to be all our own. Here's luck!"

He took a twist of rope about his right boot, grasped the line in gloved hands and slid over. His last sight of Jerry was her dark head bent to watch. Beyond her Pap squatted, smoking his pipe.

DESCENT was hard at first, for the cliff bellied slightly outward, and he went down dragging against the rock. Then the face straightened, became perpendicular. Presently it curved in, and he hung free. The turn of rope about his boot made a brake with which his movement could be checked at any time. The knots, spaced at fifty-foot intervals, gave firm hand-holds and a chance to release the pressure of his legs.

He went down rapidly from knot to knot. Then the sliding line began to burn his gloves, forcing him to go hand over hand. "Not so good," he thought. On top, three hundred feet had seemed a short distance. But not now. His face burned; sweat broke out on his forehead, came into his eyes. Gravel showered from overhead where the rope was pressed against the bellying surface. In his mind flashed a vision of strands fraying upon sharp points. . . .

Even before the cave itself came in sight, he knew the cliff's curve was holding him too far out. At last the dark mouth was at his eye-level. He reached a knot and rested, slowly spinning to the rope's twist.

Unlike other dwellings in the valley, Hanging House was carved mainly out of virgin rock. The frontal tiers of rooms, which he had seen from below, were but a small part of it, built close to the lip, while from his position now he saw that a great cavern had been hollowed back to an invisible depth.

For a moment he considered his next move. Might start a giant swing and

drop onto the cave floor. There was plenty of rope. The trick would be to keep an end of it with him. Lose that, and he'd be bound to find how the Keres people got out of this place! He looked up, shook his head. Couldn't take a chance on that rock above. His line would wear apart if he swung much. He looked down. A length of pack-lash was still below him. Easy. Throw a loop!

He drew up the dangling section, made a running slip-knot and gathered the coils in his free hand. His first cast for a boulder lying on the cave lip fell short. The length of rope dropped. It was not as easy as it had looked, with himself a human pendulum swaying to every move, the boulder at an awkward angle almost level with his shoulders, and a dizziness gradually whirling in his head.

Clinging one-handed, he made his loop again. His arms were tiring. It flashed to him that this cast had to be good. Couldn't hold on much longer. He thought of the three-hundred-foot climb up. Might as well be three hundred miles. Never make it without rest first.

"Now then," he said aloud.

His loop whirled, swung in, settled.

"That's better."

It had caught around the boulder top. He shook it down about the base, then taking up the slack, drew himself in. Solid rock of the cave floor felt good beneath his boots. He crawled back from the edge and rolled a cigarette.

"Well, here we are!"

SMOKE tasted good too. Ed grinned. Funny how flirting with eternity makes you thankful for small things afterward! He looked around, thinking of what Jerry had told him about Hanging House. It was supposed to have been used for religious ceremonies. The one in power lived up here, told others what to do, collected tribute to the gods and stored it in hidden vaults. Sometimes the one in power was a witch-woman. A night not long ago Jerry had read aloud by the camp-fire a record which her father had transcribed from the walls of a lower cliff cave. It gave the curse put upon Hanging House by the last witch-woman in control there.

Ed had laughed. The Keres were a superstitious lot! So was he this minute, just a little! Up here was not of the real world. Easy enough to believe anything. He crushed out his cigarette and stood up. Believe anything, almost—but not quite that to enter the treasure vault would bring sudden death, even if a witch-woman had threatened it.

There was no choice of an entrance. The solid front wall had but a single narrow door, though in coming down, he had seen the cavern hollowed behind this tier of rooms. With the death curse still in his thoughts, he tossed a rock first before entering. No triggers fixed to tumble the whole thing on his head. He looked at his watch. Half an hour gone. Jerry had said she would come herself in an hour. And she would! No time to lose then, if he wanted to explore a bit on this trip.

LIGHTING a candle, Young stepped across the threshold, passed the first room in a few paces and came into a passage not high enough for him to stand upright. Its sides were cut as straight and smooth as if chiseled by quarrymen's tools. Soon it ended in a domed chamber. He halted to take his bearings. So far, his course had been on a line directly back from the outer cave face. He was perhaps one hundred feet inside. Fresh air moved about him. Good sign. Moving air had to have an intake and an outlet. Now let's see—

Across the smooth floor of the chamber he approached a second passage. This sloped downward, twisted twice on itself. Ed took a piece of paper from his pocket and began to drop bits on the rock as he walked. Things were getting complicated. The back-trail might not be clear without these paper markers. The passage turned again, forked.

Ed stopped. "Now what?"

By recalling angles and dips of the way he had come, he felt certain that one prong of this fork led parallel to the cliff surface; the other struck deeper underground and straight in.

He looked at his watch, and frowned. Time was up. Well, next trip down, he'd start here. This was something to report to Jerry. She had a map made from picture-drawings thought to represent Hanging House. Perhaps they could trace this forked passage.

Reluctantly he went back along his paper scraps. His curiosity was high; things had just begun to be interesting.

At the cave mouth he saw his loop still around the boulder. He continued toward it, drawing on his gloves, wondering if his arm would stand the long pull up. No trouble if he took his time. Jerry and Pap would know he was coming by the way the rope—

Ed halted. Until this instant, coming out into daylight, he had not seen that his line no longer curved upward under the cave roof, but lay out over the lip and down. He sprang to it, drew it up hand over hand. The whole three hundred feet were there. The end had been chopped cleanly with an ax.

CHAPTER IX

ED had foreseen that something might work to prevent his return up the rope. He was prepared to begin here at Hanging House and search for a way down. Now in the moment of standing fixed, with the cut rope in his hand, the fear that flooded him was not for his own position. What had happened above? What of Jerry? Pap? He had heard no shooting. But the sound of shots would not have carried to him here; and he had been far inside the cave. A battle might have been fought up there, and he wouldn't have heard it!

He turned back. Action relieved the hopelessness of thought. Once again at the passage fork, where had seemed the most logical chance of finding an exit of some sort, he stopped, held up his candle and studied the two openings. To the left certainly would take him straight back in the cliff. Might as well look at it first, though, and be sure.

With his candle penetrating only a few feet into the dark, he moved on, feeling his way more than seeing it. The passage floor was as level, and the walls cut as square and true, as a mine tunnel. It was this thought of a mine that drew Ed to a sudden halt.

Gravel had rattled down upon him. A smell of dry dust had come into the air. He stepped back. From having been in deserted prospect diggings with Pap Welton, he had learned that this smell of dust was a warning. Cave-ins sometimes followed.

For ages this passage had not been disturbed by so much as the vibration of a man's footsteps. Ed walked more lightly. "I'll make a guess you've gone far enough," he decided in a moment.

From the looks of it, anyway, this cut would never lead him outside. He turned to the right-hand prong of the fork. At once it gave him the feeling of being the course he wanted. His sense of direction was good. Even underground, through gradual turns that were more deceptive than sharp angles, he could place north and south, and knew he was following parallel to the outer cliff wall.

Yet the thing was endless. It seemed hours that he felt on, goaded by his helplessness, though unable to go faster than a groping step at a time.

One candle burned to his fingers. He lighted another. Only the fact that the passage began to slope steeply downward kept him from turning back. Then suddenly his light flickered. He felt a warm gust on his face where before there had been a cold dampness.

With his next step a dry hiss burst almost underfoot. He sprang aside, gun drawn, shooting at the glint of a flat rising head.

The roar deafened him. But the rattler lay in a mass of quivering coils, and in that snake's being here, he felt relief. For rattler snakes stay close to the warmth of sunshine. This one had come from outside, and not far. Gun in hand, he went on.

Shortly the corridor floor broke into steps cut from the rock. He went down. There came a turn, another flight of stairs— Then his boot touched—nothing.

He drew back, bent and looked. Only a black hole met his eyes.

Ed straightened up, considering. Stairs leading to a pit? Not a deep one, either, for a rock tossed in struck bottom a few feet down. Deep enough for a trap, though, like that other . . . . Faintly across from him came an outline of the pit's edge. A scar on the rock—white, freshly broken—identified it clearly.

"Well, I'll be—"

Quickly he uncoiled the climbing-rope from about his waist. Even the knob where yesterday he had hooked his loop was visible now. This was the same hole Jerry had stumbled into!

He made a cast, caught the knob, swung down to the bottom and climbed up. Now everything was clear. At some time this must have been filled with water—enough to drown a human in. It was a trap guarding the stairway to Hanging House!

No time now to consider that discovery. He ran through the familiar corridor, and came onto the shelf of the lower cave. It was already sundown in the valley outside.

WHEN the grass-patch showed ahead dimly in the twilight, he turned under a cut bank and stood watching. No movement showed there. He approached closer. A cigarette's red tip

winked at the base of the lone juniper tree. Ed made out Pedro's shape, sprawled lazily as usual on the ground.

Sight of the Mexican smoking peacefully was reassuring, and Ed took a long breath. Perhaps nothing so desperate had happened, after all. Up there in Hanging House he had thought too much about the curse on it, and hours of stumbling down the passages had not helped.

A dark bulk rose and took the form of Angel. She walked to a heap of blankets. It was then that Ed saw Pap Welton's gray hair, and he continued into camp.

ANGEL turned with a scowl as he approached.

"No," she warned. "Don't come."

But Pap had heard, and rose weakly onto one elbow. "How the—"

Ed bent over him. "There's an entrance to Hanging House through the lower cave," he said. "Stairs leading beyond a pit. I came down that way. What happened? Where's Jerry?"

"Black Wolf took her." Pap dropped back. "I shoulda smelt him! I—"

"You get her!" Angel ordered, clutching Ed's arm. "You leave him. He hurt some."

"Tried to make me tell," Pap explained. "Thought we knew how to get in. Black Wolf and two others."

But Ed had whirled into the night. "I'm going to their camp," he flung back. "Pete! Run in a horse." He heard a sharp sputter from Angel, and turned. Pap was trying to stand up.

Ed went back to him. "Leave this to me. I know something about one of those men that I haven't told. I'll explain later."

He threw a saddle onto the horse that Pete sent in and raced north. Full night had come by the time he approached the hidden cave several miles up the valley from Hanging House. Halting at a distance, with the valley wall looming ahead, the black opening slitted at its base, he dismounted and went on afoot.

So far, he had come with no definite plan of action. He must manage to see Jerry, get close enough in to understand the lay of things first, then decide.

The way was up a sharp incline strewn with boulders. Except that he had taken his bearings from a bold face like an Indian's profile in the cliff outline, Ed now would have been unable to distinguish this cave from others that marked the valley sides.

Boulders melted into one another, only their round gray tops showing as if thrust up from a black sea. From the cave came no visible light—no sign of human beings within miles of this spot. Yet surely somewhere a guard stood watch.

Ed bent and studied the ground. His eye picked out a stray line of hoofmarks. He followed those, came presently to the rut of a trail. Then in the moment of discovery he stepped back, crouching into a rock's blackness.

Two figures had emerged from the direction of the cave. They approached slowly, their voices indistinct. One argued; the other replied in quiet tones. This last, Ed recognized. The pair passed so close along the trail that he could have reached out and touched the one nearest him. It was Jerry.

She walked with her hand in the crook of a man's elbow, unafraid, not at all a prisoner, but apparently going with him as willingly as if on an evening's stroll.

As they moved past, the man said: "You understand, don't you, Jerry? We haven't much time to talk out here. I'll prove everything when we go back to New York. Is that all right?"

There came an interval of silence. Then the girl's answer: "Yes, I think I understand. It must be all right, Alan, it must!"

Ed crouched heavily against the boulder. Alan? Alan Darcy! Then it was true—all of it. Words rang in his ears: "*—when we go back to New York.*" The night flashed red before his eyes. His hands clenched with a surge of madness that was more than anything else his own desperation. . . . He gained control. What was the use of that? Jerry's answer had been voluntary enough. "It must be all right, Alan."

FOR two days Ed had been crowding this from his thought. Jerry was not engaged; she was not! She would not have played him, at the same time being promised to another. But she had walked here now with Darcy, her hand on his arm, agreeing with his, "—when we go back to New York." Those words were plain statement.

If Ed's natural alertness had not gone dead with hearing that, he would have stood up from the boulder's shelter more cautiously. But he had little care for what happened now.

He rose. A gun-hammer clicked. A third figure, following behind the other two, loomed out of the night.

As they moved past, the man said: "I'll prove everything when we go back to New York."

"Keep your hands up, brother," it said. And for the moment, to be caught by the greenhorn Thompson filled Ed only with disgust.

CHAPTER X

"WELL, we are surprised at your joining us, but you're welcome, brother. Yes sir, the most welcome man we could think of! Have a seat."

Ed remained standing. In the yellow light of kerosene lanterns hung on the cave walls, Thompson's hard slate eyes peered out from a face now heavy with black stubble.

"Welcome," he went on, "because we're curious. How'd you get down from Hanging House, anyway? That's what we want to know, and I think you're going to tell us. Or maybe you can show us, better. How about it? Might as well start, hadn't we? Things happen, you know, in this Valley of the Caves. No use staying here too long, from what I've heard." He turned. "Wolf, get the horses!"

From the shadows behind him Black Wolf emerged, his eyes momentarily fixing Ed's as he walked deeper into the cave. There were more indistinct forms back of Thompson: Gregg, the white, untanned face of Alan Darcy—and near him the one pair of eyes that in all the group Ed was trying hard to read.

Thompson took an impatient step. "Well? Maybe you don't get my drift, brother. I'm asking you to show us the way to Hanging House. If asking isn't enough, then—"

"Oh, save it!" Ed broke in. "You don't interest me any. There's only one voice here that I'll listen to." He faced Jerry, hoping to make himself clear to her. "I hired out to Miss Logan at the beginning of this trip. She's still boss."

But she said only:

"Take us up the way you came down."

For one second Ed stared across the lantern-light to her. Yet she meant that. No mistake. "All right," he said slowly. "I will." So be it! She wanted him to lead this pack up the secret stairs to Hanging House. Well, he could do that. Afterward— He shrugged cynically. Dreams of trails going on forever! How had he figured that, anyway!

Black Wolf brought horses from back within the cavern. The party mounted. Ed went outside to his own animal, Thompson riding at his side, a gun close to the man's right hand. Ed's revolver had been taken, his knife too; yet the deputy sheriff's badge in his shirt pocket had been missed. His hand brushed it as he swung upon Zuni, and he was glad that Sam Watt had not come himself. What good would it do to arrest Darcy here? Only make more trouble for Jerry. And even now, no matter what had happened, nor what would happen, his part was to save her from as much of that as he could.

On the way to the lower cave beneath Hanging House, Jerry and Darcy rode close together, talking. Ed was kept in the lead, flanked by Thompson and Black Wolf. It was not until they had passed the pit trap by means of his rope, and were climbing the rock stairs, that he was allowed near the girl.

With too obvious indifference Thompson and Gregg pushed ahead, followed at a pace by Black Wolf. Ed was unguarded, save that both Jerry and Darcy were behind. What did Thompson expect him to do? Break away? Or talk to Jerry? His carelessness had some purpose. For that reason Ed held to his solitary place in the dim candle-lighted procession, neither falling back to be near Jerry, nor turning to look at her.

Coming at last to the fork, where the stairway passage entered into the one at right angles, Thompson stopped. He was visibly excited when Ed approached.

"Which way?"

Ed nodded. "Straight in."

Thompson held his candle higher, throwing its glow along the narrow cut. He seemed to hesitate, yet at a word from Black Wolf, went on.

The 'breed showed a tense face also, but he controlled it better than did the white man. He stalked forward with his tall body bent, head down like some animal following spoor.

In time the walls began to swing apart. The corridor ceiling struck upward. Thompson, Gregg and Black Wolf were now far in the lead, lights flickering to their eager pace. They halted. Ed heard a startled oath from Thompson, a grunt from Black Wolf, and saw beyond them the hollow of a great room.

He too stopped, the others coming close behind him. Suddenly one brushed past, Darcy stumbling on down the widening passage, his eyes fixed in a stare upon the treasure vault of Hanging House. It lay revealed beneath the combined lights of the three motionless men; riches in blue turquoise, streaks of fire opal glowing in broken rock. Gold was there, Ed knew, lying in dark ore heaps, and back in deep wall-recesses.

He heard Jerry gasp. There was no other sound save the scuffling of Darcy running to join those forms ahead.

SUDDENLY Thompson whirled, and grinned. His lips moved as he spoke to Black Wolf. But already, as if knowing well what was expected of him, the 'breed had drawn his gun.

Three shots burst in a shattered report. The first was for Darcy, plunging up to see the treasure he would share. He crumpled in his tracks. The next two clipped the cave wall where Ed and Jerry had been. Yet with that flash of a grin on Thompson's face, it was clear to Ed why he and Jerry and Darcy had been kept behind. From the beginning, their death was planned for this moment.

With the drop of Black Wolf's hand to his gun, he flung down his light, one arm sweeping Jerry backward into the dark. They tripped, his grasp still locked. Next step brought them hard against a rock face. It was Jerry who took the force of it, and he heard her sharp breath. Then a fourth shot thundered. He knew that it had not come out of Black Wolf's gun, but from back toward the forks. It exploded with the force of a cannon. Underfoot, the rock floor vibrated. From overhead came a rain of gravel. He smelled dust, and that alone was vivid in his senses as he lifted Jerry bodily and ran with her up the passage.

Even as he ran, he was aware of the gun's roar echoing strangely, suddenly louder, growing into a crash like falling water. He turned his head. Darcy lay motionless just within the great room. All others stood with hands raised through an instant of terror, as if they could hold up the mass of a crumbling roof. Next the sight was blotted by a deluge of rock. The last Ed saw before candles were snuffed out and there was left only the deafening thunder of the cave-in, was Darcy's feeble attempt to rise. Jerry saw it, too, and sank in a limp weight against him.

Ed Young ran on, carrying Jerry, with dust rolling outward in a choking vapor. He knew what had happened—a geologist would say a fault had slipped from the guns' vibration; but in that moment he thought of the curse upon Hanging House, and above the grinding rock there seemed to wail a high-pitched chanting voice.

Down the passage he came upon another figure also stumbling out.

"Pap?" he gasped.

"Keep a-comin'!" said the old man. "I'm all right."

Together they reached the fork and went on to the safety of the main house.

"Tried to come sooner," Welton said in a breath. "Been followin' you." He stooped as Ed placed Jerry on the floor. "She hurt?"

"No. Not hurt—not that way. She saw—" What she had seen came to Ed with a surge of feeling for her. "She saw the man she was to marry—saw him killed in there."

Pap had a canteen. He wet Jerry's face. Her eyes opened. One hand came up, fumbling through the dim light until it clutched Pap's sleeve.

"Is he—" she begged. "Where is—"

HUNCHING down, Pap Welton put a gnarled arm about her shoulders. "Hush now, child," he soothed her. "Hush. You're all right. Sure you are. Don't you worry none at all."

Ed was standing, tense with his own desire to take her up, kiss her pleading lips. Yet he knew that plea was for another.

He turned away with sudden resolution. "Pap, I'll go to camp and get things comfortable. Angel can do more than either of us. You bring Jerry to the foot of the stairs."

He said nothing of what he himself would do. At camp he called Pedro, ordered him to take horses back to the cave below Hanging House, then told Angel about Jerry.

"When Pap Welton brings her in," he finished, "tell him I've gone to San Verde."

And almost the next he knew, Zuni was carrying him through sunlight, with the squat San Verde adobes just ahead.

CHAPTER XI

"AND now what?" asked Sam Watt, leaning forward in his swivel-chair.

Ed sat facing him. He had given his report, and turned in his deputy's badge. Also he had told much of his story, for he had to talk, and Sam Watt had long been a friend.

"You aint noways going to let a girl break you up in business?" Watt continued. "Shucks, when you came in here, I thought something had happened! Forget her. There's more!"

Ed forced a grin. "Sure, plenty. But when you've opened up the way I did to this one, and found that your ideas sort of jog along with hers, and then have felt pretty certain that you were the man—" He broke off, and rocked onto his feet. Again he was the Ed Young of but ten days past—slow and lazy-looking, like a true Westerner; and like one, accepting the deal as dealt him.

"Well, hell!" he said. "I'm going home. Pap will be bringing the party into town soon. I don't want to be here when they come."

He rode out beyond the adobe town and up the trail to San Verde Mesa. It was dusk when he came within sight of his buildings, and full dark by the time he approached along the fenced lane to his corrals.

At the same moment that he was aware of animals in the enclosure, where there should be none, he heard ax-strokes off toward his house and rode that way.

Pap Welton had both arms full of stove-wood. He dropped it. "Where the Billy-hell have you been?" was his greeting. "What kind of a pup are you, anyhow, runnin' out like that where you're needed most!"

"I wasn't needed," Ed denied. "My job was done. You took care of things, didn't you?"

The old man bristled. "Took care of things! Why, you—"

"Look here, Pap," Ed told him bluntly, "for once you've poked into something you don't know about. You shouldn't have brought Miss Logan here."

Pap came closer out of the dark. He took the bridle-reins from Ed's hand.

"You get on up there to the house!" he ordered. "Tell an old man twicet your age he don't know nothin'? Why, you young jackass! I know enough to tan your hide, if you give that girl another minute's trouble—ever!"

"But she—" Ed began.

"The hell she did!" Pap retorted. "She didn't care about that Darcy. Never did. I know. Didn't we talk the night plumb through? Maybe she was engaged to him, oncet; but what of it! Then he come out here sayin' she was the only one that could help him; he was in trouble. And what sort is she? Sure she'd help him. Then when all that was over, and she needed you—poor kid lyin' there askin' for you, you're gone." He shook a knotted fist. "You travel!"

Beyond an arched opening in the adobe wall around Ed's house were three stone steps leading up to the level of his patio. He did not see the figure standing on the topmost one, until he had let himself in and closed the gate. Then he saw her—not a girl in boyish shirt and breeches, but a small dim form like smoke-weed, gray—motionless against the night.

"YOU'VE been a long time coming," said Jerry clearly. "And I've wanted to talk to you."

She moved down a step. "I know what you're thinking. You ought to be told that he—"

"I have been told," Ed answered. "And I'm the one who should explain. My job wasn't finished exactly, and I did run off before you had found what you went for."

"You mean the Keres gold?" asked Jerry, leaning a little to look at him. "That treasure is gone forever—buried, and thank heaven it is! But there was another I found there, and couldn't take then." She floated nearer; she was on the last step. "I can, now."

She was in Ed's arms, had drifted into them through the mist that was clouding his eyes. Tightly he held her, fear flooding him that she was not real, that this was not real, but would go the way of his other dreams. He bent his head, barely touching her lips.

"Treasure," he whispered, "you are the treasure!"

Fervently he kissed her then; and for him, in that moment, his question of life was answered.

THE END

Wherein a demon detective (dark black in complexion) ferrets out his quarry in a whippet-race crowd, and is himself run down by a mechanical rabbit.

By ARTHUR K. AKERS

Illustrated by Everett Lowry

Bugwine Goes to the Dogs

"NOT only is you fall down on recognizin' dat crook 'Six-ace' Reed," roared Detective Columbus Collins at his dusky five-foot aide "Bugwine" Breck, "but you drives de car he stole across de Georgia State-line *for* him! Makin' de offense Federal, and de fifty bucks' reward for him a gone goose for our agency!"

Mr. Breck shivered and lifted dull eyes to the Collins detective agency's wall, where a tattered poster again roweled him with its front and profile views of the elusive Six-ace, listed there as wanted and as an inveterate frequenter of dog-tracks—whatever *they* were.

"Knows him next time," groaned Bugwine weakly.

"Aint gwine *be* no next time! Done took yourself for a ride too, when you rode dat crook out of Alabama wid you! Dat's how-come you is fired now. And—"

Without, brakes screeched interruptingly. Columbus glanced out the window, then whirled on his ex-assistant. "Git out de back way, too! Quick! Looks like classy clients comin' in: might think you still worked here!"

As the rear door banged on the discharged and discredited Bugwine, a knock resounded on the front; and, "Who de big bad detective round here?" a large overdressed darky was demanding as he looked down on the six-foot Columbus.

"I is," admitted Mr. Collins uncertainly.

The visitor pushed past him, trailed by a minor disturbance.

"Campus Barnes is my name," he said. "Runty boy back of me, Perennial Root. Both Montgomery-bound on business—and takin' de business wid us!"

Mr. Collins noted the metropolitan polish of his callers, and swelled: he had got rid of Bugwine just in time!

"Us needs a detective," Mr. Barnes sounded even better than he looked.

"Smells 'em out whar others jest sniffs about," asserted Columbus.

"Boy what us is after is done been smelled out; he jest needs grabbin' now," interposed Mr. Root.

"So what us craves," resumed the bulky Mr. Barnes, "aint so much detectin' as dumbness in de head—"

"What us craves," said the bulky Mr. Barnes, "aint so much detectin' as dumbness in de head:"

"Boy workin' here, so dumb you cain't tell it when he's stunned!" Columbus boasted.

"What us is after," Campus qualified, "is one so dumb he cain't understand dog-racin'!"

"Bugwine cain't understand nothin'! Uh—what's de crime?"

"Aint no crime—yit!" Mr. Barnes cut his conversational boom to a bass whisper. "Dat's what us come here for—to git one, to hang on de boy us is got picked out for de crook, over in Montgomery. Your fee'll be ten bucks."

Mr. Collins' conscience all but yelped as he kicked it ruthlessly from between him and the ten dollars. "I furnishes de detective and de crime, too?" he demanded, perplexed.

"Is you git de ten dollars, you is. But us furnishes de crook."

Columbus' eyes grew slightly crossed, trying to follow his business around.

"Clarifies de case," Mr. Barnes rumbled to the rescue: "You knows de government is been payin' boys to plow up cotton, instead of pick it?"

"Sho is! Whole mess of 'em got more money now dan dey knows how to count."

"You is tellin' *me?*" Campus pointed proudly. "Look out de window dar!"

A glance showed—wedged into the rumble-seat of the clients' blue roadster, and alternating happily between a bag of bananas and a purple stalk of sugar-cane—an excessively rural darky, all eyes and appetite.

"Eighty dollars on de hoof! Government-money, and itchin' for action!" came Campus' assay-report. "Name is Amos Stump, and on his way to Montgomery wid us. Us gits him out of a roach-race, over at Epes."

"Roach—*huh?*"

"He was fixin' to bet his whole eighty in a roach-race—against a boy what had done already doped Amos' roach. Mess of crooks—"

"Better git back to de crook-catchin'," interposed the restless-eyed Mr. Root. His roving glance had been taking in the agency's bear-trap handcuffs and lenseless magnifying-glass, its yardstick, numerous framed wall-mottoes, and the posters offering intriguing rewards for capture of criminals—posters that supplied just what he needed!

"You said it, Perennial!" acquiesced Mr. Barnes affably. "And now, Mist' Collins, us slips you half your fee: other half to de detective on de job, C. O. D. when it's finished. Rally close now for de de-tails!"

If in the huddle that followed these details gave Columbus a pain in the pit of his conscience, he forthwith found Campus' pain-killer rustling soothingly in the itching palm of his hand. For to Columbus, framing the innocent held no pangs a five-spot could not heal; while the loom of the larger good completed the cure—the end justified the means. And that it left Bugwine on the spot was immaterial, to Columbus.

"*Bugwine!*" he bawled loudly.

Dubiously a discharged assistant sleuth appeared. "Meet Bugwine Breck, de human bloodhound!" his one-time chief proclaimed him to the clients. "Cain't even lie down widout turnin' round three times. Always gits his man. Mist' Breck's in full charge de agency's dog-racin' department."

Client looked at client. "Any dumber, and he'd come by de dozen, in a sack," whispered Mr. Root acquiescently upward to his associate.

"Mist' Barnes and Mist' Root, here, Bugwine," amplified Columbus, "is got out-of-town assignment for you. Dey tells you de rest in Montgomery."

Mr. Breck brightened until he was practically a moron: that Montgomery gin had more authority than a pair of sheriffs! "Rearin' to ride!" he bugled.

"But not wid us," Mr. Root objected instantly. "Springs him on Amos *dar!*"

"Bugwine'll be right back of you, on de agency's motorcycle," countered Columbus. Then, as the clients rejoined Amos outside: "Listen, louse! You aint hired, you's on probation. Flop *again,* and you is finished! But I gits call for a dumb detective—and you fills de order so full you slops over. And don't try to understand nothin': less you knows, less you messes up. Now, git gwine!"

IN the drab outskirts of Montgomery's "Peacock Tract" three hours later, a muddled detective under sealed orders coasted to a noisy halt. From the curb Perennial Root, the smaller client, was flagging him down.

"I rides to de Steamboat Hotel wid you now, in your side-car." Mr. Root was already stuffing himself into it. "But remember, I *still* aint know you!"

"Up in three-twelve—wid his key in my pocket," Campus answered the unspoken query in Mr. Root's eyes on arrival at the hotel. "Grazin' noble amongst his sugar-cane!"

"Whar-at Pharmacy Frazier, den?"

"Him? Why, old Drug-store's in de pool-room, honin' hisself to bet copious!"

"Boy, dat's brains!" admired Mr. Root—obscurely, to Bugwine.

"Brains aint started good yit. But us fixin' take Detective Bugwine out to de dog-track now—git de lay of de land in his knob good—"

Instantly Bugwine wasn't listening, for thinking. Dog-track! Posters said dog-tracks was where Six-ace Reed was most likely to be found! What if a boy's luck were to turn around and come back?

At the dog-course shortly after, the brightening Bugwine gaped gratifyingly at the oval track with its starting-stalls for the racing greyhounds; at the mechanical "rabbit" being trundled slowly around the course on the end of the arm projecting inward from the little electric car that circled its outer rim.

"See dat rabbit, Mist' Breck?" Campus directed his dizzied gaze.

"Sho hop hisself noble!" enthused the adenoidal Bugwine.

"You aint seen no hoppin' *yit!* Is you ever see a dog-track race?"

"Seen a horse-race!"

"Dog-race jest de same—only different. Customers bets on which dog gwine win. But dog got more sense'n a horse: he aint run without somethin' to chase. Dat whar *you* fixin' to come in—"

Bugwine was halfway to his motorcycle before his clients could head him off. "Aint gwine take *no* rabbit's place for de dawgs to chase!" squalled Mr. Breck in explanation of his flight. Memory—and three shot—still stung, from the time when Columbus had hired him out for the deer in a deer-hunt.

"Who says you is?" panted Mr. Barnes irritably. "Stand hitched while I illuminates. Is you see dat little two-story tower yander, right by de track?"

"Uh-huh." Mr. Breck still remained skittish below the knees.

"Well, *dat's* whar you comes in, I been tryin' tell you! Dat tower's locked. In it is whar dey regulates keepin' de rabbit ahead of de dogs; dar you does your stuff, and I fixes a race *right!* Like dis: cain't nobody git in dat tower durin' a race—except a officer of de law; dat's why us gits you. See?"

Bugwine saw—and swelled proudly.

"So you goes in," resumed Campus, "wid me right back of you. Two birds fixin' git smacked off one limb in dar tonight wid one rock. I fixes a race, but you—*you* cotches a crook. Makes yourself big money, and everybody hollerin' what a smart detective you is!"

Bugwine heard them. And if he couldn't understand what Campus Barnes was up to, he could understand big money, if somebody explained it to him. Happy fog enveloped him.

"NOW, git dis!" Both clients were clustering close. "Workin' de rabbit-control in dat tower is a crook. All you got do is grab him and collect."

For Mr. Breck, two and two finished clicking dazzlingly together. "You means I busts in dar and cotches a crook?" he pressed for confirmation.

"At de right time, yeah. And gits a big reward, too—"

"Who tell me de right time?"

"I is," Mr. Barnes was talking fast now. "Den you arrests—"

"Arrests *who?*"

"Six-ace Reed—" began Perennial.

"Six-ace Reed?" Bugwine battled joyously for belief! Six-ace, for whom there was that fifty-dollar reward still standing, was in the bag for Bugwine now!

"Workin' one dem towers is swell place for a crook to hide out—bein' all by hisself in 'em dat way," further confirmed Mr. Root.

Bugwine heard him dimly. Reward, regard, reinstatement in turn dazzled him.

"Me and Mist' Root is got heap of business to 'tend to before de races tonight whar you does your stuff, Mist'

"Wait—see how dat rabbit runs, first," counseled Campus. "Ricollect, you was about to lose your roll on a doped roach, over at Epes!"

Breck," Campus was interrupting. "Got to git in de tower den and makes everything come out right: me and you. So watch yo' step."

"Circulates myself on de motorcycle! Fixin' to strut my stuff!" By now, Mr. Breck was practically blinded by the brilliant glare of his own future.

"Circulate—but git back to de hotel before dark—wid your mouth still shet," cautioned Mr. Barnes. So far, he exulted privately, Bugwine was too dumb to be suspicious! Columbus was right.

"Mouth stays shet, regular," the elevated Mr. Breck was already headed for his mount. "Even wears mittens in bed, to keep from talkin' deaf-and-dumb in my sleep!"

Back at the hostelry, Campus turned to the ever-underfoot Mr. Root with: "Rally round wid Pharmacy now! Business 'bout to buzz! Starts surroundin' Amos' eighty, soon!"

"Pharmacy parked in de fish-stand, wid 'Don't Disturb' sign on his vest. How about checkin'-up on de rabbit?"

"Rabbit rearin' to run. Bible say, 'Amos and his money is soon parted.'" Then a detail occurred to Campus: "What de name of de crook you tells Bugwine he gwine arrest in dat tower tonight, Perennial?"

"Six-ace Reed."

"How-come you thunk up no such name as dat?"

"Aint think it up: gits it off one dem crook-wanted pasters pasted in agency."

Approval broke out on Mr. Barnes' face like a rash. "*You* got brains too!" he applauded. "Hangin' a *real* crook's name on a boy what aint never done nothin'!"

"Wonder who workin' in dat tower, nohow?" speculated Mr. Root idly.

"Aint know—and it aint matter," interjected Mr. Barnes briskly. "Whoever he is, he aint no Six-ace—and by de time Bugwine finds out he is done arrested de wrong boy, and turns him loose, *I* is done got into de tower, made de race come out right—and Amos' eighty come to us!"

Meantime, two hours and six speakeasies later, Bugwine Breck had checked dull care, and was calling strangers by their first names.

"*Whuff!* Dis here Bugga Homa gin sho laps noble!" he endorsed the native vintages thickly to a dusky, husky tablemate he had never seen before.

The table-mate, wearing a sad face and plaid plus-fours, appraised the loose-lipped and loose-lidded Mr. Breck at a discount, and in silence.

"Shays Bugwine Brecksh my name," persisted the little sleuth. "Gits my man."

The huge short-pants boy eyed Bugwine with the gaze ordinarily reserved for forms of life found under flat rocks in the woods.

"Who—who you think you is—de Tar Baby?" demanded Mr. Breck more loudly, as he counted himself in a mirror opposite. "Shays I come over here from Demop'lis, conf'dential, to do little mess of detectin'."

THE oversized boy's fingers flexed slowly. He eyed Mr. Breck's neck yearningly.

"Fixin' grab myself a crook *and* collect fifty bucks reward, too!" Station GIN was now getting both distance and volume. "Calls me de human bloodhound—"

"*I* aint care is you got fleas!" the silence was broken at last, suddenly and sourly.

"Grabs dat boy right off his rabbit-levers in dat dawg-race tower tonight," Mr. Breck expanded. "Me and 'nother boy fixin' tie dat tower up in a knot, tight—"

For a fuddled instant here Bugwine thought his companion had been shot off of his chair; then he realized that the other had merely fallen from it. Yet the fall had apparently loosened his tongue; already he was coming back up, all ears and interest. "At de *dog-track*, you says?" he demanded oddly.

Mr. Breck swelled. "Yeah!" he crowed. "At de dog-track—whar I rambles amongst de rabbits—cotchin' de crook what work de rabbit-lever in de tower."

"Crook named who?"

Such interest was flattering! Bugwine grew alcoholically arch, in consequence. "De-tective never names de sus-pect," he countered craftily.

Whereupon a new look shot across his new friend's face, and the plus-foured boy rose hastily. "Jest come over me, listenin' to you," he threw behind him, "dat I got a little job of *firing* to do. Got to git right on it!"

And he was gone, in haste and in a taxi.

Aromatic entry into the Steamboat Hotel an hour later caused the weaving Bugwine to re-rub his eyes: where he had had but two clients before, three stood in the lobby now; while, "—Here's our eighty bucks, Pharmacy—and us meets you at de track tonight; but remember you aint seen *us* in a month," Mr. Barnes completed some transaction.

The third member, a morose-looking darky with protruding eyes and heels, was already leaving. A brown derby, diagonal pockets in his coat, and a vest that would abash an awning, further distinguished him from the herd. "Dat was Pharmacy Frazier—everybody call him 'Drug-store'," Mr. Barnes indicated him. "How you set, Bug?"

"Right shmack in de middle of a itch—to arrest dat crook Six-ace!"

"Sho is organized-up, too!" Campus sniffed the aura of Mr. Breck critically. "Better go up and lay down, till you can tell difference between de tower and de rabbit."

"Way dat runt is now," foreboded Mr. Root after him, as Mr. Breck shambled elevatorward, "he's liable arrest a jedge, instead of boy in de tower he thinks is Six-ace."

"I be right wid him," reminded Campus. "Besides, aint matter who he arrests—jest so I gets in de tower behind him for long enough to fix one finish. Who*ever* he grabs jest be some boy workin' in tower, and us gits him loose from Bugwine right after it."

IN the darkness Bugwine awoke with a start, to find Campus Barnes laboring at his one side, and Perennial at the other.

"*Whuff!* Must have lapped up a overdose dat gin!" mourned Mr. Breck at last from his own bedside. "Sho wisht I knew who I was out wid!"

"Couple of more snorts of dat Bugga Homa owl-milk," Mr. Barnes spoke harshly, "and you'd have been 'out' by yourself—in a box—wid your folks phonin' whar-at to ship de body! Time now to git on to de dawg-track and grab yourself dat reward for arrestin' Six-ace—and jest look at you! How your hind legs?"

"Legs comin' up! Lemme git my head in a sling now, and be right wid you."

"Ride on out to de track ahead of us, den, and wait. But don't you know us till us knows you! Gits your signals from me. Me and Perennial follerin' wid Amos and his eighty."

By night the dog-track was a place transformed. Lights blazed, a band blared stirringly above a milling mob of Montgomery's dark élite and otherwise.

In happy hubbub dogs were being weighed in, rail-positions drawn, bets placed. Above all sounded the preliminary rumbling of the "rabbit"—the small car that would soon be hurtling its mechanical bunny headlong around the track in front of the fastest dog.

On the distant, dim-lit tower-steps, Bugwine glimpsed vaguely three men—one descending dejectedly as two ascended. With a start his mind and eyes focused on the ascending pair; one of them would be Six-ace going to work! Work from which Mr. Breck soon would pluck him!

But into these rosy dreams suddenly shouldered reality, in the shape of Campus and Perennial, with Amos ambling trustingly between. Yet, just short of their reaching Bugwine's stand, a notable and outwardly accidental meeting occurred, as "Well! *Well!*" burst heartily from Mr. Barnes. "If it aint old Drug-store Frazier hisself! Thunk you was in Chattanooga, Drug-store!"

"*Was*. Aint," responded Mr. Frazier succinctly. "Howdy, Perennial!"

"Den how de first race look to you now, Drug-store?" persisted Campus.

Mr. Frazier glanced inquiringly toward the ivory-toothed Amos from Epes.

"Forgits," apologized Campus. "He's a *hot* sport—Mist' Amos Stump, from Epes."

Mr. Stump lit up as if some one had flung him a fish. "How you bettin' on dat first race tonight, Drug-store?" reiterated Mr. Barnes.

Amos all but sat in Campus' lap in his interest. "Fan dat eighty in my pants—it's blisterin' me!" he implored huskily of the hovering Mr. Root.

But Mr. Frazier had suddenly grown serious. "W-e-l-l," he debated conservatively, "I'd say it was about time for de rabbit to outrun de dogs, *dis* time. Leastways, dey's a ten-spot in my pocket what feels dat way about it—like de rabbit is gwine to win."

AMOS STUMP'S ears practically met, quivering, above his scalp. All the way from Epes, hadn't his new-found friends been telling him how at these dog-tracks the rabbit raced against the dogs? Now he was about to see it, with his money up on it!

"Den how about puttin' a couple of bucks on de rabbit's nose for me, too?" Perennial was pulling a bill from his pocket. "Dem pooches looks sort of slow to me too."

"Gimme de she-note; two fixin' to be four!" acquiesced Mr. Frazier.

Amos hiccoughed shrilly. "How 'bout lettin' *me* in on de rabbit?" he demanded.

"Wait. See how dat rabbit runs, first," counseled Campus conservatively. "Ricollect how you was about to lose your roll on a doped roach, over at Epes!"

Mr. Stump subsided abashed. Drug-store disappeared toward the book-makers. "Heap of times old Pharmacy wrong, but *all* de time he's game to back hisself," murmured Mr. Root admiringly—even audibly—after him.

FROM about the starting-stalls arose a pandemonium that fed upon itself. Loud and ever louder brayed the band. The first race was being called, final bets being placed. The rabbit-car rumbled faster and faster on its rails. None knew at which of its circlings the starter's flag would flash.

"Craves to git up close, whar I can see dat baby hop," yearned Mr. Stump.

"Dat's right; git a good line on him—den bet de works!" applauded Mr. Root.

Again the speeding "rabbit" shot past the starting-stalls. But this time there was a checkered *Swish!* The barriers flew upward. A veritable torrent of dogs erupted from behind them, yelping wildly, and the race was on, with the favored rabbit of Drug-store's "choice" fleeing lightly, electrically, on before.

"*—Go on, rabbit!* Lay *down* dem *legs* and *lope! Ram-ble,* rabbit!" the frenzied whoopings of the hatless Pharmacy led all the rest. Amos gnawed the rail till it splintered. Wilder, wilder blared the band in ever-quickening time. Epes had never been like this! Over one hurdle, over two, poured the dogs—with the mechanical rabbit *still* in front! Mr. Frazier's histrionic hysteria mounted higher and grew perfect. He cast his coat from him, his vest. Red-gallused and gayly-shirted, with flailing arms he widened the puzzled circle that split its attention between his antics and the race. With frantic hat he fanned the dust from about his feet, as in some fantastic rite of his own devising.

"*Stimulate yo' step, rabbit! Rammmble, rabbit! Strut yo' stuff, bunny-boy!*" implored the sweating Pharmacy through dust-clouds of his own raising—until amid acclaim that jarred the skies, the favorite dog came home, the rabbit still in front!

"*Dar now!* 'Scuse me while I collects from de boy what bet me de *dogs'd*

finish first!" Pharmacy was struggling into his clothes before a knob-eyed Amos.

"*How long* is dis been gwine on?" Mr. Stump begged feverishly of his mentors.

"You lookin' at big-town stuff now! *Dis* aint no roach-race!" blared Perennial.

"Guess one of *dese* races right—wid your roll—and you's *rich!*" boomed Mr. Barnes—while Campus' roving glance picked up Bugwine waiting near by.

"You means," persisted the avid Amos, "dat whichever ways I craves to bet, I gits on?"

"And *how!* Difference in opinion—dat what makes dog-racin', *too,*" adapted the now-purring Campus. "You jest got to find somebody what thinks different from you—like, say, Drug-store comin' yander. Heaps of times he's wrong—den *you* wins—but all time he's game to back hisself wid his mazuma."

The returning Mr. Frazier bore a spray of greenbacks like a bridal bouquet. "Old rabbit romp dese home to papa!" he caroled convincingly when yet far off.

"How de second race look—now dat de rabbit done loosened up?" Mr. Root greeted him.

"Rabbit loosened up, but also wore down," pointed out Pharmacy judicially. "And got to race a new batch of dogs what's fresh. So next race I bets on de *dogs* to win."

Campus felt eager pawings at his arm, turned to find new light shining in the canine eyes of Amos. "Lemme at him!" Amos begged. "I jest finds out something!"

"Finds out what?"

"*Shh!* Dat de *rabbit* aint pullin' dat little car around at all: de car is pullin' *him.* Dat way, old bunny *cain't* lose! Drug-store too dumb to notice it."

"Brains, Amos: you got 'em!" exulted Mr. Barnes. This victim was not led but actually leaped to his own slaughter! He signaled Bugwine decisively over Amos' shoulder.

"Bets on de rabbit to win de next race!" blurted Amos in Pharmacy's very teeth.

"Bets *how much?* I aint mess wid chicken-feed." For strategic purposes, Drug-store looked down, fiscally, upon Mr. Stump. Perennial wriggled ecstatically at the outlook.

"Chicken-feed?" Amos scorned. "Boy, in Epes when I gits to ramblin' amongst de rooster-rations, dey feeds *elephants* wid jest what I spills! Here—fade me, town-boy!" he rose further to the bait.

"Turn dat boy a-loose, Bugwine!" burst from the victim's employer, "Aint I tell you I fires who you was after?"

"Showers down eighty bucks. Wid all eighty hollerin' dat de rabbit gwine win de next race!"

"You's faded!" Pharmacy knew what Campus would do in the tower.

"Who holds de money?" Amos broke out in an unexpected quarter.

Startled at it, Perennial's eyes sought inspiration—and found Bugwine. "Officer Breck here"—he leaped instantly aboard a sudden hunch that Bugwine was too dumb to be dishonest!—"holds de stakes. Bein' de Law, he 'bliged to pay off right."

"Pays off reliable," croaked Mr. Breck. In a few moments more he was going to be in that tower, earning a fifty-dollar reward, so big money couldn't bother him. . . . Everything was in the bag!

"And *I* keeps my eye right on Bugwine, too." Mr. Barnes had never seen a bit of business work out better: he had Amos' confidence, and his sleuth had Amos' money!

Again arose the preliminary rumblings of the rabbit. "Stay wid Amos, Perennial," directed Campus. "Me and Mist' Breck got business by de tower; roots *dar* for de rabbit."

Then, as the crowd swallowed them: "Step on it, detective! Us got to be on de steps to de tower at de exact right minute now, so—uh—you can grab de crook, and everything *come out* right."

Bugwine shivered excitedly. Wait until he grabbed that crook he had seen going up into the tower! What would

Columbus say then? Also that short-pants Bogue Houma boy, walking rudely out on a boy who wanted to talk, just to fire somebody! Every dog had his day, and for Bugwine the dog-days were coming now!

"Hang on to dat crook till I gits back out of de tower," Campus coached him, as they climbed the steps. "And remember you is de Law—cain't nobody stop *you* from goin' in."

"Caint *nobody* stop *me!*" bragged Mr. Breck. He felt that fifty in his fingers, Six-ace in his grasp! From below came up the stir of another start. He caught the flash of the flag, the catapulting torrent of dogs, the rumble of the rabbit.

"Come on!" Campus recalled him to duty as howls of spectators, yelping of dogs, thunder of band, again quickened, blended, soared, *crescendoed* in one vast roar as the race was on.

"Come on, dogs!" the frenzied phrase of Pharmacy cut through it.

"Romp yourself, rabbit! Come on, rabbit!" swelled the hog-calling tenor of Amos.

Mr. Barnes at his heels, Bugwine stumbled higher on the steps. With victory, reward, vindication awaiting him at last at their top!

BELOW, occupants of the stands, of the rails and roofs, rose to their feet as the hysteria of a hot finish surged higher. Mad shoutings to canine favorites blotted out even the rival bellowings of Pharmacy and Amos.

"Now!" hissed Campus in Mr. Breck's twitching ear. Convulsively Mr. Breck rose to his big moment, gripping his bear-trap—a trap that soon would hold Six-ace. *Then* no Bogue Houma boy would walk out on him again: not even on the flimsy pretext of firing somebody! Bugwine heard dully his own feet kicking the tower-door as the race swept on below; heard his own voice, sounding odd: "Open dis door—in name de Law! Or else I kicks it in—"

Suddenly, swiftly it swung inward, affording a vague glimpse of two forms within. *Then* its frame filled—and everything got different—for Bugwine. For even as his startled gaze met an uplifted baseball bat it also met a *face!* And at sight of it, old boasts boomeranged, recent memories leaped to life, as his strangled *"Y-you?"* collided weakly with the other's thunderous *"You?"*

That Campus Barnes stood immediately back of Bugwine only meant now that his upset and prostrate form became a boulevard for the frenzied feet of Mr. Breck, while fear and memory merged to urge them to superhuman speed. For in that tower-door, blotting out all else, had loomed—and now was leaping for him—*not* the expected Six-ace Reed, but the big Bogue Houma boy! —With TRACK MANAGER writ large upon his cap!

IN his cups, moaned Bugwine, he had evidently spilled important beans! Clearly, *again* his mouth had made a job for his feet! But what? The berserk bellows of Mr. Barnes, now also back of him, indicated anew the seriousness if not the nature of his error. But he still lacked the details—details which he shrank from now at some forty miles per hour, down the steps, while strong yearnings welled within him to reach his motorcycle and a good State-line before the short-pants boy reached him.

Yet even in his fright he caught camera-like the clear picture of further fresh failure of his below: the race was ending there—with Campus never having been in the tower, and the stuffed rabbit well in front! At which a new and awful note in the hunting-cry of Mr. Barnes behind him betrayed that he too, had seen it—intimating unmistakably to Mr. Breck that now there was not to reason why, there was but to stay in front or die!

Then, with a second *"Awr-r-r-k-k!"* more soul-rending than his first, Bugwine realized next that he still held Amos' eighty dollars and Drug-store's eighty! His flight was thus bound to arouse suspicion and augment pursuit. Yet, with two truck-sized berserks at his heels already, he could not pause to pay off. Under the pressure of this dimly understood dilemma, Mr. Breck mistook himself for a greyhound, and doubled wildly back. . . . His feet found and began to use the greyhounds' track.

Formlessly at his side, he perceived the still-speeding synthetic rabbit that had started everything. "Git out of my way, rabbit, and let a *runner* run!" panted Bugwine as he overhauled and passed it like the Century passing a flivver with a flat tire.

And then, *then* the blur-footed Mr. Breck spied escape! Ahead, to his left, a gap in the outer fence beckoned. Beyond it lay his motorcycle, Mississippi, Mexico—

Yet even as he leaped from the track

toward fence and freedom, the final ignominy overtook and overcame him. Too late he saw, squawked horridly—and went down before it into the dust, darkness, and defeat. . . .

Far in the forefront of the pursuit now, Messrs. Barnes and Root led the rush for the spot. But track employees were before them, struggling to right and disentangle the wreckage, as Mr. Barnes arrived—arrived but to develop instant symptoms of hydrophobia at what lay half-stunned and struggling there.

"—Dumb, us hires!" Campus' ravings at least and at last grew coherent to Mr. Root; "and dumb us *gits!* But gittin' a detective so *damned* dumb he gits hisself *run over by a stuffed rabbit* is *too much* for de money!"

But just here, in the soul of the wretched Bugwine the spirit of salvage—his own salvage—began burning like a beacon. To get his clients and Amos off his neck, satisfy them of his probity by discharging one of his obligations, would lessen his liabilities, it flashed over him. Then he would have only the oncoming Bogue Houma boy left to outrun. But time was short. Hurriedly Mr. Breck achieved his splay feet. Wild-eyed, he glanced about him, to find Amos eager again before him. At which Bugwine gulped, gurgled—and embraced opportunity. And, as there burst over the startled onlookers the ear-splitting anguish of a Mr. Barnes who had no come-back and the soul-rending yelps of an equally defenseless Mr. Root, Stakeholder Breck paid off—one hundred and sixty hard-bet dollars, not to the pair that had schemed to "take" him, but to their would-be victim, Amos Stump.

AS Bugwine, freshly bewildered by their outcries, whirled for new flight, the track-manager was upon him. "Runs you most a mile to tell you somethin' else, too!" startlingly rumbled his captor as he seized him. "And *now* I got you!"

"*Awr-r-rk-k!*" rang eloquently anew from Mr. Breck's wild despair. Old Bogue Houma boy kept on talking in riddles! Galloping off from the speakeasy in a taxi to fire somebody Bugwine reminded him of; and now running a boy down like a chicken to tell him something!

"Thunk you was smart, didn't you?" his grip relaxed, "—bustin' up to de door of de tower jest now, after you'd done forgot gittin' soused to de scalp, and tellin' me in Bogue Houma you was gwine tie my tower up in a knot!" boomed the short-pants boy.

"*Ulp!*" remarked Mr. Breck in inadequate rebuttal.

"Told you you gits me in mind to fire somebody, and I *did!*"

"Fired who?" Bugwine was but battling for time.

"Fired de boy you said you was gwine gum up de race by arrestin'—in de tower, dat who!"

Mr. Breck watched his future fall to join his past in fatal tail-spin! So *that* was who this Bogue Houma boy meant when he said in parting he was *en route* to fire somebody! By his gin-born boastings in Bogue Houma, Bugwine had wrecked himself anew!

"So I fires *him,* and lays for *you* wid de bat," the track official kept rubbing it in. "And hires me a new boy—from Georgia, he say—what had been hangin' round de track job-hunting for a week!"

But Bugwine saw even more: That dejected-looking boy lately going down the tower-steps had, then, been the discharged Six-ace, again escaping under a sawed-off sleuth's very nose!

At which final realization of his humiliation, Bugwine lifted anguished gaze—

WITH a bay like a sick bloodhound, Mr. Breck suddenly stiffened; then broke, ran, and was off unaccountably again, toward the tower.

As the puzzled and pursuing track-manager at length overtook him upon its steps, Bugwine was descending them. But not alone: in his bear-trap and protestingly accompanying him, was a stunted, rolling-eyed darky.

"Turn dat boy a-loose, Bugwine!" burst peremptorily from the latter's new employer then. "Aint I tell you I fires who you says you was after—and hires dis one jest a week out of Georgia?"

But Bugwine's trap only tightened, his pæans only heightened. "You fired de tower-boy you *thunk* I was after, yes! And hires a new one from Georgia, huh? Well, who you *fires,* I aint know. But who you *hires,* I does know—de second he stuck his face out dis tower-door jest now! And he sho is from Georgia, too—I knows becaze *I druv him dar,* a week ago . . . in de car he stole! You fires de wrong boy; but you hires de right one—*Six-ace Reed*—jail-bound wid Bugwine Breck, what always gits his man! . . . Reward, *come to papa!* — And, Columbus, *hunt your hole!*"

Murder Island

Wild adventure on mysterious Murder Island reaches its terrific finale in a desperate air-flight through hell and hurricane that only a writer who is himself a much-experienced pilot could describe.

By LELAND JAMIESON

The Story Thus Far:

SEVENTY miles from Andros, in the Caribbean, Dan Gregory saw below his plane the mysterious uncharted island with its bright new buildings shining among its palm-trees. And then—

A cruising scout-plane swooped down upon them without warning and shot them down.

The whole terrific adventure had begun the day before, when Gregory, a MYCABA pilot, arrived at Miami from Merida, and found the dispatcher's office in great excitement because of a strange radio message just received from Helen Sayles, an English sportswoman who had taken off in her plane for Miami from Havana, and had failed to arrive. Her message stated that she was landing on an island, was being attacked—and then the message broke off. Cross-bearings had given the location of the island; and the operations-manager Dunbar had sent Gregory to the rescue, with his friend Melvin as co-pilot, with McKinnon as mechanic and the newspaper man Jackson as passenger. . . .

With Melvin dead and McKinnon badly hurt, with one engine dead and one wing crippled, Gregory managed a power dive into a rain-squall and a landing in the temporary shelter of its murk. Then with the plane sinking under them they launched a rubber raft and managed to reach the tip of the island. Leaving the badly wounded McKinnon in Jackson's care, Gregory walked toward the house. He passed through a little cemetery and counted seventeen new-made graves; he came to a dock and started out along it, intending to steal a boat. And then—a harsh, cold voice behind him froze him.

"I wouldn't bud, if I was you!"

At the point of the gun Gregory was taken into the house and into the presence of that sinister giant of the underworld, named Schnapel, who had made this island his refuge and rendezvous. Schnapel demanded to know who had sent Gregory on this flight, who else knew of this secret island. And Gregory knew that if he told, Dunbar would be murdered, to keep the existence of the island secret, and he himself would be killed. Moreover all chance of rescuing Helen Sayles, who was being held prisoner by Schnapel, would be gone.

So Gregory refused to speak. Even when put to severe torture he doggedly maintained silence until unconsciousness rescued him.

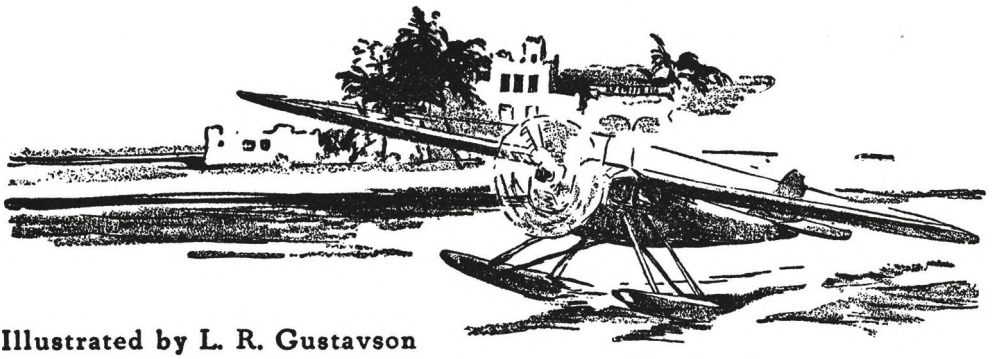
Schnapel, however, with his pilot Bacon, set out by plane next day for Florida. And Gregory was tormented by the fear that after he lost consciousness, he had betrayed Dunbar.

Gregory had been blinded by a fierce light used as part of the torture, and was left to the care of Helen Sayles. In Schnapel's absence Brooks, Schnapel's butler, proposed to Helen that they flee in a seaplane that was available. She agreed. And after Brooks had stolen part of Schnapel's money, Helen guided the blinded Gregory to the plane, took the controls, and with Brooks took off.

Their flight was short, however. A neglected gas valve halted them; Schnapel's right-hand cutthroat Tresca overtook them in a launch, killed Brooks and brought Helen and Gregory back.

Schnapel's pilot Bacon returned to the island with an offer for Gregory. The other gangster pilot Murdock was suspected of treachery; and Gregory's life would be spared if he accepted Murdock's job of dope-running by plane. First, however, he must bind himself to the gang by murdering Murdock in such a way that the police would know him to be guilty of the crime. All this, of course, provided Gregory's eyes got well soon!

With no alternative save immediate death, Gregory pretended to accept. And his eyes did improve so rapidly that by next day his vision was nearly normal. And he had need of all his faculties now; for radio messages were intercepted dur-



Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson

ing the night reporting that a devastating hurricane was bearing down upon the island, and the criminal crew planned to seek safety out of its path aboard a little freight steamer owned by Schnapel and which was expected by noon.

During the night, however, Helen Sayles had locked herself inside Schnapel's private arsenal in a sort of cupola of the house. Just at dawn Lin Jackson appeared in a little boat with two sponge-fishermen and made a surprise attempt at rescue. He failed, and the two fishermen were killed, but Helen Sayles held the gang at bay with a machine-gun through the window so that Jackson was enabled to join her and Gregory inside Schnapel's arsenal. *(The story continues in detail:)*

LIN JACKSON, at a porthole on the east side of the room, ejaculated: "Oh-oh—look at this!" And they turned and peered out across the lawn.

From the opening of the dock-house door a white cloth emerged and was waved back and forth for a few moments, as if its holder might be tentatively attempting to draw fire. They waited; finally a man stepped out and walked alone along the dock and reached the beach. He climbed it, and came to within two dozen paces of this steel-sheathed cupola.

It was Tresca. Involuntarily Gregory admired his display of cold nerve.

"There's a boat coming to this place pretty soon with guns enough to knock that house and you to hell," Tresca called. "It'll do just that, unless you bargain with me—quick. Bacon's got to leave here to get Schnapel. We've got to load the boat to get away from here. Now you put those gats away, and I'll have the boat lay off of you. Write your own ticket, and be quick about it."

"He's bluffing," Jackson warned tensely. "Watch him! He's got something up his sleeve."

After a moment of consideration Gregory said: "I don't think so. I haven't seen anybody here try bluffing. . . . How about it?" he asked both of them. "If we agree to this, it's going to leave us here, with Schnapel our last chance, and a full-grown hurricane—"

"If the boat can fire on us, what else is there to do?" Helen Sayles inquired, dabbing a tiny handkerchief against her eyes.

Gregory shouted down to Tresca; "We'll play along with you. But don't try anything, or we'll see who's blown to hell!"

Tresca had scarcely gone and summoned his men from their place of safety before a steamer-whistle sounded dismally across a width of wind-swept sea. The three there in the cupola looked out, and saw a small, squat, dirty vessel moving slowly in, her funnel pouring forth a plume of smoke that flew flat across the water till it seemed to merge into the waves at the horizon. Her lines were low and blunt; she was a decrepit-looking thing.

In silence they watched the men down there gather on the dock, watched the boat come up and warp in against the piling behind the bobbing seaplane. They could hear the surge of voices on the wind, shouts and curses and admonitions to make haste. They saw some of Schnapel's men come back across the lawn, looking up with a tense uneasiness at this steel-curtained fortress, and then later come back carrying suitcases and personal effects.

The radio operator came past, lugging a receiver and some miscellaneous equipment; Gregory, seeing what he had, despaired of getting out with a message of distress when the boat had finally gone. They would undoubtedly disable the transmitter, if they did not take it with them.

Three wounded men on stretchers were carried out along the dock. From the

building nearest the east side of the island a cradle was rolled out—a cradle on which a little single-seater fighting plane was held. The plane, after being slid down into the water, was towed by hand-lines to the side of the boat and hoisted rapidly onto the deck.

"There," said Gregory with a grinding bitterness, "is the plane that Bacon used to shoot us down."

Helen Sayles nodded. Lin Jackson, a moment later, said: "Bacon is getting ready to take off." Just then the sound of an exhaust rippled back to them upon the wind. They watched with a peculiar sense of isolation. The motor warmed, and presently men on the dock dropped the mooring-lines, and the plane moved out. It bobbed with the cadence of the rolling surf, and suddenly a blast of sound drifted back upon the wind, and the craft moved out and picked up speed. For a long way it climbed the swells and plunged down beyond them to the troughs, and finally lifted, clipping through two wave-crests. At last it climbed into the air, wheeled back toward the west and disappeared.

ITS going brought to Gregory a depressing melancholy. He stood with Helen Sayles close by his side, wondering if she felt the force of it as he did, wondering if still, out there where she was looking, she saw a man sprawling in the sand and felt the shivering pound of a machine-gun against her shoulder. She was passive now, with a pale and fragile look that stirred him deeply.

The boat continued taking on the men and effects from this island—and from the southeast a storm was whirling toward them, a storm which would destroy this island and all upon it before tomorrow night. He had seen the devastation following a hurricane; thought of it was like a lash across his memory. It would be at least six hours before Bacon could get back with Schnapel; it would then be dark before the plane once more could return to Florida.

He had no doubt that Schnapel would return. Carefully he watched, and saw that the massive safe, which Brooks had robbed of a portion of its contents, was not put aboard the boat. That meant that Schnapel would return at any cost short of too great a risk of life itself. And, Dan Gregory planned grimly, the gangster, when he came back, would face guns which he himself had brought here for emergency!

CHAPTER XXIII

THE morning dragged. Helen Sayles, brooding, taut with waiting and with watching that spectacle below, said softly to Dan Gregory, as if her mind had just then leaped the gap of distances: "I dreamed last night about—my home." Her voice broke off, but she went on after a moment, glancing up: "Dad didn't want me to take up aviation in the first place, and my mother seemed to sense that something like this was going to happen on this flight. But I knew more than they did. . . . I wish there were some way to—let them know. Some way to turn time back, and change a lot of things—"

Lin Jackson waited for her to go on, and when she did not, said: "No news is good news. It really works, this time. There's a girl in Vero Beach who should be concerned about this too. She knows I started—and that's all she knows."

Gregory added with a note of grimness: "Neither of you has anything on me. But it can't help them and won't help us to brood about it now. . . . Look there!" He pointed. They saw the pilot Murdock being marched down to the boat before a guard, and Gregory added: "If that tub should sink and everyone put out in lifeboats, that poor devil might have a chance to get away. Our situation, so far, isn't quite as bad as his."

At last the boat gave a long blast of its whistle, as if warning any laggards that they were about to be abandoned here, and moved slowly out to sea, plunging a little in the swells already forming a mile from shore. It swung to the southwest, pointing its blunt nose toward the coast of Cuba, and in fifteen minutes was hull-down.

They went downstairs, risking the possibility that some one had been left behind to ambush them. Then Gregory hurried out across the sand to the shack where the radio had been. The transmitter had been shattered, some of its mechanism gone; the receivers every one had been removed. The radio did not exist. With a dull sense of defeat, Gregory returned to find the others in the living-room.

Their voices sounded small in this massive house. Helen Sayles went into the kitchen, to occupy her mind with the preparation of hot food. Gregory stayed with Jackson, his thoughts somber. And he asked, dreading to voice the question that had been on his mind: "Lin, what

Working in that smoky light, they built a raft, while the wind screamed and the rain drove down.

happened to McKinnon? Did he—" He broke off, searching the reporter's face, waiting for a confirmation of his fears. "They didn't find his body here, apparently."

Jackson stared for a moment out the window. "No, Dan," he returned in a queer hushed voice. "No, I got halfway to Great Exuma island with him. . . . But he died."

Helen Sayles called them to the kitchen presently, and they ate in detached silence—until finally Gregory asked in a gentle tone the thing which had been going unanswered in his mind: "Why Great Exuma, Lin? Why didn't you take McKinnon on to Nassau, to a doctor? Wasn't there a chance to get him there?"

Jackson cleared his throat. "Mac was so bad off by the time we got away that I didn't dare risk trying to take the time to get to Nassau. I knew Exuma was the nearest land, except perhaps the southern tip of Andros, where I'd find nobody, probably—and there wasn't time, Dan. It turned out there wasn't time to get him anywhere. . . . I took him on with me, and he is buried there."

Dan Gregory said, filling the gap of silence, but speaking as if only to himself: "I liked Mac. . . . And I liked Melvin too." He glanced up at Helen Sayles, but there was no accusation or bitterness within his eyes. "But Lin," he went on, "I don't see why you didn't go back to Nassau before coming here. I don't see why you didn't get in touch with Dunbar or some one so you could have had help when you came back. You must have known you didn't have a chance, with just two men. It was a brave thing you did—a great thing. But even as I watched you beach your boat and come ashore, I was sure it wouldn't work. Why didn't you do that?"

JACKSON shook his head. "There was no radio at Great Exuma—I had no way to get in touch with anybody," he explained. "The men who came with me were taking me to Nassau, so I could communicate with Miami. We had no thought of making an attack, when we landed. We knew how hopeless it would be, and—"

"Then why?" Gregory demanded. "Why didn't you go on, and not take such a risk?"

Jackson said in a tone half musing: "Dan, that night when I came up here

looking for a boat, and you, I stumbled through a cemetery back there behind those seven little buildings. The moon was up—and I knew it was a cemetery. I counted seventeen graves! It gave me the cold chills to think that maybe you were already ready for that place. But I couldn't take more time to find out then. McKinnon needed medical attention—had to have it quickly. On the way to Great Exuma I kept wondering who those people were back there."

"Sponge-fishermen, I think," Gregory interposed. "But I don't see the connection—"

"The connection is this: I landed at a sponge-fishermen's settlement with McKinnon. I told them about this island. They wouldn't believe me. They thought they knew every foot of this part of the Atlantic. But they remembered that four men from that part of the Bahamas had disappeared recently and never been found. I wanted them to take me back to Nassau immediately, but they wouldn't without coming by here to take a look at this island—to see if it was really here.

"You see why I had to come back? I didn't want to take time to come here, but I had to convince them I was sane—that the island wasn't something from my imagination. I had to let them show themselves. They were just going to take a look and then take me on to Nassau. We brought guns, because I remembered how we'd been attacked by air, and how Miss Sayles had been attacked by something—and I was afraid if we got too close, we'd be."

He paused, his eyes shadowed. And then presently he lit a cigarette and inhaled deeply and went on.

"I knew there were guards posted all night long—I'd run into them myself when I'd tried to get that boat, and I figured you had too. So we approached carefully. It took longer to get here than we thought it would, so instead of being dark it was just breaking daylight—enough to see to land. We had a good telescope with us, and there wasn't anybody visible, or any sign of life. The spongers insisted that we land and look around." He shrugged and flicked ashes from his cigarette. "I gave in, finally, and we landed. . . . You know the rest of it yourself."

GREGORY nodded. "If all the guards hadn't been at the radio-station getting word about this hurricane, you probably would have seen them and not landed," he declared. "It just happened that they were all back there together—everybody but one man. . . . Well, that's over, and there's nothing we can do for them."

Jackson nodded grimly. "They'll be two more who went out and disappeared. They saw the buildings, and the full-grown palms, and wouldn't believe their eyes."

Helen Sayles said moodily: "I'm to blame for all of it. And those people didn't even know that I exist—"

But Dan Gregory asked her gently: "Haven't you paid any debt you owe? The island was here. Schnapel and his crew were here. A lot of people died because they found the place, before you came. Forget it, if you can."

She shook her head, and her eyes reflected what must have been passing in her mind. "I can't," she said softly, "I can't, and never will."

CHAPTER XXIV

THEY made a survey of the island, while the day was dragging on, and they cast repeated anxious glances at the western sky to catch sight of Bacon's plane returning. In a kind of ghastly silence, Gregory and Jackson buried the two men who had been murdered out there on the lawn, and then returned. Gregory could find no barometer with which to judge the movement of the hurricane. The boats which had been at the dock had been taken on the steamer—even the little auxiliary in which Jackson had returned had been set adrift, and was nowhere to be seen. There was no way left by which to leave this island except with the plane in which Schnapel was returning.

The wind was rising slowly, steadily, although as yet it was still below a gale—still just a strong wind in which gusts were beginning to sing against their ears. The sky, clear but filled with cirrus mare's tails at the break of dawn, was now becoming overcast in places, long strings and rolls of clouds that raced low across the sea from the northeast, and from which spits of rain occasionally slatted down upon the waves or drummed upon the sand.

The day wore on. The wind was now a steady sighing sound, broken recurrently as a gust lifted its voice into a whistle. They stood at the west windows, straining their eyes for the approaching plane.

The image of it did not form. Gregory knew the storm would destroy them if they were here. It might wash the sand completely off this coral reef, and leave the coral bare as it had been in the beginning. But he did not tell them that. He couldn't bring himself to do it yet.

He had a hunch of something now. He had sensed it long before he faced it squarely: He was afraid Schnapel wasn't coming back, now, even for the money—that they would stay here, until the storm roared down on them and swept them from this island.

Dusk drew in about the island, and still Schnapel had not come. They snapped the light switch in the living-room, but the lights did not go on. Gregory, hurriedly trying to fix the light plant, found the batteries torn out—taken by the men aboard the steamer. There would be no lights here through the night. A hurricane would scream at them—in utter darkness.

Gregory went back to Jackson and Helen Sayles, a stifled feeling in his lungs. He could hear the wind, rising all the time. He could feel the tremors of this massive house already. Built here on the sand, he knew it would go down. He knew the water would sweep over this shallow island with the fury of a tidal wave.

He said: "No light. We'll have to make out the best we can. We've got to work—we've got to get ready to abandon this island sometime in the night, when it begins to go. A raft—maybe we can find some empty gas-drums, or some—"

Then, for the first time, he realized how afraid this frail and lovely girl must be. A wave of compassion swept him as he looked at her, and it hurt him when she asked, staring up at him there in the pressing dusk: "Dan—is it really going to be that—bad?"

His voice was taut and ragged: "Yes. Worse. It's dark now. Schnapel isn't coming, because he couldn't land now if he tried. It's going to be—well, there's a hundred-and-thirty-mile wind inside that hurricane."

SHE searched his face, trying to find something to steady her. He tried to look confident, to help her, but he couldn't help her. She said huskily: "Yes—yes, I know. . . . I've felt it somehow, all the time." And after a long silence: "Could we light a fire? I'm so—cold!" Gregory's own teeth were chattering a little, but not altogether from the temperature. It was partly the darkness, and partly the beastly whining of the wind and the stark, dreadful pounding of the sea a hundred yards away.

CHAPTER XXV

HEAVY rain, flung into almost horizontal streaks by wind, slatted on the east windows. The house shivered again before the onslaught of a heavy gust, and a high whine went up from somewhere on the roof as a tile was loosened by the blast and made a cup for the surging air to whistle into.

They had explored the house, and found matches, candles, a couple of flash-lights. With these latter they had stumbled about among the outbuildings, searching vainly for material with which to build a raft. As a last resort, they had fought their way out along the sea-swept dock to the boat-house. And there, inside the building, they found a dozen drums of gasoline both full and empty, and rolled them laboriously to the lee side of the house. One at a time they drained the gasoline into a pit scooped in the sand and ignited it. And there, working in that smoky reddish light, they built the raft, while the wind screamed across the house-top and rain drove down in constantly increasing, lashing flurries.

Now, in the house again, they ate in weary silence, dreading the greater ordeal to come. Jackson, wearied by the strain of bringing lumber for the raft, presently got up and moved slowly from the room. "I'm going to sleep," he said. "I won't sleep out there on that raft! You call me—I'm so dead the house could fall down around my ears and I'd not move." He slouched away and disappeared.

Dan Gregory sat there silently with Helen Sayles in the flickering candle-light, feeling the slow fraying of his nerves against the prolonged grating of the wind. Minutes dragged away. He jumped at a resounding crash from somewhere to windward, on the beach.

Helen Sayles cried tensely: "The dock? That must have been—"

"It was," he answered bluntly. "I've been waiting for it for the last half-hour."

She pressed her fingers to her eyes, and seemed to hold herself in check. "Can't we do something to get through all this waiting? It's simply too—too dreadful, waiting like this. If we could talk, and get our minds— Tell me about yourself—what will you do, when we get back?"

Dan Gregory started to say, "If we get back," but checked himself. "I'll go back on my run with MYCABA," he declared. "I'll take a seaplane when it's my turn out, and churn across the Caribbean. Hauling a lot of oily South Americans and fervent Cubans and perfumed *señoras* from the provinces—just as always. . . . Life goes on—until it stops." He cleared his throat. It was a little cold now, and the whining of the wind outside seemed to accentuate the chill. "And you?" he asked at last. "You'll go back to England—or will you go back to Havana and make that flight to Miami and do the thing up right?"

"England," said Helen Sayles, and there was warmth in her voice for the first time in many hours. "Home!" And then, suddenly and almost before he knew it, she was weeping silently.

He tried to give her solace in his arms, but in his heart there was no solace, for he knew too well how little chance she had of reaching home. He forced himself to say, "We'll make it. We'll come through," and tried hard to believe that it was so. "Tell me what happened on your flight. I've had no chance to ask you, until now."

She hesitated, as if bracing herself, as if collecting her memories and assorting them. Then she said: "After the first hour, nothing went right. I took off, and checked myself from the field. I was so sure I would make it if the engine would run and nothing happened—and yet I was afraid. I was afraid, and there was nothing of which to be afraid. I think now I must have feared myself more than the airplane or the sea—"

Involuntarily he interrupted: "Imagination is a pilot's greatest enemy. I've known that for a long, long time."

SHE nodded—took up her narrative: "I don't know how long I was out before the compass-bearing jewel cracked. I was on my course for three hours before I made the discovery, thinking every minute after the first hour that I would surely pick up a key pretty soon. I made myself believe, at first, that a headwind was delaying me—you know—I invented excuses to keep myself from getting scared."

He hesitated, and then voiced a question. "Why didn't you check your direction by the position of the sun? There were breaks in the overcast that day. I came across about the time you did—I got into Miami after they expected you."

She made a futile gesture with her slender hands. "I didn't think of it," she said. "I didn't think I could possibly be off my course, with the compass steady. I had checked drift as best I could, and thought that everything was fine. After while—after three hours, it must have been, I saw this island. I thought it was a key, and kept on going on, past it, thinking I'd see others in a little while. But I didn't, and then I got out my maps. I couldn't find it on the map. But I was so sure Florida was somewhere ahead that I kept on going on that same compass-reading without noticing the position of the sun. Somehow, what with looking at maps and trying to find out where I was, I had forgotten that I had been so much afraid in the beginning.

"Pretty soon the engine quit. I switched to the reserve, and this island was still the only land in sight, so I turned back toward it, knowing I must land within fifteen or twenty minutes, and that—"

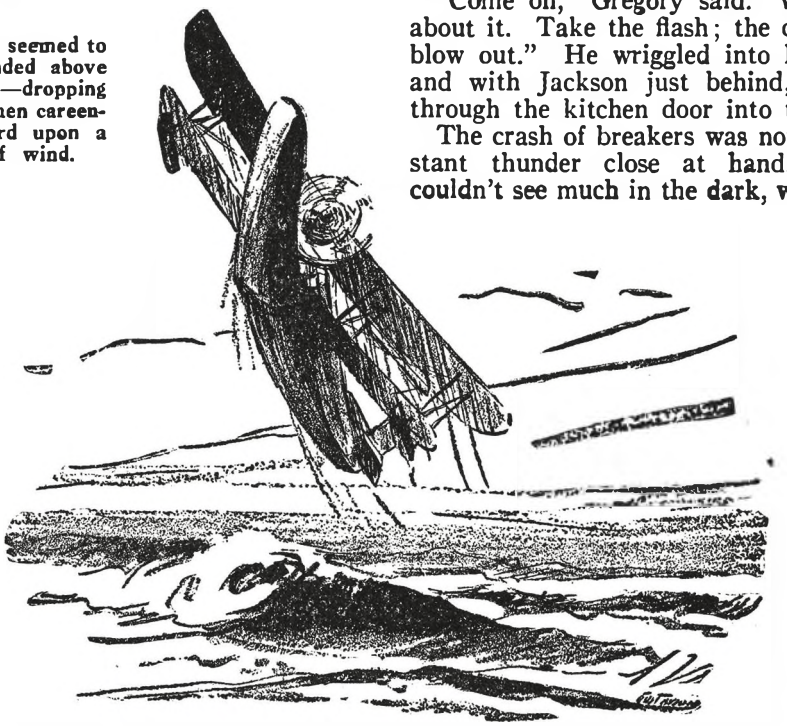
"WHAT about your radio?" Gregory questioned. "All you had to do was call for your position and MYCABA would have given it."

"I forgot the radio, after I was hunting through the maps. I didn't realize I was lost, until I had to turn on the reserve tank, and then I did call for my position. Before that I kept thinking a headwind had delayed me. . . . Well, when I turned back toward this island I saw that the compass card didn't move at all—that it was stationary. Then I knew I was lost—knew I hadn't the slightest idea of where I was. I sent a call for my position, coming back toward the island.

"There wasn't much beach, but I decided to land on what there was and crack up the best I could. I saw the palms and the buildings, and knew some one lived here. So I started down. Then, when I was in the glide I heard something in the air above me, and looked up—and there was another plane diving right at me. It looked like a streak, it came so fast. I heard a kind of hollow popping, but didn't realize what it was. I couldn't believe that there would be another plane out here. Then I saw holes appearing—like magic, almost—in my wings. A lot of holes. A bullet smashed my windshield and glass flew back into my face—"

She paused, and, in a kind of nervous exhaustion, sat awhile with her hands pressed to her eyes as if to blot out from

her memory the vision of the scene. "So I sent out a distress message. I said, *'Attacked by plane,'* but I don't think I got it finished. The bullets were tearing through the wings so fast that one wing



The plane seemed to be suspended above the waves—dropping sharply, then careening upward upon a gust of wind.

crumpled and the plane went into a dive. I don't remember all of it from then on. I remember trying to get out of the cockpit. The island was under me. I wasn't very high. I remember wondering if the parachute would open before I—struck the ground. Pulling the rip-cord—I don't remember that at all, but the 'chute opened, and I landed just a few feet from the beach on the west side of the house. The plane struck the water. Two men came after me and took me in the house to Schnapel. . . . You know the rest of it yourself."

She finished, her tone low, her eyes focused on the floor. Dan Gregory cleared his throat and answered, "Yes." And he added, "Why didn't you notice your compass sooner? The compass always swings a little now and then—you should have seen it before you turned around. You have to fly by compass all the time, out of sight of land."

"I guess I didn't know enough about over-water flying," she said a little lamely, smiling wanly. "After all, that's why I made the flight—to learn."

Lin Jackson, shuffling his feet across the tiled floor in darkness, came into the room and inquired in a voice both querulous and jarring: "Dan—you know the plaster's coming off of the ceiling in the bedrooms, and there's three inches of water on the floor? The roof's going."

"Come on," Gregory said. "We'll see about it. Take the flash; the candles'd blow out." He wriggled into his coat, and with Jackson just behind, pushed through the kitchen door into the gale.

The crash of breakers was now a constant thunder close at hand. They couldn't see much in the dark, with only their two meager flashlights; but they could see enough to know the thing was coming—rapidly. Two palm trees that had been on the grassy lawn were down already. The beach had been eaten out another fifty feet or more.

"Better see about the raft!" Gregory shouted, his voice ineffectual in the gale. "See if everything is set!"

Out of the worst part of the wind, they inspected the raft, nail by nail and drum by drum, for flaws. They found a cable insecurely tied at one point, and a drum with a loose plug at another. Tediously they made repairs.

IN a lull, when the wind died for an instant to a whimper, Gregory heard from the living-room a melody lilting through the night, oddly meager in contrast to the noises that had held throughout this interminable dreadful length of time. There in the darkness the song reached out to them, holding Gregory as motionless as graven stone.

And somewhere in him there arose a warmth toward that girl who had come through all these things with him, and he saw her as he had not been able to see

her in the past. He marveled at the faith she must possess, the self-control which enabled her to sit there at a piano calmly while this house was crumbling around her in the storm, to sit there knowing that at any minute she must fling herself upon the mercy of a sea which would probably grind this raft to splinters in the first half hour.

THE music stopped. They faced the wind again and leaned against it until they reached the corner of the building. Inside, stripping from their clammy coats, they heard Helen Sayles grope through the hall, and saw her move into that ineffectual aura of blue light.

"Is everything all right?" she asked.

"It comes down to waiting, now," he answered, calmly enough. But he was thinking: "I never have believed in miracles—and it will be one if we last an hour on that raft."

The girl said steadily: "Mightn't Schnapel and Bacon come back in the morning? There's always hope of that, isn't there? If we can stay here until then, and they do—"

Gregory remembered the money that was hidden in the safe somewhere in the living-room. He tried for a moment to put himself in Bacon's position, to visualize himself as faced with the problem of getting back here and landing at this island without crashing—in the wind. It could be done, he knew, but it would be a test of skill and nerve. He wouldn't want to do it, but it could be done, right now, before the wind got any stronger. For a million and a quarter, he would make the effort, anyhow.

And then, considering, he knew that Bacon probably would not get much, if any of that money; and he feared that Bacon would not come. Schnapel would not know whether it was possible or not; he would have to take his pilot's word for it; and Bacon would no doubt tell Schnapel it wasn't safe to try. Looking at the matter in that light, Gregory felt the seaplane wouldn't come.

But he said: "I hope to God they do! We'd have a hundred chances in a seaplane to one aboard that raft—although if they wait much longer, our chances in the plane—" He broke off; there was no use to worry them with that. "Let's see if we can find the money. Then we've got to get some sleep."

They found the safe in a niche in the west end of the living-room, and knelt in front of it and twirled the knob and listened to the tiny ticking of the tumblers for half an hour. But they could not get it open.

"To hell with it!" Lin Jackson muttered finally. "We're only wasting time. I'm going to sleep. I'm going to get a drink and then pour myself in bed. I'll wake up when the house begins to go—and then I'll wake you two. What good would money do us, where we're going, anyhow?"

"Shut up, you fool," Gregory snapped.

But Helen said: "That's all right, Dan—if Lin wants to be a realist. He may be right, of course."

Jackson said heavily:

"Okay. Everything's lovely, isn't it? I'll see you in church—but don't forget to call me when the roof falls down, unless I hear it first. You go on and say your prayers—I said mine long ago!" He moved quickly away into the darkness.

And after a long time—a time filled with whispered, broken phrases—Helen Sayles got up and went to the divan and tried to sleep. Gregory, waking recurrently from the cold, huddled in a chair near by.

CHAPTER XXVI

DAWN broke, and now the wind was squealing across the waste of leaden sea and lashing spindrift the width of the island. The rain descended in gray blotches. The overcast was solid now, and the clouds scudded on the wind, roll on dark roll and tier on tier. Gregory was surprised that the hurricane had not attained a greater violence; but he was not deceived. He could be patient and wait the thing out, remaining here in safety until the full force of the wind arrived. Then they would leave—and tomorrow there would not be a stick of wood, a block of mortar to mark the spot where this place of Schnapel's once had stood.

They ate breakfast. Lin Jackson, watching Gregory across the table, voiced the question which was foremost in the minds of all of them:

"How soon?"

Gregory shrugged, lifting his eyes across his coffee-cup. "Who knows about a hurricane?" he countered. "We'll leave when we're driven off. The wind is shifting some. That means the center of the storm will probably pass us on the south, but the wind will be too strong here to

let us stay. Whatever's going to happen will happen pretty soon."

Helen Sayles asked: "How can you tell the storm is turning? Couldn't that mean it wouldn't hit us, here?"

"It's curving, all right," he said. "But it was too close when it began to curve to save us. You tell that by the wind-direction. The rule is this: Stand with your face into the wind, raise your right arm to the side, and your hand will point toward the center of the storm. I went out to check the wind just now; it's shifted some, but not enough to do us any good. It's blowing sixty miles an hour."

INCREDULOUSLY she asked: "No more than that?"

He shook his head grimly. "Not yet. Forty-five or fifty. Gusts up to sixty-five . . . They had one last year in Jamaica that recorded a hundred and fifty miles an hour, steady wind, with gusts of a lot more than that. That was really quite a blow. This one heading here won't be as bad as that, but it'll be bad enough to—"

Jackson had been listening, watching Gregory's face intently. Suddenly he started, and jerked his head and sat in tense rigidity while a look of incredulity spread itself across his features. He lifted his hand, wagging one finger for attention; and there in the silence of the room they all listened acutely—and they all heard the sound that had pierced the shrieking wind to Jackson's ears.

Distantly, blotted out recurrently by the louder burst of wind, but so plain it could not be mistaken in the shorter lulls, was the far thrum of an airplane engine in the air. After an interim of seconds, there was no doubting it.

The sound was in the west. They grouped themselves around a window on that side and peered out into the leaden rain which lay like an opaque shroud across the island and reached out to sea, dimming the frothy crests of breakers, shortening the horizon until it seemed to hug the sea there before their very eyes.

For a moment they saw nothing. The limit of the visibility, from where they stood, was still no more than a quarter of a mile. The sound washed back to them continuously, changing in volume only with the changes in the violence of the wind. But finally Jackson, shouting with an exultation amounting almost to hysteria, exclaimed:

"Plane! See him out there—trying to land! Good God—that's Bacon coming back!"

Gregory's eyes had not yet recovered their normal strength, and it was some time later that he saw the seaplane. But at last he located it. And, watching it, he said in agony: "He'll never land out there, the way he's going at it now! He'll pile up and lose the ship as sure as hell!"

The plane was now no more than three hundred yards away. Headed into the whipping wind, it seemed almost to be suspended stationary fifty or a hundred feet above the waves, buffeted unmercifully, dropping sharply as if to smash into the water and then careening upward with incredible speed upon a gust. Once it seemed to touch, and went almost out of sight behind a wall of spindrift.

Jackson, standing with face pressed against the cold pane, kept murmuring: "I never thought they'd come back in this gale. I never thought it."

Helen Sayles said in vibrant wonder: "I don't see how they found the island—rain and wind, and clouds so low!"

Unconsciously Gregory tried to shout advice to Bacon. He didn't know he spoke. His mind was working out the method they would use when the plane at last got down and Schnapel and Bacon advanced toward the house. It would be better to take no chances with these men, better to strike first. And as he was thinking this, his voice was booming: "Come closer in! You can land standing still in this wind, if you've got guts enough to try it, man!"

But Bacon did not follow this advice. Repeatedly he dipped down as if to put the hull into the water, and each time a gust either smashed him down so fast he had to gun his way back up to safety, or the gust worked from below and blasted him too high to make the contact. He tried constantly to maintain his position on the lee shore—almost in the lee of the house itself, had he been closer. But the wind drifted him to one side or the other repeatedly as it switched in fury. One moment he would be directly offshore, and the next he would be almost out of sight.

GREGORY watched with a sense of impending tragedy. If he could only get Helen Sayles aboard that plane! He could take care of Schnapel and Bacon, when they came ashore; but if Bacon crashed the seaplane now, there would be no hope for any of them.

Gregory threw the future into one swift *coup*: He smashed his fist into Schnapel's face with all the power of his legs and shoulder.

Bacon kept on trying. Once a wing got low; flying at fifty feet, the ship lurched and slid toward the sea with a sickening finality. It seemed to touch, then another gust picked it up and snapped it over in a half roll with incredible speed, and then flung it up into the clouds.

Gregory heard Helen Sayles draw a deep breath and exhale it in a sigh. He said: "Let's get upstairs. When they do get down, there's going to be a fight. We can see better from up there." He turned and led the way, while the far murmuring of Bacon's engine still beat back against the wind.

THEY walked through the water on Schnapel's bedroom floor and climbed to the cupola above. The wind was rattling the windows here and each time it came the whole room trembled. Jackson took a position on the west side, searching for the plane, which now had drifted out of sight. Gregory took two pistols for himself and two for Jackson. There were plenty. He got out a machine-gun, snapped the drum in place, clicked back the cocking piece to load the weapon. He thrust it out to Helen Sayles.

"Lin and I will go downstairs to meet them, when they land. You see that they don't get the drop on us."

The girl's eyes were wide, jerking from that dreary panorama of the sea to Gregory's face, and then down at the gun she had now in her hands. Her hands were trembling, and the confidence which he had seen so plainly in her in that crisis during Jackson's landing had seemed somehow to wear thin and disappear.

"I'll try," she said. "If— I hope they don't come too close to you, because I'd be afraid the gun might jerk away—"

"Don't worry about that. This won't take long. It'll either be successful in a hurry, or it won't at all. There won't be any waiting!"

Jackson's voice came through the room against the screaming of the wind. "They're gone! I haven't seen them for five minutes! The last I saw, Bacon had turned around and was heading back the other way!"

For a space of time that grew interminable they watched, focusing their eyes into the slanting lines of rain, into the

murk to leeward. It was impossible, at first, to believe that Bacon would have given up the effort to land here; and yet as minutes passed it became evident that he had done so. Gregory, deep within him, realized the utter impossibility of landing a seaplane in that surf and saving it from quick destruction. The wind would get under one wing and flip it over as lightly as a whirlwind lifts a leaf. Bacon, realizing the futility of his efforts, had turned back toward Florida and safety—and Schnapel had given up a fortune of a million and a quarter.

That much was clear to Gregory, and it brought back to him again that leaden hopelessness which had lurked deep in his mind since dark had come the night before. He could not bring himself to voice this stark opinion to the others; better, he decided, for them to reach their own conclusion, to work out in their own way whatever resignation they might feel toward that ultimate ordeal—and ultimate destruction—on the raft.

Helen Sayles, looking up at him and trying to hide her fear, said softly: "We wouldn't have been able to get off, even if he had landed without cracking up the plane. The wind's too strong." She stood close to him, searching his eyes, trying to penetrate the mask with which he hid his own emotions. And she saw that she was right. "Shall we go down, Dan?" she asked. "It—it seems so cold up here."

Jackson, following behind them, cursed intermittently as they went down the narrow stair. They waded through the water on the floor, and went into the living-room. A chill dejection hovered over them, stifling their words, isolating each one within himself, a victim of his apprehensions. Gregory was conscious of new noises in the storm—a shrill whistling that seemed to come from somewhere in the air above—a dull metallic scratching rattle, almost steady now, changing in tone only when the wind subsided from its scream. He had never heard palm fronds sound like that before.

The sea was marching forward through the sand, eating its way with an almost perceptible progress with each thrashing breaker. The end was coming now.

GREGORY stood in fascinated horror at the window, watching the pounding surf. Helen Sayles tried to occupy herself by playing the piano. Jackson sang. But their efforts were a gesture, an effort at escape. They all knew there could be no escape, with Bacon gone.

They had been subjected to this thing too long—through day after day, it seemed; now Gregory could not remember when there had been anything but the harsh whining of the wind, rising always periodically to a shriek; he could not remember anything but the stark oppressiveness with which these surroundings ringed him in. They were all the same; their nerves were taut and raw and bruised by days of virulence, by fear that always bordered on a palpitating terror. Gregory wondered how much more they could withstand. Not much. They would soon go mad, imprisoned here. They would go stark crazy, giving way to a distraught and gruesome consciousness.

In an uncontrollable frenzy he whirled upon the others, his voice barely a croaking sound: "Come on! God—we can't go on waiting like this! Let's get that raft and get away. I'd rather get out there and do it now—if we've got to die I'd rather do it and have it over with!"

He was watching Helen Sayles, and somehow the strained pallor of her face

jerked him back from the awful brink of madness. He said, "Sorry," and his tone was once more normal. He moved to drop down to the piano bench.

But he did not. The expression on her face changed suddenly from sympathy and tenderness to shock. Her eyes were not now on him at all, but were staring past his shoulder at the door behind him.

CHAPTER XXVII

GREGORY pivoted in time to see Bacon standing in the doorway. He saw Bacon lift his hand, a gun in it. He felt Helen Sayles snatch at his clothing, trying to drag him down behind the piano for protection. These things happened with a rapidity that made them blur across his consciousness.

Before he could have moved to get down out of range, before he could have twitched a muscle reaching for a weapon of his own, Bacon might have fired. But even before Bacon could squeeze the trigger of his gun, another figure emerged from the shadowy hallway and a hand reached out and struck Bacon viciously behind the ear.

The gun detonated once, the bullet thudding softly into the upholstering of a near-by chair. Bacon dropped to his knees from the violence of that blow; the gun clattered to the floor, and Bacon, groggy, swayed there on all fours.

Schnapel, himself having a pistol in one hand, stepped past Bacon, and his booming voice erupted angrily against the varied sounds outside: "You blasted fool! You might have hit the girl!" He ignored Bacon and confronted the trio there at the piano. "Reach high! he snarled. "High—damn you!" And his gun wavered from one to the other of the men.

He went on in that tone that Gregory so vividly remembered: "That's it. You have still got a little sense. We haven't time to waste—that wind's rising fast as hell! We've got to get the seaplane gassed." While he was talking he was moving forward, until now he stood almost before the three. And suddenly he reached out with his hamlike hand and grasped Helen Sayles by the wrist and dragged her to him. But he did not forget Gregory and Jackson while he did this. The gun was motionless and deadly in his other hand.

Through a series of strangely disconnected sensory impressions Gregory realized that he must not forget that gun; that some one else was entering the house —the door of the kitchen opened and a draft swept into this room—and was coning through the hall; that Helen Sayles looked cold and wan and miserably afraid. He eyed Schnapel, and Bacon, standing now behind the gang chief; from the corner of his eye he saw another figure come into the room, and, turning a little, recognized the man as Druggan.

He said, eying Schnapel: "There isn't any gas—it's gone. The dock went down, and we used the drums to build a raft."

Schnapel stood there, slowly releasing his fingers from the wrist of Helen Sayles, his face reflecting his momentary bafflement. He flung over-shoulder at Bacon: "Hear that? The gas is gone. We'll have to take off with what we've got."

Bacon's voice came across the space of room with a curious frozen sound. "Good God!" he said. And then: "No gas?" His voice swelled, growing round and hollow in his throat: "That can't be —can't be! There must be gas! There was plenty when we left. There must be gas—*or we're marooned here too!*"

"There's not a drop here now," Gregory returned. "But if you'll—"

Schnapel shouted at Bacon without turning his eyes from Gregory and Jackson there in front of him: "You'll have to take off and go as far as possible! Right now, before the wind comes up more than it is!"

BACON snapped: "And fall in the drink? There isn't enough gas in the tanks for more than thirty minutes in the air! We'd not get anywhere. We'd go down miles from land! That hull wouldn't stand this sea two minutes, and the sharks would—" His voice broke thickly, and there was hysteria in it. Gregory watched him, and watched Schnapel, too. For the first time he noticed Schnapel's rain-soaked pallor.

And Schnapel burst forth in a frenzy: "But Andros is only seventy miles, with a cross wind! We'd be on dry land, there, at least. This island won't be here in six more hours, man!"

There was a tremolo in Bacon's voice. "Thirty minutes at ninety miles an hour in a cross wind . . . We'd never make Andros." He shook his head half a dozen times, unconsciously.

For a moment no one spoke. The rising wind now blasted at the house and Gregory wondered how Bacon had landed safely in this gale, how the plane was

being cared for to protect it from the seas. He asked: "Where is the ship? How'd you get down? Won't it be torn up before you get back to it, with this wind?"

Bacon shook his head. Both he and Schnapel seemed almost hypnotized by their realization of the situation. They were not dangerous now; they had forgotten everything but the peril which they faced. "Ship's all right," Bacon said. "I landed on the beach—landed standing still. We tailed the plane into the wind and staked it down . . . . But without gas— It took me an hour longer to get here than I thought it would, and then an hour more to land."

THE thing gradually grew clear to Gregory as he stood there. Minutes counted, now. The ship had thirty minutes' gasoline—at ninety miles an hour. Andros was seventy miles—cross wind. Great Inagua was seventy, into the teeth of a sixty-mile-an-hour gale. Cuba—Cuba was a hundred, but the wind would help to take him there. He calculated with a lightning speed. Forty-five miles on the gas he had, not counting the wind. He could climb high enough to get seventy or eighty miles an hour from this wind. That wouldn't be enough. It would take a hundred, and it would be touch and go to make it then. And—he halted for a minute on this possibility—what about the roughness of the air? What if this hurricane, swinging to the southward, moved across his path? He couldn't fly out of a hundred-mile-an-hour wind into the area of calm that formed the center. That would in effect be the same as doubling for a moment the velocity of wind against the wings. They might come off! And even if they did survive that, what about getting out of that same area? The same thing to face in that. And while he was inside it he would lose so much time, probably, that his gas would be gone before he sighted land.

But suddenly he recalled a theory he had heard discussed a time or two in Florida by MYCABA pilots—pilots who flew through the West Indies every year when hurricanes were brewing. He had heard the opinion that if a course were set by compass through the storm, the wind, circulating violently around the center—around the area of calm—would drift the plane enough that it would always have a tailwind, would miss the area of calm entirely, passing to the right of it and then in turn being drifted back upon the other side so that in the end it would emerge from the violent portion of the storm almost on its course.

He pondered that dim theory now. Some one, in trying to illustrate it, had said the action of a plane would be like the action of a swimmer past a whirlpool—the whirling motion of the water would throw the man aside, and would fling him back again after he had passed the center until, as long as he kept swimming steadily, he would come out beyond the danger zone in a straight line, as if he had swum through the vortex.

But would it work? He didn't know. No one had ever tried it, and the thing was pure theory. Gregory, standing thinking hard about the action of the wind and the reaction of the plane, could see no reason for its failure, if the seaplane was strong enough to survive the savage shocks and thrusts that it would meet. And yet the thought of starting out with Helen Sayles to try such a hazardous experimental thing left him with a clammy perspiration in his palms.

What about the landing, if by some miracle he did reach Cuba? This storm would have the seas lashed into a froth of foam along that coast—along any part of it that he could reach with the little gasoline still in the tanks. There were few harbors, few protected coves. But he thrust aside that portion of the problem. The thing now was to get the plane and get away; the landing would be made—somewhere—when they ran out of gas.

HE said, gazing at Schnapel: "I can take you through, gas or no gas. I know how to do it and I will do it. We are in this thing together now, and we can all go out together. But I won't do it with a gun in my ribs, and I won't have Bacon, there, itching to stick a knife in me. We all go—or we all stay here."

Bacon rasped: "You're crazy—you can't reach land in thirty minutes, any way you go."

"I'll reach land," Gregory contradicted quietly.

"How, Mister?" Schnapel snapped. "Quick! We can't be waiting here."

Gregory shook his head. "You don't need to know how—you or Bacon or anybody else. But I'll get there, if you've guts enough to let me have that seaplane and ride with me—before the wind tears off its wings."

There was a pause between them all, as if Schnapel could not make up his mind that there was no trap here. And in that moment, Gregory knew he had them; he knew that they would be afraid to kill him now, in spite of Bacon's threats. They did not know how to save themselves, and would finally turn to him.

Schnapel said to Bacon with that odd slanting cupping of his lips that directed his words without making it necessary to shift the position of his eyes: "What about this? We'd do better trying it with him, than staying here. We haven't got a chance in ten here, kid, and you know that."

Bacon answered: "Or a chance in fifty thousand in the plane. We just got down out of this storm, remember. I don't want to get out there in it again. I'll take my chances here. Or, you might find out what he's going to do to reach some safer island. I can do anything he can with that seaplane. No need for taking him along—they'll be that much dead weight in the way. You take the girl, and leave these two babies here for me to handle before I come down to the plane, after we've pried open this guy's mouth."

GREGORY returned, almost blandly: "You don't think I'd tell you what I'm going to do? We're either going, as a party, or we're not."

Bacon said: "We're not, wise guy."

Schnapel stood there, curiously tense, trying to weigh Bacon's advice against the calm assurance Gregory seemed to have. He forgot Gregory, apparently, for he turned sidewise to say something to Bacon, perhaps to voice another argument.

And Dan Gregory, sensing that Bacon might convince his chief, knowing the value of time in this equation, threw the future into one swift *coup*.

He took two quick steps and smashed his fist into Schnapel's face with all the power of his legs and shoulder. He grabbed at Schnapel's gun, and tore it from the other's hand as Schnapel went down from the blow. And standing there, catching Bacon by surprise, he shot it out with him.

He fired only twice at Bacon before swinging the weapon on the shadowy form of Druggan in the hallway entrance. And standing erect in a kind of hazy trance, he watched both Bacon and Druggan slowly fold down to the floor. It was a minute or two before he realized that he had done it; it was that long before he felt Helen Sayles' frightened presence at his side, and heard her saying: "Dan, Dan, they might have killed you!"

"Yes," he answered slowly. "I know that, too."

A silence washed back across the length of that dim room. Then Jackson cleared his throat, walked past Gregory and occupied himself with Schnapel, and then later, with the others. But he went about his inquiry almost unnoticed now. Helen Sayles, looking up at Gregory, asked in a taut voice:

"What is it you can do—to get away from here? Have we—any chance at all? Honestly, Dan—have we really any chance?"

"Certainly—a chance. That's more than we have here."

"But what is it?" she persisted. "What *can* you do, with only thirty minutes' gas?"

He turned and looked outside, into the east, where the breakers were crumbling down the barrier of sand that lay between them and this house. The wind was shifting steadily; the center of this storm was almost south of them already. It seemed incredible that they had been here long enough for that, since daylight. The thought passed through his mind that the hurricane must have picked up speed these last few hours, and he knew this was likely, from the continued shifting of the wind. He wondered if the center of it would lie directly in his path. The course he meant to follow was almost south-southwest. He turned back to Helen Sayles, remembering her question.

"We're going out," he said, "and try to miss the center of this hurricane. If we can do that, we have a chance of reaching Cuba on the gas left in the tanks."

CHAPTER XXVIII

ALWAYS Gregory remembered that slow battle with the wind, going along the west side of the island searching for the plane. The sand was blowing on the surface, drifting like dry snow from a mountain ridge before a blizzard. That this sand had been wet from the driving rain seemed to make no difference, in a wind of this velocity.

They couldn't face it, and yet when they turned their backs and tried to

Always Gregory remembered that battle with the wind, searching for the plane. The sand was like a blizzard, blowing, drifting.

make their way by back-tracking, they were forced forward by the pressure of the blast and had to turn once more into it and drive on with bodies bent almost double and legs jerking, piston-like. The rain slashed down from clouds that seemed now to rest upon the sea, moving with incredible speed from one horizon to the other and thus out of sight.

In single file, clinging to one another hand in hand, they made pitifully slow progress. The beach on the lee side of the island was swept clean except for ridges of wet sand blown there by the wind and packed hard by the rain. The water was at high tide now; almost from the very shore it was kicked up into a fury of white froth.

They found the plane huddled on the beach, tailed into the wind as Bacon had described it, staked down, the control wheel lashed so that the flippers were depressed and the pressure of the screaming wind only drove the hull deeper in the sand. Sand had blown up around the hull, and as they untied the ropes and made ready to attempt the take-off, Gregory wondered how they would contrive to turn the ship around and head it once more into the wind. A take-off down-wind was impossible in such a gale. The velocity of the stronger gusts, he estimated, must now be almost ninety miles an hour.

They couldn't turn it. Ridges of sand lay a foot deep on each side of the hull. Even with the ropes unfastened, running the risk of the wind getting under the windward wing and wrecking the whole structure, it had no tendency to slide forward.

For a time Gregory despaired of ever getting off. But bent there, shielding his eyes from the driving sand and rain with one hand, he thought of one possible solution. If it failed—well, the plane would be smashed hopelessly.

HE loaded Helen Sayles and Jackson in the cabin, got in himself, closed the hatch. He started the engine, and unlashed the control wheel. With each gust the wheel was almost torn from his fingers as the ailerons jerked and slapped one way or the other in the wind.

Slowly and with infinite caution, he pulled the control wheel back. The flippers, horizontal now, relieved the pressure on the tail. The whole structure of the plane was being racked by the repeated gusts; even in the lulls, now, this wind had a velocity of at least seventy miles an hour. If it got beneath the tail too much, the seaplane would go end-for-end before Gregory could prevent it.

He pulled the wheel back still more, and the wind lifted the tail section. Holding his breath, he watched the nose go down in front of him, until the plane was horizontal—in flying position, headed in the wrong direction.

After that, carefully Gregory opened the throttle, inching it along. He was attuned to the slightest reaction of the plane and the force of the propeller-thrust against the gale. And as he hoped, the plane slid forward on the sand! It moved, with the keel grating, scooping out a trough. It almost overturned when a violent gust struck an unexpected switching blow, but Gregory was quick enough to stop it.

A foot at a time, they moved down the beach and finally touched the water. If this maneuver failed, eternity lay just ahead. He held the nose down and the tail up with that backward pressure of the flippers; and the seaplane crawled out until it sank down into the sea.

FOR a space of moments, Gregory could not tell what would happen next. The plane almost instantly gathered speed before the wind, while he kicked rudder all the way, to let the wind grasp the control surfaces and fling the ship around into the gale. If it worked just right, they would get off; if it failed—as it seemed almost sure to do—they would smash a wing and drown before they could climb out and get ashore.

They were a hundred feet from the beach now, and the plane's speed downwind was fifteen or twenty miles an hour. The water was rough and frothy under them. They had to turn now or they would not be able to turn—they would be out in that foaming, boiling sea.

And then it happened. The wind slammed the tail around.

It came so quickly that Gregory did not respond in time. He had the rudder hard over to the right, and the right aileron depressed as far as it would go. The plane pivoted and whipped, and as it came around, the right wing rose to an angle of forty-five degrees and the left one smothered the pontoon.

If there had been much forward speed, the pontoon would have been torn off, and probably would have taken half the lower wing with it. But there was little. The left wing simply buried itself in dirty foam, the right came up, and for an instant the hull seemed lifted from the water.

Behind him Gregory heard Helen Sayles cry out, but he had no time to ask what she said. For when the seaplane was flung around and faced the wind, it was picked up and hurled fifty feet into the air.

They went up in that position—rocketing, with the left wing down forty-five degrees, and the engine idling! Gregory slapped the throttle open with a reflexive action of his wrists, and swung his weight against the wheel to bring that wing up before the gust let go of them and they smashed down. He sat there in a kind of frozen horror, certain they would strike before the wing came up, and knowing they must not.

The engine took, slowly, it seemed, with an impotent lethargy. For a space of seconds the plane was moving backward across the waste of sea, with the gale singing on the wires and the motor grumbling to life.

And then, as they slid down, as the wing slowly came up—then, ten feet from the lashing crests of water, Gregory got control and climbed. With a taut haste, knowing that any minute lost might be the minute which would make the difference between reaching Cuba and failing to do so, he climbed to the level of the scudding clouds and turned southward.

His speed even at this elevation was incredible. The island lay below as he began the turn, and then when the turn was made nothing was below him but the lashing spindrift of the sea, and dirty greenish water that was piled up in sharp-peaked crests in a furious disarray.

The ceiling was two hundred feet, and on the bottom the clouds were rough and ragged. There was a ninety-mile-an-hour wind at this meager altitude, Gregory estimated. But that was not enough. He pulled the nose up, watching his turn indicator and his rate-of-climb, and ascended into the roughest air he ever had encountered in ten years of flying. The turn needle flicked viciously from side to side, never remaining in the center. The climb indicator jerked up to show a three-thousand-foot-a-minute ascent and then flipped down to show them falling like a plummet. The compass oscillated, never coming completely to rest throughout the first five minutes of that flight. Yet somehow he navigated accurately by it, judging the duration of the swings. He must strike Cuba at the nearest point, or he would never reach it.

HE had no chance to look around and see where Helen Sayles and Jackson were. His belt tight around his thighs, he was either up against it or hard down in his seat, too busy to be able to tear

his eyes away from the instrument before his face. To have unbuckled his belt would have meant disaster to all of them alike; his head would have been smashed against the cockpit roof violently enough to knock him out. A dozen times his feet were lifted from the rudder pedals by the shocks.

He marveled, each time a crunching blow hurled them up or slapped them down, that the wings did not come completely off the hull and let it fall into the sea. He marveled, seeing the wash of grayish water sluicing back upon the windshield, that the sparkplugs of the engine didn't drown, and choke it into silence. But somehow the engine ran; somehow the wings stayed on.

IN later years, the whole thing had a hazy unreality in Gregory's memory. He could not space events as they had happened; everything had seemed to come at once; he could only recall sitting in the cockpit thrashing the controls to follow the signals of the instruments, fighting desperately, perhaps a little prayerfully, but curiously without emotion.

He climbed until the altimeter registered four thousand feet—where he hoped the wind would have attained its maximum velocity. He could only conjecture what that wind might be up there. A hundred and thirty, possibly; perhaps as much as two hundred in the gusts. He never knew. The clouds were thick and wet about him, flinging back a constant mat of rain that beat through the window seals and soaked him to the skin. He could see nothing through the glass.

Ordinarily, when flying blind, the pilot feels no sense of speed; but curiously Gregory had one now—a sense of flashing through the clouds, of tremendous movement. Perhaps it was the roughness of the air.

The thing went on. Gregory scarcely breathed as minute after minute crept around the clock with the movement of the second hand. He was afraid to think, afraid to conjecture how far they had come in this wild flight. He wondered if Bacon had estimated his gasoline correctly; it was possible, of course, that there was not thirty minutes' supply in the tanks. But the engine roared on and on, the propeller thrashing at the gusty air.

There was no climax throughout the time the engine ran. Gregory meant to keep on going until it quit, until the tanks were dry, and then come down, gliding and making use of every second in the wind. But time lengthened to thirty minutes, and then thirty-five, and the engine had not quit; so at last he cut throttle and eased down.

Eased down? Hardly that. The wind smashed him down, and then lifted him again with the engine idling. He came down to four hundred feet by the altimeter, and saw no holes in the murky clouds. He opened the window on his left, to see against the lashing rain. But there were no holes of any kind.

It occurred to him that if the wind had been stronger than he thought, he might have gone past Cuba—that he might now be over the Caribbean and too far to get back to the land. The suggestion filled his mind with a sinister sort of dread. He turned back into the wind, until he was no doubt standing stationary above the land or sea. And then, holding his breath and saving his nerve for the final ordeal to come at any moment now, he cut back the throttle for the final time.

They descended, buffeted wildly by the gale. At two hundred feet Gregory caught a glimpse of something green—and knew he was still above the sea! On which side of Cuba?—that he didn't know.

But he went still lower, and he saw, then, that it wasn't water showing green below. It was a field of sugar-cane, lashed into a frenzy in this wind. The seaplane, in the glide, was moving backward now! So Gregory gunned the engine, picked up speed and came down and settled in that carpet of madly thrashing cane.

DUNBAR, in the MYCABA office in Miami, smiled soberly as Dan Gregory finished his terse narrative. "They were after me," Dunbar nodded. "They got my name from the message I sent you. But later on, when we couldn't raise you and you didn't check in at Nassau as you said you'd do, I got suspicious. . . . We almost caught the man whom Schnapel sent to put me on the spot. . . . I guess the hurricane drove them off."

"That was Druggan," Gregory said. "Probably Druggan, anyhow."

"And Schnapel was on the island, alive, the last you saw?" Dunbar questioned, glancing keenly from Gregory to Helen Sayles and then at Jackson.

"Alive," Gregory confirmed, his face clouding at the memory of Melvin and McKinnon. The room grew quiet, until Dunbar asked:

"Well, what are your plans? You deserve a long vacation, and we'll arrange to let you go . . . Do you think Schnapel could perhaps be alive? I'll send word to the Coast Guard to look out for the *Henry D. Purley*. . . . But five days—they're all back there by this time, or they didn't come through that hurricane alive! . . . You know, Gregory, I've checked the weather reports, and maps, and you must have passed right through the center of that storm. When you have time, I'd like to have a full report of everything that happened on that flight—for reference. I didn't know a plane could survive, running through the area of calm the way you did."

"I didn't go through the area of calm," Gregory declared. "But I'll write you a report, explaining why. I'd like to have a month off, if I could—we're going down to San Juan on our honeymoon."

"We?" Dunbar queried, lifting one eyebrow and looking quizzically at Helen Sayles. And then he laughed. "Well, Gregory, sometime you'll have to teach her how to navigate across a stretch of water!"

But Gregory said: "Hell, why should she learn—when she's got me?"

BARNSDALL was the pilot of that south-bound run, and at Gregory's request he deviated from his course a bit and swung over the position on the chart where Schnapel had built a kingdom on an unknown isle. Gregory and Helen Sayles sat in the cabin, straining their eyes to locate it as they came to that vicinity. But they failed. Barnsdall checked his position by the radio stations at Kingston and at Miami, and opened the cockpit door and shouted back to them: "We're there! I don't see any land!"

There was no land. They could not believe that it had been leveled so completely by the wind and seas. And then Helen Sayles pointed and cried out in swift excitement: "There it is!"

But what she saw was not an island. It was a coral reef, just out of water at high tide. A long, curving coral reef, utterly alone and barren, desolate, a momentary obstacle to ceaseless waves that broke against it and dissolved themselves to spray.

THE END

REAL EX-

Most of us have been through citing experience. In this dereaders tell of their most tails of our prize offer for an oil-driller tells of what hapdrilling on Lake Maracaibo

The Lake

WHERE the continent of South America shrugs the tip of its right shoulder north into the Caribbean Sea, the Gulf of Venezuela takes a nick from the mainland. At the lower end of the gulf, a channel full of sandbars and shallow water slips through the coconut palms and jungle, and at last opens out into Lake Maracaibo. For two hundred miles or so the lake spreads out into the interior of Venezuela. It's quite a body of water. Along the shores and out into the lake itself, oil companies have driven their bits into a big underground basin of petroleum.

I had been working as driller in the Santa Fe Springs and Signal Hill oil-fields during the boom time of town-lot drilling and frenzied promotion. When the big lay-off came, I contracted with one of the oil companies operating in Venezuela, and was sent to Lagunillas on Lake Maracaibo.

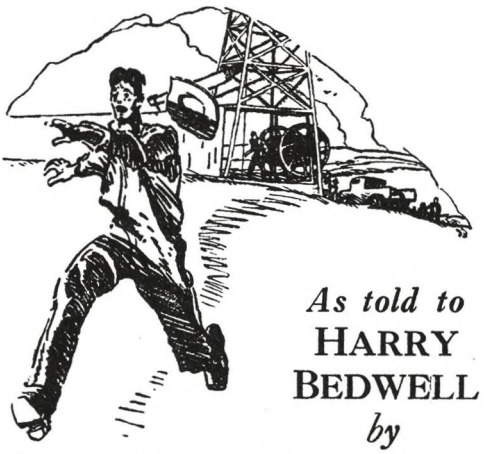
They gave the Americans a big houseboat to live in, and we were thousands of miles from anybody we had to report to, except the superintendent and the tool pusher. One of my first jobs was drilling on a well out in the lake two miles from shore. We had native drilling crews, yellowish-brown mixed breeds, irresponsible, with a peculiar kind of intelligence.

One midnight I was landed at the rig from the tower-boat to take over my shift, and I found the driller I was to relieve all alone without a crew. There was some sort of native holiday in progress, and the natives celebrate these festivals without exception or asking leave of their employers. The little tower-boat took the other driller away into the darkness. I was alone, perched out there above the black water, with

PERIENCES

at least one tremendously ex-
partment five of your fellow-
thrill-filled moments (for de-
these stories, see page 3). First
pened when a well he was
in Venezuela caught on fire.

# of Fire



As told to
HARRY
BEDWELL
by
GORDON MONTGOMERY

some thoughts for company that I couldn't have written home.

Without a crew it was impossible to accomplish any actual drilling. All I could do was to continue to pump the hole full of mud to keep the gas pressure from blowing out. We were just entering the oil- and gas-structure with the bit. Our experience in this field indicated that at the depth we were then drilling there was little gas pressure, so the heavy control gates had not yet been installed.

The hole filled with mud, I slowed down the pump to a speed that would keep it full. Then I rigged up a comfortable seat, lit a cigarette, and by the time I had smoked it I'd about given up trying to stay awake.

Evidently I didn't hear the first warning sounds come up from three thousand feet below. What brought me fully awake was a grumble that jarred up through the drill-pipe and shook the heavy steel rig till it rattled as if made of tin. It was a great gas-pressure that had worked into the hole from below, and was bubbling up through the heavy mud I had been pumping down on it.

I jumped to the pump and twisted the valve within the same second I opened my eyes. Within the next second the hundred-horse-power pump was putting all the power it had on the mud I was crowding through the drill-pipe, trying to keep that gas down there where it belonged.

But with all the force the pump was able to put into the hole, I could hear and feel those bubbles coming up from half a mile underground with a power that grew each split-second. With the pump wide open, cramming the mud down on top of the gas, there wasn't enough power even to check it in the open hole. It was a force that had been gathering for a million years, and it had at last found an outlet.

It came up growling, and flung itself out of the hole with a blast and a suction that pulled all the blood in my body right into the top of my head, where it congealed. Mud and oil and gas shot up over the crown-block, then blossomed out into a black flower that bloomed in the night and reached for the stars. It roared and blew and sputtered and almost shook me apart. It spread oil all over the adjacent water. The rig was lit by electricity made by a steam generator, so of course the lights went out when the hole blew in.

Lake Maracaibo is heavy fresh water, hard to swim in for any length of time. There wasn't a chance for me to swim to any place I could land. So it looked as if I was stuck to the blowout till some one came to get me. I ducked into the sheet-iron leanto shelter alongside the engine just off the derrick floor so as to get out of the oil and mud that was being sprayed all over that side of the lake.

I crammed myself into a very small corner farthest away. The bellow and suction of that big fountain seemed as if it would lift the top of my head off. Oil banged down on the iron roof. It was like being on the inside of a drum with some one outside lamming it.

I WAS trying to decide if there was anything I could do about this, when there was an explosion that knocked me out into the lake. A burst of flame flung out of the hole that lit up the north end of South America.

Evidently a rock had been heaved up from the bottom of the hole and struck

the steel derrick, making a spark that ignited the gas. The resultant explosion kicked me into the lake.

The blaze that leaped out of the hole reminded me of the place my grandma said I was going if I didn't behave myself. A sheet of flame licked at the sky, showing the rolling black cloud of smoke it made. I could feel the vibration in the water. I began trying to spit out that section of the lake I had swallowed in the first dive, trying to stay afloat at the same time. There was considerable oil in the water, which didn't taste so good—coming up. I was also having trouble getting my breath back. And staying near that rig was like trying to make friends with a volcano.

Venezuela is a hot country, with only a few degrees difference in day and night temperature. I had worn only pants and shirt and bedroom slippers to work. (You can't imagine a driller going to work in bedroom slippers? Listen! Who's telling this story?) Anyhow, I wasn't incumbered with clothes.

I WAS paddling about trying to think what to do, when the lake neighboring the rig caught on fire. It began to flame all about me. It looked as if the lake itself was burning up. Of course, my imagination had been sensitized by everything that had happened. But to have the water you are swimming in burst into flames, with a hundred-foot geyser of fire in the immediate middle is something to scatter the wits.

I dived, and thought it out while I was under. The oil had spread over the water around the rig, then the burning well set it on fire. I kept swimming under water, trying to get out of the circle of flames. The oil had spread four or five hundred feet on all sides of the derrick, so I had to make long dives.

After a while under water I got clear of the fire. But where was I then? It wasn't possible to swim around there all the rest of the night in that heavy fresh water.

I turned over on my back and tried to rest and think at the same time. I didn't get very far with either endeavor. The rig was roaring and flaming, and was surrounded by burning oil that was spreading slowly. The explosion had jarred me considerably when it kicked me into the water. After my forced diving, I couldn't get enough air into my system.

And there were sharks and alligators in the lake. I knew, because I had seen them both. Being new to the country, the fellows had filled me pretty full of what these usually did to nice, red-headed boys when they found them in their lake. I hadn't believed much in those tales at the time, but floating out there in the water on my back, with a volcano for a neighbor and the lake on fire, I wasn't so sure. I suddenly remembered a night aboard a yacht anchored in the bay at Avalon, Catalina Island, when we had turned the searchlight at the head of the gangway into the water. That light in the clear water attracted a great number of fish of all sizes. They swam and circled in the circle of light. The point was, light had attracted them. And I was now right where there was too much light. The flaming well, and the dancing fire on the surface, might bring all the things which lived in the lake for a look. Any one of them might get curious about what kind of fish I was, and take a sample.

Besides which, I was getting tired of swimming in Lake Maracaibo. In fact, I didn't have much breath or strength left to swim with. I reasoned I'd best stay as near the fire as I could, because they could see the light from the houseboat. They might, if they were short of drillers, try to rescue me.

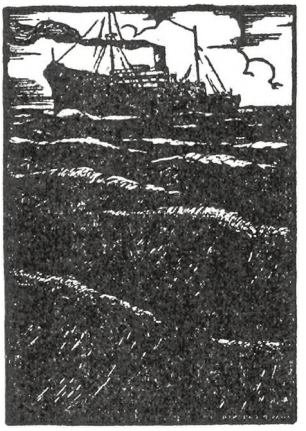
There was a splash out there in the water some place. It sounded huge. It had to if I heard it above the roar of the blowout. Being pretty certain by now that something was going to devour me, I found more strength to stay afloat.

ABOUT the time I felt sure that the oil company was going to lose a good driller, I saw a motor-launch knife out of the black wall beyond the circle of fire. It was cruising about looking for me, sounding the horn. It seemed to me I was hardly able to raise my voice above a whisper as I hailed him, but they told me later when they had taken me back to the houseboat, they heard my yell ashore, two miles away.

It was the superintendent in his launch who picked me up. He had been inspecting one of the rigs about a mile away when the explosion came and the fire broke out.

It was good for me that the boss was prowling the lake at that time of night. But there have been times when I haven't cared so much for his inspecting my drilling operations in the dead of night!

The Voyage of the Monarch



III—ST. PAUL ROCKS

By CAPTAIN GEORGE GRANT

A FRESH westerly gale met the *Monarch* in the chops of the English Channel with a stubborn weight behind its shrieking blast. The steep concomitant seas crashed upon the decks and sent her rolling, bulwarks under, across the Bay of Biscay, with water gushing from the scuppers and washports, and with a swirl of spray rising higher than the funnel from the weather beam. In the ensuing calm, when the sea became as flat and as gray as a plate of steel, nimbus settled on the mastheads and rain came down in a steady incessant stream, clearing away, in a flush of yellow dawn, to reveal the Peak of Teyde on the Island of Teneriffe in the Canaries as a tiny speck of cloud on the horizon ahead. So far had it been sighted that the sun was a red, tepid disk low in the western sky when the *Monarch,* dwarfed by its towering timber-crowned magnificence, steamed through its shadow to the southward, swerving from her course to avoid colliding with a small inter-island schooner that was proceeding from Palma to Grand Canary with a deck-load of bananas for transshipment to Europe.

For a day the fine weather held. We came on deck from the after-peak, where in a stuffy lamplit gloom we had been chipping rust from the shell plating ever since sailing, to gobble up the sunshine and the wholesome air while overhauling the cargo gear in readiness for port. For one day only! On the succeeding morning, when the *Monarch* was one hundred miles offshore in the vicinity of Cape Blanco, a mist obscured the horizon and the wind came away from the northeast in a cloudless squall, bringing with it a fine red dust. It fell upon the decks; it mixed with our food, drove into our eyes, blinding us, and filled the air so densely that it was with difficulty we could breathe, even although towels were held tightly against our faces. Mr. Selkirk informed us that it was minute particles of sand, and came from the Sahara.

Two days later, the twelfth since our departure from Cardiff, I was on the bridge during the morning watch polishing the brass under a blistering sun when Captain McFarlane came up from his cabin and walked over to where Mr. Boxley was leaning on the rail, keeping a pugnacious eye on the sailor-men who were washing down the forward well.

"Guid mornin', Mister," he said.

"Morning, sir," answered Mr. Boxley, straightening with scowling expectancy.

Captain McFarlane loosened the stud in the collar of his white uniform jacket and turned his face upward toward the zenith. Slowly his gaze dropped to the horizon ahead, where the pale unbroken blue of the sky met the deeper blue of the sea. "It's settled in fine," said he. "Ye'd better open up the hatches an' let a breath o' the fresh air blaw oot the holds. Wi' a' the foul weather we've had, the cargo has been neglected." He held up a silencing hand when Mr. Boxley would protest. "Dinna jump tae conclusions, Mister. I didna say ye had been negligent. I ken the ventilators ha'e been trimmed on the win' at every opportunity. But I ken tae that their cowls ha'e been covered when the rain was comin' doon in sheets, an' gas has a way o' collectin' frae the coal. It was damp, ye remember, when it was put in."

"It's close on eight bells—" began Mr. Boxley.

"After breakfast will be time enough," interposed Captain McFarlane, and he added, as an afterthought: "We'll be stoppin' then, like as no. The Chief was tellin' me last night that he had a wee

job on his engines. Mebbe ye'd like tae tak' a glimpse at the hull."

Eight bells struck. Packing the polishing-gear in its box, I stowed it away in the wheelhouse locker and ran aft to the half-deck. Jamie sat on the doorstep, gazing forlornly at the wake which stretched away toward Scotland.

"What's the matter, sailor?" I asked, swinging on to the rail before him.

"Nothing, Tommy."

"Have you seen a ghost?"

"No."

HE shook his head wearily, and I guessed that an attack of home-fever had caught him. It is prevalent during the first weeks of a voyage. To cheer him up, I said: "The first hundred years are always the worst, Jamie. You want to catch up with them." Then, and I do not know why, I said: "You can write home this morning if you want to. The ship's going to stop at the St. Paul Rocks after breakfast. I heard the old man telling the mate that he was going to post some letters there."

Instantly he became animated. The color came back into his face. "Have you written one, Tommy?" he asked.

"Sure—two."

"I'll get one ready."

He entered the half-deck, leaving me sitting on the rail dumfounded. I had told him a lie, a lie with which all first-voyagers were tormented; and as I watched him take paper and pencil from a drawer, I did not have the heart or the courage to call it back. The St. Paul Rocks were more than a thousand miles away. They are an isolated, uninhabited group, awash most of the time, which lie about sixty miles north of the equator in longitude 30 degrees west. Sailing vessels were sometimes becalmed in their vicinity; and once a grim-humored ship-master, after a hazardous and prolonged voyage from Australia, ordered a boat away, declaring that he was going to post a letter on them, as it was possibly the last land they would ever see. His vessel reached port, and the story flew upon the winds to the utmost corners of the seven seas.

I had reached a point where my troubled conscience had gained an ascendancy over my inherent jocosity and I was about to tell Jamie that I was kidding, when the mess-boy came to the entrance of the engineers' alleyway to inform me that breakfast was ready. The thought of food obscured all else. Washing my hands and shouting into the half-deck, "Come on! Grub-o!" I went galloping into the mess-room like a wild Indian—to find a fight under way between Ernie and Spifkins. It was over a cockroach or two which had been mixed up in the porridge. Cockroaches had a mysterious way of becoming immersed in the food especially. All would have ended amicably on this occasion if I had not thrown a pat of butter at the combatants from where I sat at the head of the settee. It missed them, but it landed squarely in the eye of "Frosty" Jones, the chief engineer, who had come, like the nosey-parker he was, to investigate the uproar. The fighting stopped instantly, and we sank meekly on to our seats, assuming innocence; but a roar of laughter went up when the Chief, in clearing his eye, smeared the butter all over his face.

"You cheeky little pups!" he bellowed, "I'll break your necks!"

He leaped into the mess-room, his white beard moving up and down as he chewed upon his anger, and swung his fist at Spifkins' head. Spifkins ducked in the nick of time. The Chief's knuckles came in violent contact with the wooden bulkhead, and a hard Liverpool pan-tile —commonly known on land as a sea-biscuit—thrown by Ernie, soared through the air and stopped abruptly against a bright and shining spot where the hair had left his head. He spluttered and swore, and flung at us.

"Come on, my lads!" I shouted, fully aroused. "Up and at him!"

OVER the table, scattering the dishes, we scrambled, piling on the irate man. We got him down. Spifkins sat on his chest, Ernie grasped his legs, while I rubbed molasses into his beard and hair. Every time he opened his mouth to swear, or call for help, we filled it with mustard and salt. (It was a shame, I must admit, to show such disrespect for a senior officer—now, I mean; but then it was great fun.)

"You little pigs!" he shouted, when finally freed. "The Old Man will hear about this. I'll fix your hash. You're not fit to eat in the fo'c'stle, far less in the mess-room." He backed to the door.

"We're in for it this time," said I, for the reaction brought a troubled conscience. "We'd better clear up a bit before the Old Man comes."

"What the use?" demanded Ernie, "He can't kill us, and anyway, he will be laughing up his sleeve at the chief."

Which was indeed the truth. It was quite apparent to all hands that Captain McFarlane and Mr. Jones were as friendly as two Kilkenny cats, who love each other only when fighting.

"Sh! Here they come!"

WE shot into our places at the table and pretended to be eating breakfast as Captain McFarlane reached the door, paused for a moment to make a brief inspection, then entered, followed by Mr. Jones, who had a malicious grin on his face.

We rose to attention. "Good morning, sir," came respectfully and in unison.

"Guid mornin', laddies," scowled Captain McFarlane, but in his eyes there flickered a sly twinkle. "What capers ha'e ye been up to?"

No one answered him.

"Come! Come! Ye've got a tongue, ha'e ye no?"

He faced me. I felt stupid, and I blushed, but, for the life of me, I could not shape words with my fuddled thoughts to answer him. Ernie had no scruples, nor embarrassment.

"It was like this, sir," he blurted out. "We were eating when the Chief came in and accused us of making a noise in the mess-room, sir."

"Weel? An'—"

"He called us beastly little pigs, sir, and we piled on him!"

Captain McFarlane glanced sideways at Mr. Jones. "Did ye, Chief?" he asked, pleasantly enough.

"I called them nothing of the kind, the lying pups!" shouted Mr. Jones. "Look at this place—our mess-room," he continued, waving his arms angrily around. "It's a wreck if ever there was one."

He exaggerated the condition of the place. Two cups lay broken on the deck, and a plate of porridge was spilled on the table. That was all.

"The engineers did that," muttered Ernie impertinently.

The twinkle left Captain McFarlane's eyes. The lie was too apparent to be ignored. His brows came down in a frown. The truth would have saved us, but the truth stuck in our throats.

Captain McFarlane's eyes were troubled. "Shame on ye, laddies!" said he, "Ye'll come up tae ma cabin in the dog-watch. I'll ha'e a few words tae say." He looked toward Mr. Jones. "Ye wanted tae stop her for a wee, Chief, did ye no?"

Mr. Jones nodded, a shade disappointed. "Verra weel," said Captain McFarlane. Together they left the mess-room.

"You've gone an' put our feet in it now," Spifkins growled at Ernie when we were alone.

I could see another fight was imminent. "Shut up, you two!" I shouted. "Can't you see the Old Man means to let it slide?"

The engine-room telegraph jangled, and when the *Monarch* stopped, she fell into the trough to roll easily with a clinking of the cargo-blocks against the derrick-heads. The engineers passed through the alleyway on their way below, sweat-rags tied around their necks and their torsos bare, and a voice summoned us from the mess-room.

"Ho! There! You chaps! Clear away the port bridge boat. The mate's taking a day off and he's going for a sail."

Because the sailor-men were busy opening up the hatches Lord Percy and Mr. Selkirk gave us a hand to take the canvas cover from the gig, hoist it from the chocks, swing it out on the davits, pass the painter forward, and lower it away to the water. Ernie went down with it to put in the plug and fend it off from the hull; Spifkins fetched a pilot-ladder to hang over the side, and I searched for Mr. Boxley. He was yarning in Mr. Jones' cabin, but he followed me along the deck with alacrity when I informed him that everything was ready.

With one leg over the bulwark-rail, he was about to precede me down the pilot-ladder when Jamie came nervously forward from where he had been standing in the saloon entrance. He touched Mr. Boxley timidly on the sleeve—handed him a letter.

"What's this?" barked Mr. Boxley.

Jamie backed away frightened. "It's—it's a letter, sir," he stammered. "I would like you to post it at—at the St. Paul Rocks."

"Who told you that?" Mr. Boxley asked.

"Tommy, sir."

A WAVE of understanding passed over Mr. Boxley's face. He blew out his lips, and moved his head very slowly up and down as he turned on me with a deadly deliberateness.

"So! You haven't done enough mischief for one day. You'd even pick upon a child!" he sneered, each word falling upon me with the sting of a whip.

"There seems to be more energy in your brains than in your limbs. We'll use some of it up. Get down into the boat!" He wheeled on Jamie. "You'd better come too!" he said savagely, though without malice.

I was stroke, Spifkins second, and Ernie bow: Mr. Boxley sat in the stern-sheets with the lanyards of the steering-yoke over his knees; and Jamie, wide-eyed with wonderment, at his side. He scanned the hull for rust as we rowed slowly around close alongside, each of us hoping that the sight of the unbroken paint would change his humor. It seemed to at first. A pleasant expression settled on his face, but suddenly, approaching the pilot-ladder after circumnavigating the *Monarch*, he heaved himself into a comfortable slouch, pulled the rudder hard over, placed an arm around Jamie's shoulders with a great show of affection, and shouted:

"Lay your backs into it. It's a long way we have to go. We're off to the post-office—on the St. Paul Rocks!"

We bent to the oars obediently. The water sparkled in the sunshine, and whorls of heat rose from it to settle as globules of sweat upon our brows and bodies. There was no easing up, for there was no escape from his captious glare. I could not help thinking what an incomprehensible being he was. He shunned sentimentality, scorned sympathy; yet on isolated occasions it could be seen peeping from between the cracks of the gruffness which he habitually affected. I had heard it said by the sailor-men that he was a man wedded to the sea, and that he had taken on the garb of his inexorable mistress. . . .

The *Monarch* drew away into a shimmering distance. Ernie and Spifkins gasped; blisters formed on my hands; my back ached terribly; and as I watched him covertly, I recalled a night off Chile when, by a predesigned mishap, Burns, the senior cadet, dropped Mr. Selkirk overboard to sober him up when he had ordered us to row him to Australia, and I wondered if such a chance would come now. Wild schemes formed in my head, only to be dissipated by the glowering wrath on Mr. Boxley's brow.

I believe to this day that it was his intention to take us beyond the horizon where the *Monarch* would be lost in the blue-gray mists, and we would experience the utter desolation of a world of water. But when fatigue was about to sneak into our limbs, Ernie sprang suddenly to his feet, raising the oar above his head in his excitement.

"Look! *Look!*" he cried.

Mr. Boxley twisted around in the stern-sheets. I raised my eyes and looked over his head. A dense cloud of black smoke rose from the *Monarch* amidships. It hid the funnel and the bridge. The faint blast of the siren came over the empty sea.

"She's afire!" exclaimed Mr. Boxley. For the tiniest part of a second he stared blankly into space; then he grasped Jamie by the collar and shoved him roughly toward the bow. "Get up there! Take an oar!" he bellowed. He tugged the yoke hard over. "Get your backs into it—make her fly!"

Weariness dropped from our limbs. We obeyed with a will.

BOYS may become gods when lashed by an indomitable will. There is no task too arduous for them to tackle, or to accomplish. Mr. Boxley knew this; and tired as we were, he urged us on. Yet he did not utter a word. Instead, his face set as though in a mold, his eyes fixed all of us with a steady stare, and he moved back and forward from the waist with an energizing regularity. Under a blistering sun, blinded by the sweat that poured down from our brows, we responded to his urging, our fast-beating hearts stimulated by the imminence of disaster. The boat swept through the sparkling sea with water bubbling around her stern as if from the churning of a screw, while the chug-chugging of the oars in the rowlocks seemed to chant the fearful cry: "The *Monarch* is on fire! Oh! Hurry! Hurry!"

Happily there was no time in which to think. Emotions lurked in the deep caverns of our thoughts like wild beasts cowed by a strange intruder, and before they could emerge, we were alongside in the shadow of a dense cloud of smoke which billowed out and drifted above the *Monarch* like a gigantic fan. Mr. Boxley stood up in the stern-sheets and grasped the pilot-ladder. With one foot on the lowest rung, he glanced back.

"Leave the boat in the water," he ordered us, his voice pitched very low, "but see that it's well made fast. We may have need of it."

He clambered up the ladder.

Over the forward bulwark-rail a sailor-man thrust his head, and shouted: "Ho, there, my hearties! Chuck up the end of the painter, and I'll pass it forrard."

I pulled myself together. I gave orders to the others, and when the boat was made fast, I led them up the pilot-ladder to the deck.

Most of the crew were gathered around the cross-bunker-hatch from which the smoke was coming, but none of them showed any of the excitement which I felt. Some of them smoked their pipes; some yarned, Mr. Boxley and Mr. Jones stood beside the Captain on the lower-bridge, and only the boatswain seemed interested in the extinguishing of the fire. Water poured down the hatchway from the hose he held. I moved over to where Lord Percy was standing near the fiddley door.

"Is it very bad?" I inquired with some nervousness.

"We don't know yet," he answered, and he told me: "Most probably it's not. They seldom are. Bunker fires are quite common on large vessels, especially on those in the far Eastern trade. The coal has to lie so long in the side-pockets before being worked out that the hatches are taken off, the air ignites the gas. This one seems to have been smoldering for some time. It might be serious. We'll have to wait and see."

AN hour passed, water having been poured incessantly all the while; then Mr. Jones left the bridge and came quickly to the hatch. The chief steward gave him a dampened towel. He tied it around his head and face; and after the sailor-men had slipped a running-bowline under his arm pit, he swung his legs over the coaming, tested the life-line by leaning back on it, and without a word, descended the iron ladder into the cross-bunker. Peering down, I watched him breathlessly and with admiration. He never faltered. He seemed to drop into the very heart of the fire; then the pall of smoke enveloped him, and I commenced feverishly to count the seconds until he should return.

Within a minute he was back on deck, smoke clinging to his clothes as though they were on fire. Discarding the towel and the life-line, he walked back to the bridge, all hands following him with their eyes. He reported to Captain McFarlane. The water was of little use, he said. It formed channels on the surface of the heat-caked coal, and ran into the bilges without getting at the seat of the fire, which was high up. To be effective, the vessel would have to be half-filled. He suggested steam.

Captain McFarlane shook his head. Too many outlets from the bunkers, he was heard to say. Impossible to confine it so that it could smother the flames. There was silence for a while, each gazing at the other in perplexity. Mr. Boxley walked to the bridge-rail and looked down at us, gathered below, then he retraced his steps, and spoke rapidly to Captain McFarlane and Mr. Jones. When he had finished, they nodded. He left them. He descended the ladder with the energy of a man about to move mountains, and came over to where we all waited, fidgeting with impatience.

"All right, lads," he shouted. "Take off all the hatches! Turn off the water!" He swung toward the boatswain. "Get some shovels, as many as you can, and some dunnage baskets. If the fire won't come to us, we'll go to it!"

All hands were mustered, and the deck became a hive of human activity. Under Mr. Boxley's direction the wooden hatch-covers were flung aside, the short bunkering booms were rigged, an engineer was ordered to the winch, and when the shovels and baskets had been fetched from the bow locker, they were thrust into our hands, and some of us were ordered down into the smoking inferno of the cross-bunker, while others were ordered to remain on deck to pile the coal against the white-painted houses as it was hove up from below.

I was among those ordered down into the cross-bunker. At first I could not see, I could not breathe. The smoke and dust and heat clutched upon my throat with strangling iron fingers so that I spluttered and groped around, and in my anguish, sought the iron ladder above which the sun shone with an inviting eye. But when I reached it, there was no escape. Mr. Boxley stood on guard. He struck me with his fist full on my chest. As I rolled over and over on the burning heap of coal toward the vessel's side, I heard his bellow:

"The next man gets it on the chin! You'll work here an hour, and you'll work on deck an hour. You'd better learn to like it, for it's a taste o' the place you're all headin' for!"

Picking myself, up, I spat the dust from my mouth and set to work. We dug down into the center, as if into the crater of a volcano. Basket after basket was filled and hoisted to the deck, and all the while the coal beneath our feet became more hot, and the air around us more suffocating.

Frantically Spifkins yelled: "Here's fire! I see fire!"

Mr. Jones, who stood near me hooking on the baskets to the fall, inquired: "Where are you?" The smoke and dust was so dense he could not see.

Spifkins shouted back: "At the port after corner! It's not very far below the lower 'tween-deck!"

Mr. Jones started across in his direction. Freed from the eye of authority, we rested on our shovels, edging furtively toward the iron ladder for a waft of fresh air and a sight of the blue sky.

Suddenly Spifkins shouted, his voice pitched high with fear: "Look out! It's sliding!"

The coal commenced to rumble, quietly at first, then with the swishing rush of a landslide. It slid from beneath our feet, dragging us down. We clawed at each other, and the more desperately we clawed, the faster slid the coal. But we gained the ladder, and one after the other, kicked by each other's heels, we scurried to the deck like rats driven from a flooded hole. Mr. Boxley came up, his eyes blazing wrath.

"Who ordered you up?" he thundered.

Before we could answer, a burst of flame shot through the hatchway, then as quickly died away; and looking down, we saw a deep red glow, and on the edge of it Spifkins was struggling with Mr. Jones across his shoulders like an empty sack. "A line! A *line!*" he gasped. "Send down a line!"

Mr. Boxley spluttered an oath and dropped down into the cross-bunker to lend a hand. A rope was lowered. The running bowline was passed under Mr. Jones' armpits again and he was hoisted hand over hand to the deck, swinging round and round like a side of beef. Spifkins came up on the derrick-fall, his feet jammed in the jaws of the hook, and he grinned sheepishly and made an exaggerated bow when we cheered. Mr. Boxley followed by the ladder, shouting as he ascended:

"Turn on the water! Sink your souls! What are you waiting for? D'you think this is a circus and that I'm going to dance a jig?"

We sprang to obey. Mr. Jones was carried into the saloon. Three lengths of hose were brought to the hatch-coaming. Water was poured into the cross-bunker, and in no time, it seemed, the fire was extinguished and the *Monarch* was on her way, very little the worse for the accident.

With the

A Federal agent has a lucky break to escape with his life in trapping a dope-peddler.

IT HAPPENED in Minneapolis in February, 1927, when I was working as a Federal agent with the narcotic squad. I had been assigned to this district because I was not known by the drug-peddlers and wholesalers.

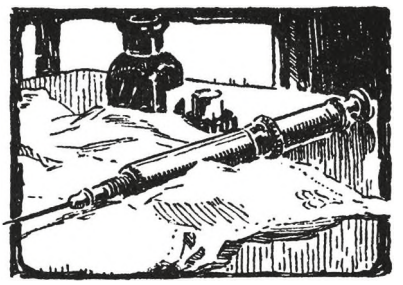
The agent in charge of the Minneapolis office was especially anxious to get the "big shot," who was supplying all the smaller peddlers with morphine, cocaine, heroin and opium. I was told to "go get him." Other agents knew who he was and where he lived, but not one had ever been able to get him into the trap. In order to convict on a narcotic charge, it is necessary to buy a quantity of some prohibited drug, and then catch the seller with the marked money on his person, to prove that he actually sold and took money in the transaction.

The man we wanted to get was known as Johnny Allen, a negro gambler, who was making a huge fortune in the Twin Cities. We knew that his fortune was not made from gambling, but from the business of wholesaling illicit drugs.

In trying to worm my way into his confidence, I had to pose as a drug-peddler myself. After two weeks of associating with addicts and small peddlers in that district, I had convinced several of them that I was just what I said I was, a hotel man from Iowa, trying to establish connection with a source of supply.

I worked up to one of the biggest peddlers in the district, a woman known as Dorothy Whittier, alias Jacobson, alias Kane. None of these was her real name. I bought several ounces from her, expecting to get her to introduce me to Allen, so that I might "work" on him. But she held off, and at last I had to have her arrested, for she was too important in the distribution of morphine to let her go. I learned that she was planning to "blow" the town, and so I hastened to make another buy from her and give her "marked" money. Money is not actually marked in this work. We keep a careful check on the serial numbers on all bills used in making pur-

Narcotic Squad



By HERMAN BUSSE

chases. The serial numbers are "mark" enough. Shortly after the sale other agents arrested her, and she was searched. The marked money was found on her person. This was evidence enough to hold her, but she had to be taken before a United States commissioner to be bound over to the Federal grand jury. I appeared in the office of the Commissioner and gave my testimony against "Dorothy Whittier." A commissioner's hearing is not the same as open court, but it is open to any who care to attend. In this case the hearing was held in a small office and I saw a number of addicts and dealers there. I knew they were watching me carefully; I was another "Fed" spotted. One man in particular kept his eyes on me, studying me.

The arrest of Dorothy was something of a victory but not what I had come to accomplish. So after the hearing and after Dorothy had been bound over to the grand jury, I went out of the office determined to make one more effort to get at the "big shot" before my usefulness in the community was gone. As luck would have it, I ran into an addict and peddler I had known in Omaha.

"What are you doing in town?" I asked him.

"Just came in to get some junk, Harry," he said. I had used the name of Harry Budd, when he had known me, and I was using it here.

"Where do you get it, here?"

"Oh, I've got a connection."

"I can't line one up," I said. "I've got a chance to unload a lot of M at Council Bluffs, if I can make a connection," I went on, "but I haven't had any luck."

"I can put you next to the big boy," he said.

"Let's go."

This "friend" of mine went into a drug-store and called a number on the telephone. When he came out of the booth, he said, "I think it's O. K. Come with me." We went into a pool-hall and sat down, pretending to watch some players. In a few minutes a big black negro walked in leisurely, leaned against a chair not far from us, and my "friend" whispered: "There he is. He'll come over in a minute."

In a few minutes, the negro strolled up and said, "Howdy," to my friend, who, at once, introduced me as Harry Budd. "He's O. K., Johnny," my acquaintance went on. "You can do business with him and he's good for big stuff," The negro nodded. We went on talking about other things for a time and then Johnny said, "Let's take a walk." I went out with him and my "friend" sat still. Johnny put a dozen questions, and I was able to convince him that I was a peddler, who did a good business. I explained that I was looking for a real connection, as certain friends of mine, who had supplied me, had taken "raps" recently. I named them, and he knew I was telling the truth about that, but of course, he didn't know that I had been responsible for the arrest of these men.

"Come up to my house at five o'clock," he said. "This is the address."

I was there on the minute. Johnny had a big home in the negro section. I rang the bell and was admitted by a black servant, when I gave my name. I was ushered into a beautifully furnished living-room. There was a grand piano, Oriental rugs, and big tapestry-covered chairs. The servant left and Johnny came in. We chatted for a time and then he said: "Well, let's get down to business. How much do you want?"

"What's the price?"

"I can let you have it for forty-five dollars an Oz." (The word *ounce* is rarely used by dope peddlers. They say Oz.)

"That's pretty stiff, isn't it?" I asked. "I'll want it in five- to ten-Oz. lots."

"It's the best I can do, now, but later on, maybe I can make you a better price."

"All right, I'll take two Oz. now and test it. If it is the goods, I'll get more."

"That's all right," Johnny said. "Let's see the color of your money."

I gave him ninety dollars in ten-dollar bills. Just as I passed the money, a

man walked into the room. I had not heard the door open, and I have very keen ears. I looked up, and there was the man who had been eying me so closely that very morning at the hearing of Dorothy Whittier!

"Johnny," he said, "I've got that Fed spotted." He looked straight at me.

"Meet Harry Budd," Johnny said. "Budd, this is Bird." And he laughed one of those deep, rumbling sort of laughs. "That's funny," he said: "Budd and Bird, both Harrys."

I laughed too, but I was far from feeling like laughing. I knew the name Harry Bird—a false one. He was Dorothy Whittier's brother—the man who had sat within twenty feet of me, while I was giving testimony that was starting his sister to Leavenworth for a stretch.

"BIRD" had not taken his eyes off me, and no smile had broken on his face. I was certain that he knew me. I had recognized him instantly.

"That is funny, isn't it?" he remarked, and then he chuckled.

"What were you saying about the Fed?" Johnny asked.

"I got his number," Bird said. "You know they knocked off Dorothy this morning. Well, I was in the Commissioner's office, and I took a reading of the blank-blank who put the finger on her. I'd know him in the dark." Bird kept looking at me. I wondered how long he meant to play with me before he came out with it. I wondered just what the negro would do, what I would do. I never carried a gun while in the service.

"What did he look like, Harry?" Johnny asked.

"He was about six feet tall, wore a blue suit with a white pin stripe. Tailor made. It was the real McCoy, no hand-me-down."

I was wearing the suit he was describing. I looked around for exits.

"Wait a minute, Harry," the negro said, and walked into another room. He came out, carrying an automatic pistol.

"If I ever see the so-and-so, I'll blow him to hell," the negro said.

It was no idle boast, I felt sure. How long before Harry Bird would spring his surprise? I sat still and waited. Any instant now, it would come. Harry would raise a finger, point at me and say: "There he is, Johnny."

Then what would I do? Deny it? Make a break for the door and trust that the negro didn't have the courage to fire?

"Did you get a good look at him, Harry?" I asked. My voice sounded hollow to me. How did it sound to the two men, who thirsted for the "Fed's" blood?

"Yeah, I was right in the room with him. His hair is black, very black, with a few white hairs in it." My hair exactly. Couldn't they see it? Where was the cleverness of these men, reputed to be so clever?

"Come with me," the negro said and he looked at me.

"O. K.," I answered. "We'll go get the junk," he added. I got up. The negro led the way out the back of the house and down a flight of steps. It was pitch dark by now. Did he know? Had Bird tipped him off—was I walking out to my execution? I didn't know, but I didn't dare falter. Down the steps. One, two, three, four, five. Slowly, feeling my way. The negro was ahead of me. Why did he take that chance? At the bottom of the stairs, a black alleyway. The negro stopped and I bumped into him.

"Wait here," he said. "I'll be back in a minute with the junk."

I wanted that morphine. Without it, I had no case, no evidence. Why had he delayed the execution? I waited, while Johnny disappeared into the night.

One minute, two minutes. I counted mentally to click off the minutes. I had my back against the building. I couldn't be shot in the back anyway. Ten minutes. . . . Fifteen minutes.

Had the negro made a fool of me? Had he taken my money and disappeared with it? Delivery is rarely made on the spot. Morphine is usually passed on the street, or in an alley. And a wholesaler never keeps his "goods" at his home, but has a cache.

TWENTY minutes. Then— "Hello, there, Harry," I heard. My heart was pounding.

"Hello," I answered. He handed me a small package. I thanked him, and asked how to get to the street. He told me. I moved away, relieved. In three minutes I was on the street and had found the agents I had planted near by, before entering the house. In ten minutes more, we were back in Johnny's house, and he was under arrest. Harry Bird was arrested with him.

"I thought you knew me," I remarked to Bird. He looked again and said, "Well, I'll be damned!"

Johnny pleaded guilty and went to Leavenworth for six years.

The Fight Under a Train

A circus musician gets into a fight, rolls under a car—and then the train starts!

By SAM H. MITCHELL

SOMEWHERE, if he is still living, there is a man who probably considers himself my murderer. He is all wrong, though it is by a miracle that I am still alive. . . .

I was holding down a job as cornetist with a carnival company. We had been playing towns through Ohio, Indiana and Illinois most of the summer. Later, we crossed over to Kentucky, then drifted on to a town in West Virginia. You might say that my troubles began there.

The baritone player of our band was a little bowlegged Dutchman, and he had managed to get himself mixed up in a rather awkward bit of unpleasantness with a woman who ran a hamburger stand. This had happened the season before, but this woman's grown son was out to "get" our Dutchman. It was reported that he was carrying a gun.

Now, to be frank about it, we had a double reason for not wanting that Dutchman shot. It was not only because of our friendship for the happy-go-lucky scamp, but he happened to be a darned good baritone player—and right then we couldn't spare him. Our band had already dwindled down to one cornet, the Dutchman's baritone, a slip-horn, one "peck-horn" and a bass drum. You can easily see that we needed him too badly to have him shot.

We had played that first West Virginia town all week, and it was late on Saturday night that word was passed around the "lot" to keep our eyes peeled for this woman's son. I have forgotten his name, but he was known as "Lefty." One of our razorbacks had seen him crawl off a freight about dark.

Fortunately we had just finished playing for the evening, so we hurried to our hotel and put the Dutchman to bed where he would be safe—until morning. We then went out to hunt this *hombre*.

Lefty seemed to have completely vanished. We could find him nowhere. Our train pulled out about eight o'clock next morning, and we breathed loud sighs of relief when we left town without having had a funeral on our hands.

Our train was side-tracked for a time somewhere above the town of Charleston. We were just about to pull out when a man swung onto the platform of our car where we were happily engaged in a friendly game of poker. Noticing me, he motioned for me to come to him.

"I've spotted the guy that's out to croak your baritone player," he told me as I dropped from the car steps beside him. "He's sneaked into that first car behind the engine, an' he's hid behind a pile of tent-poles an' stakes in the front end of the car. If some of you'd go in there an' talk to 'im, you might be able to quiet him down an' git 'im out of the notion of shootin'. I think he's got a 'rod' on 'im."

As our train was just getting ready to start, I didn't take time to go back for some of the other boys. Instead, I ran down the track until I arrived at the freight-car. Opening the door, I climbed in. Sure enough, there was Lefty.

"Well, whaddy you want?" he growled when I climbed over the poles to where he lay.

He was a big tough-looking customer, and looked as if he had not shaved for a couple of weeks. He was not very tall, but he was wide-shouldered and thick-chested. I saw at a glance that he would be a hard man to tackle, and I was certain he was armed. Still, I knew that surprise and an air of confidence go far in managing a character of this kind.

"What're you doin' in there, guy?" I called sharply. "Come on out and hit the cinders! You've rode as far as you're goin' on this train. Come on!"

He scowled at me uncertainly. Suddenly he muttered something and started as if to reach under his coat. I instantly grabbed his arm and jerked him roughly toward me. I was really afraid of the fellow, but I knew darned well that I didn't dare to let him know it.

"Come on, guy!" I barked. "Outside! Hit the ballast while you're all in one piece. Get goin'!"

MOUTHING threats, he slouched to his feet. Still gripping his arm, I shoved him toward the door.

A number of empty coal-cars were on the track just across from the one we were on, and I made Lefty climb down in the space between. I dropped quickly beside him and pulled our car door shut.

As I turned back to Lefty, I was just in time to dodge a blow he aimed at my face. Jerking my head aside, I swung at his jaw. But he ducked and grabbed me, and we went rolling in the cinders.

Back and forth, first one on top, then the other, we fought for a moment like a pair of alley cats. He grabbed up a chunk of rock and was trying to hit me on the head with it. I was hanging on to him and trying to twist that rock from his hand. We were heaving and wrestling when we rolled clear under our train.

Suddenly above our heavy breathing, I heard a loud rumbling noise, then came the sharp exhaust of an engine. Glancing up, I saw that our train was moving.

"Look out!" I yelled.

But Lefty had seen our danger. With a hoarse cry, he hurled himself back away from me and rolled out from under the moving car. I tried to get out on the opposite side, but saw instantly that I could never make it. The wheels were almost to my legs, and the train was swiftly gathering speed.

In such a plight, a man can think awfully fast. I felt I was doomed, but my first thought was to lie down flat and let the train pass over me. Like a flash, I realized that this would never do, as a low-hanging brake-beam would most likely strike me.

Rolling over quickly and jerking back my feet, I made a wild grab at one of the iron rods above me. Clinging desperately to it, I was dragged along over the ties and cinders for some distance. Then I managed to throw one leg over the rod to which I was dangling, then I got my other leg over it.

But I knew I could not hang there long. Catching my breath, I tried to reach another of the rods, hoping to be able to climb on top of them and lie down. But try as I might, I could not reach one. I would be obliged to cling as long as I could to the one I had.

By this time, the ties were whizzing past beneath me so swiftly they appeared to be a solid floor, and the steady *click-click* of rail joints was sounding in a steady rhythm. One slip now, and I would be ground to fragments on those glistening rails.

I tried hanging first by one leg and arm, then with the other, but I soon saw that I could not keep that up very long. Suddenly an idea flashed through my head. I might tie myself. Holding tightly with my left arm hooked over the rod, I fumbled with my right hand until I loosened the heavy army belt I was wearing. I shall always be thankful it was one of the heavy old-timers. How I managed to get that thick leather belt unbuckled, then over the bar and fastened again, I don't know, but I did. Next, by working fast, I got my coat buttoned over the bar as an added help. I knew that the buttons would never hold by themselves, but it would give a little added rest to my tingling arms.

Exactly how far I rode in this way, I do not know, but it certainly could not have been far. I do know that by the time we took a side-track to let a coal-train pass us, my neck muscles felt as if they were being torn out by the roots. I had changed arms and legs on that bar so often that my shoulders ached.

I WAS just on the point of letting go and trusting to my belt and coat-buttons when I realized that the train was slowing down. The brake-shoes were grabbing and grinding noisily, the ties moving slower and slower beneath me. Presently we came to a grinding halt.

I wasted not a second. With my numbed fingers I began frantically clawing at my belt-buckle and coat-buttons, then I fell to the cinders. I lay there for a moment before I could make a move to crawl out. Had the train started then, I could not have done a thing to save myself. After a time, I managed to roll out from under the car, and presently staggered to my feet.

We never heard any more of Lefty after that day. Thinking he had caused my death probably scared him away from the Dutch baritone player. At any rate, that little bullet-headed Dutchman is doubtless still living. I hope so.

Mistaken Identity

Two hitch-hikers seek hospitality of the town jail—and find that hospitality all too warm.

By CHARLES F. NILES

IN September, 1930, I was hitch-hiking, accompanied by a friend of my own age, from my home in Ohio to Alabama, where we were enrolled as students in the State university. The first two days of our journey were uneventful. We had such excellent luck in obtaining rides that we were able to spend our second night in Chattanooga, Tennessee, where we were so unwise as to spend practically all the money that we were carrying.

On the third day no motorist seemed willing to offer us a ride. Noon came and passed. We spent our last few cents for a meager meal of hot dogs and coffee. Finally a truck loomed up on the highway, a very dirty vehicle, which, although now empty, had been carrying coal. The driver stopped, announced his destination, and told us we could ride in the rear of his truck. Of course, we gladly accepted his offer, as we thought he was going our way. Spreading our slickers on the bed of the truck for seats, we rumbled along through the afternoon, seeing nothing but blue sky and the tops of trees over the sides of the vehicle.

At nine o'clock that evening the truck-driver stopped his car and told us that we had arrived. Eagerly we clambered out, only to gaze about in astonishment at the main street of a small town we had never seen before.

"Where are we?" I managed to ask.

"Cartersville," replied our driver.

My friend and I gazed at each other. We had thought the truck was going to Collinsville, Alabama,—and here we were in Cartersville, Georgia, two hundred miles off our course! To add to our troubles, we were without money; we were tired, hungry, dirty, and our cheeks were covered with a three-day growth of beard. We looked more like tramps than college students.

"Well," said my companion at last, "there's one thing we can try. We'll go to the village jail and ask the constable, or whoever is in charge, if we can sleep in a vacant cell for the night. They might even give us something to eat. I have heard of such things happening when other hitch-hikers were in our fix."

The idea did not appeal to me. However, trying something was better than doing nothing; so I accompanied my pal down the street, after he had ascertained the location of the city hall from a passing pedestrian.

As we strode through the main thoroughfare of the town, people stared at us. We were aliens in that little place, and we were made to feel that fact. But their attitude seemed unusually hostile. They neither smiled nor laughed. Standing in small groups on street corners and before places of business, they spoke quietly, earnestly, yet passionately, and I thought I discerned an unusual amount of cursing. There was a feeling of something brutal in the very atmosphere.

However, when we arrived at the jail, which stood at one end of the main street, I was more interested in obtaining shelter than in worrying about the attitude of the villagers.

WE found the office of the jail unoccupied and sat down wearily in a couple of chairs to await the return of the official in charge. An hour elapsed and still no one appeared. We grew sleepier and sleepier. Finally one of us, I forget which, suggested that we look around and see what we could see.

Upon opening the first door we encountered, we entered the jail proper, which consisted of a single cell containing four bunks, two chairs, and a toilet. A single small, barred window, through which could be seen a few stars, afforded the only means of ventilation and light. Although the bunks were very dirty and hard, to our eyes they were as welcome

as a bed of eiderdown; therefore, without considering the possible results of such an action, we removed only our shoes and coats, climbed into two of the bunks, and rolled up into the single blanket on each.

My slumber was uneasy and haunted by frightful dreams. In one I was being pursued by a terrible monster. My yells aroused my friend, who shook me awake. "For the Lord's sake, shut up," he growled and started to return to his bunk. Suddenly he stopped.

We both remained motionless, attentive, listening. The night was alive with a great, unintelligible, confused murmur, which was punctuated occasionally with loud shoutings. Voices were raised, only to be drowned out by other voices. Shouts of anger, mingled with sounds not unlike those of exultation! Combined, they were nothing less than the growling of a beast of prey.

SOME one raised his voice to shout the strains of "Dixie" and was immediately joined by hundreds of other throats. Filled with discords and garbled words, the music rose and fell, surged and bellowed, a very sea of sound. Almost a chant, it grew louder and louder until it stopped, and we heard the sound of many tramping feet, which milled about in the street before the city hall.

"I wonder what's up," breathed my friend uneasily.

Having no adequate answer, I shrugged my shoulders and rolled over in my bunk with the intention of securing more sleep.

With a rush of sound we heard many people entering the city hall, bursting violently through doors, while a single voice was heard directing them: "This way, boys."

"Heah are the low-down dogs," said a burly creature dressed in overalls and faded blue shirt, as a group of crowding, jostling men and boys appeared before our cell door.

"Let's string 'em up," mouthed another.

Other insults and phrases of invective went unheeded by my ears. I was cold with fear. A deadly paralysis seemed to have seized my limbs. Astonishment and dread held me spellbound. Finally I glanced at my friend. His face was ghastly white, and great beads of sweat stood out on his forehead. We looked at each other blankly with fear-filled eyes.

Seemingly not noticing the door of the cell was unlocked, the mob burst it open with a great steel maul, wielded by the man in overalls, who seemed to be the leader. Cursing, shouting, the men surged in, seized us, struck us. Resistance was vain. I struggled but only received more blows for my pains. My shirt was torn from my back as the men bore me, kicking, from the cell.

I tried to explain that all was a terrible mistake, but no one seemed to notice my words. I shrieked, wept, swore, begged, but to no avail. I was shoved and knocked onward. I knew that the men were talking and shouting, but now I cannot recall their words. I do not believe I even distinguished them then, for my mind was too full of terror. It seemed a horrible nightmare through which I was living.

As my captors and I appeared at the entrance of the building, those who were outside set up a great clamoring and roaring. A sadistic lust for blood was in the air. At about the same time a car drew up and stopped on the outskirts of the crowd. From it stepped two men bearing shotguns and another with a pistol. The shotguns were trained on the mob, while the third man demanded an explanation of such goings-on.

"No sense interferin', Sheriff," said the leader. "We're goin' t' lynch 'em." And he started forward.

"Wait a minute," bellowed the officer, waving his gun in the air. "You've got the wrong fellows."

The crowd wavered and stopped, doubt entering their minds, but the leader urged them on, saying, "That dodge won't work, Ben. You can't fool us."

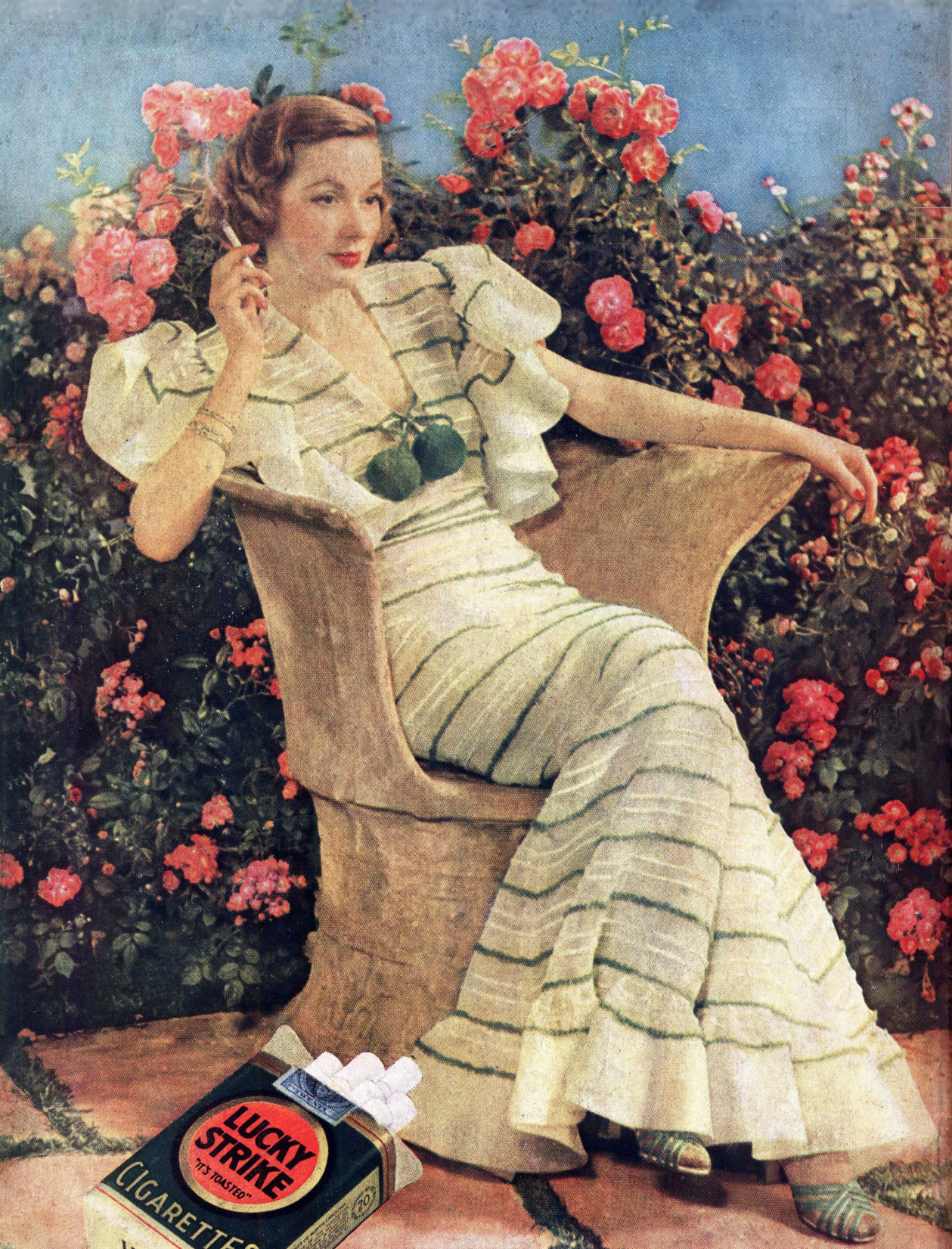
"Fools!" blazed the Sheriff. "I took those two greasers to the county seat three hours ago. I sneaked them out the side door, and I don't know who you've got there! Get a light and see for yourselves that these are the wrong guys."

My friend and I were hustled into the glow of a lighted window, where the mob discovered that we were not the Mexicans who had been arrested for attacking and murdering a young girl of the community. Shamefaced, and seeming genuinely sorry, our captors released us.

I fainted from the reaction.

WHEN consciousness returned, I was in the Sheriff's office, where many eyes were regarding me anxiously. Trying to make up for their former brutality, the villagers fed us, replaced our torn shirts, and the next morning helped us to get started on our way.

That was the last I ever hitch-hiked!



LUCKIES ARE ALL-WAYS KIND TO YOUR THROAT

"it's toasted"

Only the Center Leaves—these are the Mildest Leaves — The Cream of the Crop — *They Taste Better*